

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, March 3, 2009

WATERSHED RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER DELIVERS CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY REGARDING THE ROLE OF FEDERAL LANDS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES IN COMBATTING CLIMATE CHANGE

Washington, D.C. — Lynn Jungwirth, executive director of the Watershed Research and Training Center in Hayfork, CA, testified before Congress today about the role of federal lands in combating climate change, including the need for more proactive forest management to adapt to and mitigate for climate change and the vital role for rural communities as active participants in these activities. Jungwirth's testimony was provided to the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands of the Committee on Natural Resources of the United States House of Representatives at a hearing regarding the role of federal lands in combating climate change.

“Rural communities and landscapes need Congress’s attention in preparing for the impacts of climate change. And yet, they can also play a significant role in combating climate change,” said Jungwirth.

Jungwirth’s testimony drew upon her own experiences working for over 15 years in the Trinity Forest of northern California as well as lessons from the broader experiences of colleagues and leaders in community based forestry who work in Oregon, Washington, Montana, Idaho, New Mexico, and Colorado. She offered lessons and concerns from rural landscapes and communities regarding combating climate change, including the following:

- Healthy, resilient forests sequester carbon. Active management of these lands—public or private—can expand and enhance carbon sinks and is the least cost alternative available to the United States.
- Forest restoration work can also provide biomass for combined heat and power generation and biofuels for transportation. These energy uses have a smaller carbon footprint than fossil fuels.
- Compared to “no treatment” models, forest management for wildfire reduction and energy production provides clear climate change benefits, including net reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and number of acres burned by wildfire, dramatic drops in fire severity, and reduction in wildfire suppression costs.
- Forest restoration activities can prevent loss of timber resources to fire and also sustain and enhance wildlife habitat and water quality. These activities also create rural stewardship jobs, protect the rural tourism economy, and spare rural communities from the negative health impacts of smoke (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).
- Federal cap-and-trade policy frameworks focused on carbon credits (as well as other ecosystem services such as water) can stimulate rural economic activity and encourage investment in forest-sector projects that provide carbon benefits while also enhancing ecosystem services.

- Specific components of national climate change policy—such as resources prioritization, credit allocation or distribution, offset eligibility, and the opportunity for market participation—will have dramatic effects on rural communities and landscapes. But because of the current uneven playing field between urban and rural perspectives, Congress must take deliberate steps to ensure rural communities have a role in the collaborative development of those policies.
- Policymakers should dedicate a portion of the revenues generated through the allocation or auction of emission allowances under a cap-and-trade system to forest and other landscape restoration and stewardship programs. This is because forests and natural landscapes do not fit easily into the urban-industrial framework for carbon offset markets under cap-and-trade, but they do represent an important part of our national carbon emissions flux and provide essential co-benefits.

Jungwirth commended the Subcommittee for soliciting opinions from rural communities regarding strategies to combat climate change.

“Until now, the appropriate role of rural communities surrounded by federal lands has been conspicuously absent from public dialogue on climate change policy and mitigation despite the importance of the health of these lands and communities to our nation,” said Ms. Jungwirth.

The Chairman of the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands is Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ) and the Ranking Member is Rep. Rob Bishop (R-UT).

The **Watershed Research and Training Center** (www.thewatershedcenter.com), a community-based nonprofit organization, was started in 1993 to promote healthy communities and sustainable forests through research, education, training, and economic development. This work centers around the belief that the relationship between local communities and the public forest must change so that the economy can rebuild itself based on an ethic of land stewardship.

The Watershed Research and Training Center is a partner in the **Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition** (RVCC). RVCC is a coalition of western rural and local, regional, and national organizations that have joined together to promote balanced conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the West. For more info, visit www.sustainablenorthwest.org/rvcc.

Jungwirth’s testimony is posted at
www.sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/Testimony/testimony

Contact:
Lynn Jungwirth, (530) 949-6644 (cell), lynnj@hayfork.net