

A man with a mustache and a plaid shirt stands in front of a large, mossy waterfall in a forest. The waterfall is cascading over dark, moss-covered rocks. The surrounding forest is lush with green moss and ferns. The man is smiling and looking towards the camera.

Earth to Washington: Fix Our Forests

Wildfires have been ravaging our overcrowded federal forests and our rural economies are crashing. Could someone at the top finally be listening?

By Theodora Johnson

For years we have wished for a port between the universe of Washington, D.C., and planet Earth, as the rest of us know it. We've hoped for the ones at the top to realize that their nice-sounding laws—like the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act—have, in fact, turned our forests into tin-derboxes and destroyed our timber-based economies.

Enter President Donald J. Trump. He may be a true New Yorker with little experience with western rural problems, but he's a quick study—and he knows where to go for the real scoop. He's been inviting county commissioners and other locally elected officials to the White House. He addresses these local leaders and encourages members of his administration to meet with these on-the-ground experts. So far, he's had more than 3,700 locally elected officials from all 50 states to the White House. (See sidebar on page 16.)

A port has opened.

On October 23, Ray Haupt, a county supervisor from far Northern California, went to Washington for one such conference. Ray is a registered professional forester and U.S. Forest Service retiree, and he now represents the county where he once served as Klamath National Forest district ranger.

Why would the people of Siskiyou County elect someone from an agency so adept at burning up our resources and our homes?

Ray's actions have shown that although he's been "in the system" for 33 years, he's never been *of* the system. As timber sales have plummeted over the past three decades, he's been working against the grain, fighting the tangled web of regulations and court precedents that have brought our timber economy to its knees. He knows precisely where environmentalists will strike to stymie a timber sale, whether it's a phrase found deep within the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations, or an obscure court ruling handed down on an Endangered Species Act (ESA) case.

For years, Ray's been trying to combine his knowledge of forest ecology with his knowledge of the broken system to make policy changes in Washington. It's his calling. He's penned policy papers on topics such as

the Northwest Forest Plan, the ESA, the northern spotted owl, opposition to the proposed Klamath dams' removal (a story in itself), and the effects of wildfire smoke on agriculture in Northern California. He's seen many of his policy ideas put to ink in the form of federal legislation, but up to now most of them have withered on the vine.

Sea Change

But with the Trump administration, something feels different. "They're already working to increase production on public lands," Ray says. "One of the things on the president's mind is that he hasn't done much yet for rural counties in the West."

Ray calls his trip to Washington—and his ongoing conversation with the administration since returning home—the "pinnacle of his career."

While in Washington, Ray didn't just hear

California. He decries its "one-size-fits-all" approach, saying it "covers too much geographic and ecological complexity" to work. While it was designed to unify the various agencies and statutes governing the area, Ray demonstrates in his paper how the NWFP has only served to add new layers of analysis, regulations, and "legal gridlock."

The result: staggering reductions in timber harvests. The harvest rate on forests covered by the NWFP is now 1.03 billion board feet less each year than it was in 1990. That has meant utter devastation for timber communities.

"Many rural counties throughout the West have abandoned the notion that these lands are a valuable part of their economic future," Ray writes. "Rural governments such as Siskiyou County have publicly declared our national forest to be a significant risk to public safety, public health and adjacent private

With the Trump administration, something feels different. "They're working on things to increase production on public lands," Ray says. "One of the things on the president's mind is that he hasn't done much yet for rural counties in the West."

encouraging words from the president. He also met with the undersecretary of Agriculture, two associate deputy secretaries of the Department of Interior, the director of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, DOI senior legal counsel, the chief of the Forest Service, and congressional staff. Following those meetings, he was asked to provide his policy papers to the White House and to the agencies. Upon returning home, he held a teleconference with his contact at the White House Intergovernmental Affairs Office, Britt Carter.

"Britt actually contacted me prior to my trip to Washington, when the Klamathon Fire broke out [in July 2018]," Ray notes. "We've been in steady contact ever since. I'm amazed with the level of engagement with this White House."

Ray's Papers

One of the papers Ray sent to Washington was about the Clinton-era Northwest Forest Plan, which covers almost 25 million acres across Oregon, Washington and Northern

timberlands.... Many governments across the West advocate a return of public lands to local control of Forest Service programs or into local and private ownerships."

In Siskiyou County, where 63 percent of the land is public, the loss of those timber sales has been economically catastrophic. A timber dollar has a five-times multiplier effect in the local economy, Ray says, so no federal payments designed to replace those lost timber dollars—such as Payment in Lieu of Taxes payments—come close to reviving the once-thriving economy.

"There are many forest-dependent communities in our county where local unemployment is estimated from 30 to 40 percent," he writes. "We are, as a result of ESA listings and NWFP dysfunction, one of the poorest counties in our state."

In his paper regarding failures of the ESA, he uses more local examples. He calls the northern spotted owl a "prime example of the consequences associated with listing a species using inaccurate data, setting unrealistic goals,

Ray Haupt, forester, ex-Forest Service and Siskiyou County supervisor, has local government in his blood. In the late 1700s, one of his great-greats, Philip Haupt, served as one of the first constables in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



After 33 years working in the belly of the beast, Ray Haupt's using his experience to help the Trump administration turn the ship.

and ignoring impacts to small rural communities and counties.”

He notes that the owl's listing hasn't helped the species—in fact, quite the opposite. Following its listing in 1990 and the implementation of the NWFP in 1993, timber harvests dropped precipitously due to court-ordered injunctions in owl habitat. The result has been catastrophic wildfires on increasingly overcrowded forests.

Another paper of Ray's takes aim at a little-examined phenomenon: the damaging effects of wildfire smoke on local agricultural crops. Alfalfa production has been stunted,

and the hay that is made can be smoke-tainted. The queen of England, who usually buys the entire Queen's Tea Supply from the mint crop raised in the county, rejected this year's crop as tainted. Siskiyou's several vineyards couldn't market their grapes either and millions of tourism dollars were lost in the region.

Using this paper, which ties agriculture directly to forestry, Ray has been working with congressional staff in hopes of getting forestry provisions included in the next Farm Bill.

Tips for the Administration

Congressional action is ultimately going to be needed to fix laws like the ESA and NEPA, but Ray has tips for the administration in the mean-

time. For one, it could amend the regulations within enacted law, as many administrations have done in the past.

But the White House can also take actions that are quicker and easier than the lengthy and complicated process required to change the regulatory code. For example, the Council on Environmental Quality, which Ray calls a “personal authority of the president,” has a lot of sway during the NEPA review process required on federal projects such as timber plans. The White House may be able to use CEQ's authority to sidestep NEPA roadblocks thrown up by environmentalists.

When it comes to ESA enforcement, Ray has a few tricks up his sleeve. For one, he says the administration could use the “Section 7” consultation clause to help push through proposed thinning projects. It could force the agencies to include a “no action” analysis—in other words, put on paper what will likely happen if a proposed tree thinning project *doesn't* happen. Uncontrollable wildfire will eventually destroy critical habitat for any listed species in the area.

Ray also shared an idea to fix Forest Service culture by addressing the workforce. He was part of a pilot program under President Reagan which placed knowledgeable foresters “with a fire in their belly” in key agency positions to “produce effective results while cutting bureaucratic internal gridlock,” he says. This program could be reignited to turn around the agency, which Ray says is now dominated by a generation that doesn't understand—or care about—the economic relationship between rural western counties and public lands.

Whatever comes of his recommendations, Ray feels like he's in the right place at the right time. “This is a culmination of a lot of things I've been working for my whole life,” he says. “I've been asked lots of times why I ran for office, and [on that trip] I met my goal. I ran so that I could speak at a much higher level about the issues, and speak clearly about them.”

The portal's open, though the window could be small. Beam him up, Scotty! ■

Theodora Johnson and her husband, Dave, raise cows and kids in Siskiyou County, Calif.

President's Remarks Strike a Chord

President Donald J. Trump addressed a roomful of locally elected officials from California, Hawaii and Alaska on Oct. 23, 2018. He gave extra attention to policy failures in California—policies both federally and state generated. (The speech is available at <https://www.c-span.org/video/?453507-1/president-trump-delivers-remarks-leadership-day-conference>.)

“I look at these incredible, beautiful fields, and they're dry. It's like dry as a bone,” the president said of a trip he made to the Golden State three years ago. “I assumed it was a drought. They said, ‘No. The government, state and federal, send the water out into the Pacific.’ I believe he said they're trying to protect a smelt. Little, tiny—which, by the way, is doing very poorly.... It really is a terrible thing.”

He mentioned that he'd just signed a presidential memorandum

to “dramatically improve the reliable supply and delivery of water critical to states like California,” and that later that day he'd be signing America's Water Infrastructure Act of 2018. That act authorized “important investments in ports and harbors and waterways and levees and water systems in communities all across our country.”

The president also touched on California's forests. “[W]e're tired

of giving California hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars all the time for their forest fires, when you wouldn't have them if they managed their forests properly. They don't. They have lousy management,” he said. “And the environmentalists are, you know, doing something very bad. They won't let us take the logs. They won't let us take the dead trees. It's all a mess.”

Although the president has blamed California for many of its own wildfire problems, he realizes there's a big federal management problem too. He's been pushing for passage of federal forest management legislation in Congress.—*Theodora Johnson*

