

## New state forester supports commercial harvesting of trees



By HOWARD FISCHER, Capitol Media Services

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

PHOENIX -- Arizona's new state forester said there needs to be commercial harvesting of trees to make healthy forests economically viable.

Vicki Christiansen said Monday neither the state nor the federal government will ever have enough money to keep forests in the condition necessary to prevent major wildfires. She said that means relying on private industry to thin the forests at their own expense, something they will do only if its economically viable.

"The bottom line is our citizens want to feel safe," she told members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Infrastructure and Public Debt. That means protecting communities from wildfire damage.



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Howard Fischer*

Vicki Christiansen, named by Gov. Jan Brewer to be state forester, answers questions Monday from members of the Senate during confirmation hearings. Christiansen had been in the same position in the state of Washington.

Southwest was a prime place to be and Arizona was very welcoming to me.'

She said Arizona has different "challenges" in terms of the dry weather and the amount of fuel for fires in the forests. And Arizona has been hit hard several times in the last decade with major fires that have charred hundreds of thousands of acres before being contained.

But Christiansen said there are some things which are similar, including people who want to build homes and communities in the middle of those forests despite the dangers.

Christiansen said, though, she doesn't see her role -- or the role of state government -- to tell people where they can live or even how close they can build near the trees.

"The line is for the individual to know where the risks are," she said. Christiansen said it will be up to each property owner and those living in the communities to make that call.

"But certainly every individual family, knowing what their risk and consequences are of their entire situation around them, they have the opportunity if not the personal responsibility for their family to make themselves safe," she said.

Taylor McKinnon, public lands director for the Center for Biological Diversity, said his group has not worked with Christiansen before.

But in a prepared statement, he said Christiansen inherits three big needs: helping communities prepare for fire, safely restore beneficial fires and combat the spread of exotic grasses and unnatural fires. He said the Arizona Forest Health Council, established in 2003 by then Gov. [Janet Napolitano](#), has made "good progress" on some of the goals and that Christiansen should build on that progress.

Christiansen succeeds Kirk Rowdabaugh, an appointee of Napolitano, Brewer's Democratic predecessor. Rowdabaugh was named last October to be the director of the Office of Wildland Fire Conservation at the U.S. Department of Interior.