

Daschle double-dealing scorches Healthy Forests opponents

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Opposition to active forest management took an unexpected hit on July 23 from an unlikely source. On that date, fellow lawmakers discovered that Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-South Dakota) had inserted into a spending bill language that exempted forests in his home state from environmental regulations and lawsuits. Daschle has been a leading critic of active forest management and has fought hard against any attempts to streamline federal regulations or activist lawsuits against the federal government.

The South Dakota forestry measure was silently slipped into a defense spending bill providing supplementary funds to fight terrorism. Daschle's measure states, "due to extraordinary circumstances" – allegedly unshared by other parts of the country – significant portions of South Dakota will be exempt from the yoke of controversial environmental laws and regulations championed by Daschle when applied to the rest of the country.

The Washington Times reported Daschle's actions on July 24, and the reaction was swift and severe.

"It certainly can only be described as blatant hypocrisy on behalf of the Senate leader to claim on one hand to be the champion of the environment and then on

the other hand to cut a special deal for his home state," said Representative John Hayworth (R-Arizona).

"What's good for the Black Hills should be good for every forest in the United States," proclaimed Senator Larry Craig (R-Idaho).

"After hearing all the hand-wringing from environmentalists downplaying the impact of appeals and litigation, it's nice to see that the highest-ranking Democrat in the nation agrees that these frivolous challenges have totally crippled forest managers," said Representative Scott McInnis (R-Colorado).

"It will be interesting to find out if what's good for Mr. Daschle's goose is also good for the West's gander," McInnis added. "We intend to find out."

When word of his actions became public, Daschle attempted to downplay and rationalize the special treatment for South Dakota.

"As we have seen in the last several weeks, the fire danger in the Black Hills is high and we need to get crews on the ground as soon as possible to reduce this risk and protect property and lives," argued Daschle.

Daschle asserted his measure represented the "fastest and most effective way to get the forest thinned." Moreover, "To be effective, any piece of legislation must be crafted in a way that avoids more time-consuming litigation, and this deal should meet that critical test."

Daschle further argued that special exemptions were appropriate for South Dakota because activist groups like the Sierra Club had signed off on it. Daschle argued that approval from such groups was a necessary prerequisite and "the linchpin of my amendment."

However, the Senate Majority Leader's ability to get a sweetheart deal from the Sierra Club while fighting similar forest management plans everywhere else in the country did not surprise many Westerners.

"What he is proving today is that true environmentalists are willing to have effective forest management," Hayworth continued. "This is a classic case of somebody saying one thing for political posturing, and doing another for public policy."

Interior Secretary Gale Norton predicted Daschle's actions would dramatically improve the chances of Congress approving President George W. Bush's Healthy

Forests Initiative. "It shows there is bipartisan recognition that red tape has interfered with good forest management," said Nort