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The Wilderness Society Wants to Incinerate Your Forests

Let us connect the dots. Pay attention now. I will do this carefully and slowly, because I don't want your brain to explode.

The Wilderness Society lives in Washington DC. They are a corporation. They have assets: in 2006 they reported assets of \$54,000,000. They have income: in 2006 they reported revenues of \$37,000,000. They have a president. His name is William H. Meadows. They have members, because they are a kind of club. TWS (that's their pet nickname for The Wilderness Society) claims 300,000 members.

TWS is what is generally known as a "special interest group." They have special interests. They lobby Congress. They get involved in elections. They sue people, especially the Federal Government. They also sit on important boards and commissions.

We mentioned one of their lawsuits two posts ago. TWS sued the US Forest Service, specifically the Plumas National Forest, for an "improper" SEIS, which is the acronym for Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

It seems the Plumas NF wanted to thin some forests, to make those forests less likely to burn up in catastrophic forest fires. They called that proposed thinning "creating Defensible Fuel Profile Zones" which are areas approximately 1/4 to 1/2 mile wide where fuel loadings are reduced, usually along roads. In order to do the thinnings properly and legally, the Plumas NF first did a plan and analysis, called an SEIS (see previous paragraph).

That involved making a plan, evaluating it, and presenting it to the public for the public's input. It was all very "by the book." The Plumas NF followed all the laws, such as the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Environmental Planning Act (NEPA), and even one you may not have heard of, the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act. In the HFQLGFRA the U.S. Congress directed the Plumas NF to do exactly the the kind of forest thinnings they laid out.

That's how closely the Plumas NF followed the law; they were told by Congress (and President Bill Clinton, who signed the HFQLGFRA) that they MUST do these thinnings and so they did, or tried to anyway.

But the Wilderness Society (TWS, remember them? see the beginning of this essay) did not like all that. TWS is very stuffy about the law. They felt that, somehow, the laws were not being followed just right, so they sued. TWS sued in Federal Court, but they lost at the trial level, so they appealed. TWS's appeal was accepted by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, and last week that court ruled in favor of TWS [[here](#)].

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Plumas NF must not do those thinnings. The Court agreed with TWS that those thinnings violate the law, specifically NEPA. The Court said

that the Plumas NF did not “rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives” as required under NEPA, and so they must not do the thinnings.

Let me say that again, slowly. There is a Federal law called NEPA, the National Environmental Planning Act. NEPA says that before Federal agencies do actions in the environment, first they must create plans. Those plans must be made public, too. The public must see some alternatives in those plans, and the Federal agencies must explore all the reasonable alternatives. They must explore them rigorously. That’s the law.

TWS didn’t think that law, NEPA, was followed correctly, so they sued, and won their lawsuit.

Is all that clear so far? You may be left with the impression that TWS is a “watchdog” organization, a special interest group whose special interest is making the US Forest Service obey the law. That is certainly what the TWS would like you to think.

TWS is also a USFS service provider. The USFS pays TWS millions of dollars every year to provide special services. Among those are providing paid advice to the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC). The WFLC is the Federal Advisory Committee that oversees the National Fire Plan. That’s the plan that tells all the Federal land management agencies how they will fight fires. Those agencies are the USFS, BLM (Bureau of Land Management), NPS (National Park Service), BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs), and the USFWS (US Fish and Wildlife Service).

TWS sits in on all the WFLC meetings. They have advised the WFLC to have a Let It Burn program, and the WFLC has taken that advice to heart. On February 22, 2007, the WFLC altered the National Fire Plan to include Wildland Fire Use (WFU) [[here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)]. WFU fires are fires that the USFS allows to burn. They just watch them, without trying to contain, control, or extinguish them.

TWS is very big on WFU fires. They like them. They promote them. From TWS’s own website [[here](#)]:

Wildland Fire Use (WFU) — using naturally-burning fires in designated, remote sections of forests — is widely accepted by scientists, policymakers and land managers as an important tool for helping to restore forest health and mitigating the escalating costs of fire suppression.

Good fire management often involves a mix of approaches, from full suppression action to WFU; managers must follow a complex series of steps when they make the choice to allow a fire to burn in a given area.

Before WFU can be expanded, Congress must reform incentive structures and institutional pressures that encourage unnecessary fire suppression; the public must also be educated about the ecological benefits of fire.

Regardless of the alleged virtues of WFU fires, or their alleged acceptance by scientists, policymakers and land managers, or the alleged uneducated condition of the public, WFU fires are Federal actions that take place on Federal forests.

No WFU has ever undergone a NEPA process. In fact, the entire WFU program promulgated by the WFLC on the advice of TWS has never had a single Environmental Impact Statement written. There have been no alternatives presented to the public, no “rigorous” examination of the absent alternatives, no public involvement process, no request for comments from the public, no nothing.

On one hand, TWS sued the USFS for an “unrigorous” EIS on the Plumas NF thinning project, and on the other they have pushed for a Let It Burn program nationally with no NEPA process at all!

Does that strike you as hypocritical and duplicitous? That’s how it strikes me.

The TWS makes a big noise about forcing the USFS to “obey the law” when it suits TWS, but then they advise the USFS to ignore the law when that option suits TWS.

What do the Plumas NF lawsuit and the national WFU program have in common? In both cases the outcome desired by the TWS is incineration of our public forests.

The Plumas NF thinning was designed to save our forests from catastrophic destruction by fire. TWS opposed those thinnings. The WFU program is one that encourages forest fires to burn unimpeded by fire suppression. TWS favors WFU.

In other words (if any more are needed) TWS wants to burn, baby, burn. They will sue if fires are prevented, but will take your tax dollars and ignore Federal lawbreaking if the outcome, in either case, will lead to more forest fires.

Here is what a WFU looks like after the fire has burned:



It doesn't take a scientist, policymaker, or a land manager to see how destructive WFU fires can be. That is total annihilation of a forest. But that's what TWS desires. That's their goal.

And they are more than willing to sue the government, and/or subvert the law, to achieve their goal.

The 9th Circuit Court judge in the Plumas NF case accused the USFS of extortion, collusion, and bribery in their efforts to thin public forests to prevent total annihilation by fire. However, those accusations are more properly directed at TWS. Whereas the Plumas NF was trying to save forests, TWS uses strong arm tactics to destroy them.

Now I hope all that was pretty clear. I hope your brain did not explode. I know it is difficult for the average citizen, who has been pepper sprayed by propaganda his or her entire life, to understand that a so-called "environmental" group is not really pro-environment. You have been lied to your whole life, which should not surprise you, frankly, but probably does.

But all the above is not a lie; it is the truth. TWS subverts the law, suing when it pleases them, spitting on the law when it pleases them, in order to destroy public forests with catastrophic holocausts.

Here are the names of the TWS Governing Council Officers:

Brenda Davis, Chair
Doug Walker, Vice Chair
Hansjörg Wyss, Vice Chair
Scott A. Nathan, Treasurer
Marcia Kunstel, Secretary
Caroline Getty, At-Large
David Bonderman, At-Large

Here are the names of the TWS Governing Council:

Edward A. Ames
James R. Baca
Thomas A. Barron
Richard Blum
David Bonderman
William M. Bumpers
Bethine Church
Bertram J. Cohn
Dr. William J. Cronon
Dr. Brenda S. Davis
Christopher J. Elliman
David J. Field
George T. Frampton, Jr.
Dr. Jerry F. Franklin

David H. Getches
Caroline M. Getty
Reginald "Flip" Hagood
Marcia Kunstel
Kevin Luzak
Molly McUsic
Michael Mantell
Heather Kendall Miller
Scott Nathan
Jaime Pinkham
Rebecca L. Rom
Theodore Roosevelt IV
Patrick Smith
Cathleen Douglas Stone
Douglas W. Walker
Hansjörg Wyss

Here are the names of the TWS staff concerned with Wildland Fires

Tom Fry
Bo Wilmer
Michael Francis
Greg Aplet
Bob Ekey
Chris Mehl
Craig Gehrke
Pete Morton
Chris Lancette

You could also include The Earth Island Institute.