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Look to the Future, Look to the Forest

By: Lt. Governor Brad Little

Idahoans enjoy a unique way of life. Few places in the world come close to meeting Idaho's scenic beauty, abundance of clean water and rich farm, grazing and forest lands. Throughout the nation and the world, these resources are limited and precious. The strength of Idaho has been, and will be, our resources, our resourcefulness and our solid values. As we strive to maintain our jobs, businesses and way of life during these uncharted economic times, it's critical that we do not lose sight of the resources that make Idaho special and our responsibility to care for them.

More than 21 million acres of forests contribute to our state and our way of life. We all benefit from well managed forests through clean water, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, soil conservation, biodiversity, recreation opportunities, jobs, revenues for schools and renewable wood products. We all have a stake in making sure forests are sustainably managed.

The nation looks to us to be responsible stewards of a national treasure and future generations are dependent on a predictable supply of water, wildlife and natural resources. Good forest stewardship means responsible management by all forest owners. In the early 1950's my Dad began managing our family's timberlands in a way that would be sustainable over time and generations. Our management activities include timber harvest, pre-commercial thinning and fuel reduction projects. Sustainable management has become a Little family legacy. In our family business, we strive to be good stewards of our land and government must do the same.

Years of fire suppression with no thinning and management on national forests have resulted in overly dense, stressed forests with excessive buildup of fuels and large outbreaks of insects and disease. These are perfect conditions for huge catastrophic wildfires that pollute the air, kill wildlife, threaten watersheds and soils, harm tourism, waste resources and require dangerous and costly firefighting measures. Immediate action is needed to protect the environment and the taxpayer.

As I see it, Idaho is full of opportunities and our forests hold great promise for the future, but only if we are good stewards and manage them as a sustainable resource.

As we look to the future, we should look to the forest. Whether they are working forests or wilderness, forests covers more than 40 percent of Idaho. The renewable resources in our own backyard should play an important role in creating a new competitive business environment in Idaho that builds a strong economy for future generations of Idahoans.

Brad Little is Lieutenant Governor of the State of Idaho, rancher, farmer and 2009 "Idaho Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year".