



## **Dave's Dialogue**

*The MLA's 2010 annual meeting* in mid-May was well attended, especially considering the state of the economy. The center of this edition has a few pages of pictures from the convention... and I want to take this time to thank all of the convention sponsors—listed on the facing page—for lending their financial support to this year's conference. I encourage MLA members to remember these folks when it is time to make a decision about who your strategic business partners are.

The conference theme was *Biomass Markets in the Aftermath of the 'STONE' Age*... and the conference speakers did a great job of engaging the audience in the discussion. To be sure, we did not solve the immediate market dilemma for non-sawlog material in Montana... but questions about the potential for this material in our industry's future were laid to rest. Thanks to the presenters and the MLA staff for a job well done.

*Montana has received its share* of attention from DC dignitaries in recent weeks. Representatives of the Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture and the White House Council on Environmental Quality all gathered with Montana's U.S. Senators and the Governor, ostensibly to review the collaborative effort that resulted in the Blackfoot-Clearwater proposal.

The very next day, these folks—and several of their subordinates—participated in concurrent “listening sessions” in Missoula, Helena, and Bozeman where the focus was President Obama's *America's Great Outdoors Initiative*.

During the plenary session, these officials did their best to convince attendees that “there was no predetermined” initiative coming down from command central in DC... but few participants were buying that message. It just does not seem likely that so much political muscle would be detailed to Montana if there was not a need to collect comments in support of an initiative of some sort; too many of us remember a similar ruse to collect similar support for the so-called Clinton Roadless Rule.

In the breakout sessions at each venue, participants were asked to respond to several questions. Most comments seemed to focus on national park issues... but timber representatives did their best to remind folks that our national forests are crying for attention.

Congressional members—especially those without national forests in their districts—like to laud our national forests as national treasures that need to be preserved or managed for future generations. Few of them appreciate the insects and disease epidemics that have reduced many of these forests to a national disgrace.

Not unlike the BP oil spill spreading through the gulf waters, the mountain pine beetle has been spreading through the forests of the intermountain west for over a decade... 18 million acres west-wide are infested... 5 million acres in Montana alone. We are one ‘perfect storm’ away from a catastrophic wildfire that will devastate a rural western community or communities. But few members of Congress want to deal with that eventuality—at least they don't want to give federal land managers the necessary funding and manpower to address the situation.

Too bad... but all the more reason why congressional leaders need to give western states and local governments the authority and resources to treat infested forests around rural communities that are at greatest risk of that ‘perfect storm.’

MLA members are encouraged to weigh in on the “America's Great Outdoors Initiative” by accessing the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Interior website—or by Googling the initiative—and follow the links for submitting comment.

Until the next edition... stay dry... stay positive... and stay logging... *Dave*