

**STATEMENT OF REP. JERRY LEWIS**

**on**

**H.R. 4162 – SAN BERNARDINO BIOMASS USE FACILITATION ACT**

**Before the**

**Natural Resources Committee  
United States House of Representatives**

**September 11, 2008**

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you today about H.R. 4162, the San Bernardino Biomass Use Facilitation Act. This legislation would execute a land exchange between the County of San Bernardino and the U.S. Forest Service, in the Big Bear Valley, for the purpose of material recycling, green waste disposal, and power generation. The Forest Service parcel is next to the Big Bear Landfill and a Southern California Edison Substation, making it the ideal location for the processing and disposal of wood waste and other recyclable materials.

As you may recall, we suffered terrible wildfires in the San Bernardino Mountains in 2003 and 2007. Hundreds of homes were burned and tens of thousand of people were forced to evacuate. These fires demonstrated the severe consequences of the failure to properly manage the forest. It was dangerously overcrowded, with 100 to 200 trees per acre - more than double the healthy amount. With so many trees competing for scarce water supplies, drought

conditions weakened all of them, and bark beetles infested and killed millions of trees. We in Congress have been trying to help rectify this problem, and more than a million trees have been removed. But much more work must be done.

Even as we continue to clear away dead trees, the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service are also thinning stands of live trees to make the forest more fire resistant. Fires in a thinned forest burn at lower intensity and are more easily controlled. Bringing forest stands back to a manageable density also results in a healthier and more drought and disease resistant forest. To accomplish these goals, over \$150 million has been spent in the San Bernardino National Forest for burned area and hazardous fuels treatment.

We must continue the effort to clear hazardous fuels every year in order to provide fire protection to 100,000 residents living in more than 30 mountain communities in the San Bernardino and San

Jacinto Mountains. The property at risk in these communities is valued at approximately \$10 billion. During the 2003 Old and Grand Prix Fires in San Bernardino County, the total calculated expenses exceeded \$1 billion. There is no question it is much cheaper to clear trees and brush and bring the forest back to health.

Unfortunately, there is no place in the San Bernardino Mountains to dispose of the dead trees and brush being cleared to make the forest safe. The waste must currently be trucked to landfills a considerable distance away. As gas prices increase, this will become an increasingly costly problem.

Fortunately, we have the chance to approve a solution that will not only allow us to dispose of the waste locally, but will add to our energy supplies in the process. The land exchange in the legislation before you would provide space for a bio-mass facility which will provide an energy-efficient and more cost effective use

of the trees and wood waste. This waste-to-energy biomass plant will provide supplemental electricity to Bear Valley Electric.

In exchange for land that is next to a landfill, the legislation would provide the Forest Service with a large private parcel currently surrounded by public land. It also provides for the relocation of the scenic Pacific Crest Trail which currently runs within several hundred feet of the existing landfill. By moving the trail south it will provide a much larger buffer between the landfill site and the trail. The Forest Service and the County of San Bernardino are working on a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure that the relocation is done with utmost care. As a lover of the Pacific Crest Trail and the San Bernardino National Forest, I am convinced that the trail will actually benefit from this endeavor.

In short, H.R. 4162 represents the best in local-federal partnership, and is supported by both the County and Forest Service. We have

all worked for a number of years to ensure that it is truly a win-win-win proposal.

- Our mountain communities and the Forest Service will have a cost-effective way of dealing with the vegetation waste coming from our continuing efforts to provide fire safety.
- The Forest Service will gain property that fills in a large hole in our public lands.
- The electricity that may be generated from the bio-waste facility will reduce our dependence on traditional power generation.

Thank you for your consideration of H.R. 4162, and at this time I'd be happy to answer any questions the committee might have regarding the bill.