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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

June 16, 1993

The Honorable Bruce F. Vento
Chairman, Subcommittee on National
Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Vento:

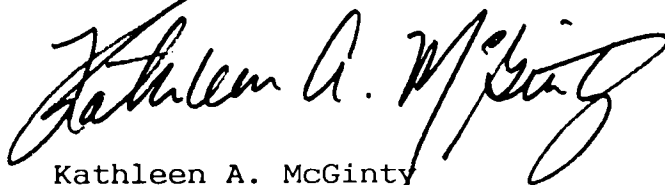
Thank you for contacting me regarding the your concerns about the problems facing the Pacific Northwest, as well as the Eastside Forest Ecosystem Health Assessment. It was good to hear from you, and I enjoyed seeing you earlier this spring.

As you know, President Clinton, Vice President Gore and I are committed to the preservation of our environment in a way that leads to strong and sustainable economic growth. I certainly appreciate your recalling my request for your thoughts on the applicability of the Everett Study to the eastside forests. Thank you for taking the time to respond so thoroughly and thoughtfully.

I will keep the study in mind as we continue addressing the concerns of the Pacific Northwest forests. I agree with much of what you say, and I look forward to further pursuing with you the suggestions you raised.

Again, thank you for your thoughtful insights in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathleen A. McGinty". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kathleen" being more prominent and the last name "McGinty" written in a more compact, stylized manner.

Kathleen A. McGinty
Director, White House Office on
Environmental Policy

KAM/avl

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May 26, 1993

Katie McGinty, Director
White House Office on
Environmental Policy
Room 258
Old Executive Office Building
17th and Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20501

Dear Ms. McGinty:

At our meeting on the Administration's efforts to develop a solution to the old growth forest crisis of the Pacific Northwest, you asked for my views on the Eastside Forest Ecosystem Health Assessment, known as the Everett Study, and whether or not I thought this study could help solve the problems of the eastside forests. At the time of our meeting, however, no information was available on the Everett Study so I was unable to respond. My staff and I have now received a copy of the Study's fifty page Executive Summary and have reviewed it. I would like to share with you my impressions.

THE STUDY'S STRENGTHS

1. The study does a good job of describing the problems of eastside forest ecosystems. It points out that some eastside ecosystems are stressed and unstable and that this situation has been caused by management activities such as timber harvests, fire suppression and grazing, that have reduced genetic, species and landscape diversity. Having the scientific community define the problem is the first step towards solving it.
2. The study emphasizes that public desires for commodity resources need to be secondary to ecosystem sustainability. This is an important point. It is helpful to have scientists reminding land managers and policy makers that we must maintain sustainable ecosystems for future generations of Americans. These ecosystems will provide no commodities at all if we weaken or destroy them.

3. The study also emphasizes the need to monitor ecosystems. The lack of effective monitoring on the effect of management activities is an important reason why we have a forest crisis in the Northwest today.
4. The study recommends that the future goal of managers should be to maintain and restore "historical ranges of conditions and variability" in eastside ecosystems. This is a worthy goal and would be a significant improvement over the past goal of maximizing commodity outputs from these ecosystems.

THE STUDY'S WEAKNESSES

1. The study does not give us any scientific direction on how to actually manage eastside ecosystems. It has no maps and is not site specific. It leaves such direction to the forest planning process. To date, the forest plans have emphasized commodity outputs and have contributed to the problem. The Forest Service needs firmer direction than this study provides. We need to have the scientific community develop more specific recommendations on how to maintain and restore the biological diversity of the actual landscapes out there on the ground. This is what the "Gang of Four" scientific panel did for westside ecosystems and something similar is needed for the eastside.
2. While pointing out that disturbance and change from fire, insects, disease, etc. is natural in eastside ecosystems, the study has a bias towards using management activities to maintain disturbance and change. It does not seem to trust natural processes to be able to work on their own. Is this another way of saying that we need additional timber harvests to maintain healthy ecosystems? This kind of thinking caused the problems in the first place.
3. The study contains misconceptions about the national wilderness preservation system and implies a negative bias against wilderness or any other kind of reserve system. It call wilderness "custodial management" that attempts to keep stands and landscapes static. Nothing could be further from the truth. The basic purpose of the wilderness system is to allow natural processes to operate and to accept whatever changes may result. It is on the lands outside of wilderness that managers often have tried to arrest natural processes and prevent change and disturbance.

The study further states that fire suppression in wilderness is a key reason why wilderness will not work to maintain healthy ecosystems. This is not a problem of the wilderness system, but of land managers who have been slow to implement natural fire plans in wilderness areas. It is Forest

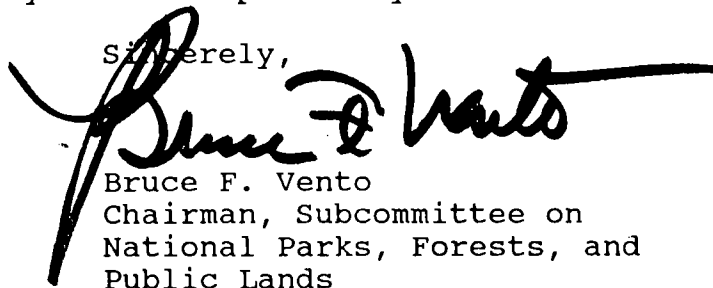
Service policy to allow fire in wilderness and the largest wilderness in Oregon's eastside forests, the Eagle Cap, has had a natural fire program for years. Managed properly, wilderness is not static, but dynamic and has great potential to maintain healthy ecosystems. It is disturbing that Dr. Everett and his scientists seem so ignorant of wilderness laws, policies, and purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. At the request of several members of Congress, the nation's scientific societies are conducting an eastside study that will be site specific with maps. The study is scheduled to be available in June. I urge you to give this study serious consideration and to use it to build on the work of the Everett Study.
2. The implication of the Everett Study that wilderness or any other kind of reserve cannot be part of the solution needs to be reevaluated. The study's reasoning seems flawed. Reserves can allow change and natural processes and can be even more effective than management activities to maintain healthy ecosystems. As the study points out, it was management activities that caused the eastside crisis in the first place.
3. The fate of eastside forests is inextricably linked to any solution for the westside forests. We cannot sacrifice eastside ecosystems to save the westside. The President's solution to the Northwest crisis must consider the needs of the eastside ecosystems.

I hope this analysis is helpful to you.

Sincerely,



Bruce F. Vento
Chairman, Subcommittee on
National Parks, Forests, and
Public Lands