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[Headwaters - Meeting Follow-up] [Loose]

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ATTN: KATIE
MCGINTY

Headwaters

To protect and restore forest ecosystems

To: Tom Tuchmann and Jeff Rogers, Department of Interior

From: Julie Norman and Robert Brothers, Headwaters

Date: May 17, 1993

Re: Followup on our Thursday (5/13) meeting in Portland and suggestions for further action

It was very good to talk with you last week. Thank you for facilitating the face-to-face interaction with Dr. Jack Thomas. Now we would like your help in moving forward on two action items:

(a) The Clinton Administration, possibly under the guidance of White House Science Advisor Jack Gibbons, should convene a Scientific Review Committee to facilitate the post-June 2nd scientific inquiry regarding the relevance and accuracy of new owl population data. Adequate review of this issue by a broader spectrum of scientists is crucial to assessing the risks of the alternatives presented to the President.

(b) The Clinton Administration should direct its agencies, in concert with the Colorado Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Unit, to resume planning of the second research workshop to incorporate the 1992 field data into the population trend analysis published by Dr. David Anderson and Dr. Ken Burnham in 1991 (Appendix C of the Draft Spotted Owl Recovery Plan).

Can you help on these items?

In our discussion with Jack Thomas, he led us to believe that the relevance of possible owl population declines is a closed issue. We feel this conclusion is premature until experts (both within and without USDA and USDI) have a chance to engage in a thorough scientific review process. Judge Dwyer drove this point home in 1992, when he extended the injunction against Forest Service timber sales in owl

habitat, largely because the agency's review of the new Anderson/Burnham findings had not followed proper process.

Given the short time frame, Headwaters is still arguing for the Clinton Administration to adopt interim guidelines and a two-year Study Period, rather than a "permanent solution" in the form of a final reserve system. We want options to be preserved (by allowing only thinning outside of owl nesting habitat) until better information on habitat and population trends of spotted owls and other wildlife can be obtained. New multi-agency GIS systems are just now being refined, which will be very useful in designing a long-term solution.

One last note of clarification: we are more interested in establishing good scientific process for handling new information and disputes between respected scientists than we are in any particular results. However things turn out, what's most important is that we have a credible process for dealing with information that falls outside of the current management paradigms. It's time to realize that disputes over scientific "facts" didn't end with Galileo. The National Environmental Policy Act requires that the best science be used, but it doesn't tell us how to find out what the best science is. In our opinion, there needs to be a mechanism to set up independent technical review committees of experts (like jurors, uninvolved in the controversy at hand) to resolve disputes over methodology, procedures, and results. If science is becoming the ultimate arbiter of natural resource decision-making, then it had better be the best science that we can produce, as objective and open to new information as possible.

Thanks again for the meeting, and we hope you found time to get out of Portland and into the forest!

cc: Dr. Jack Gibbons, White House Science Advisor
Ms. Katie McGinty, Office of Environmental Policy
Mr. Jim Lyons, USDA