

Freedom of Information Request Exposes the Real Julia Altemus: Documents Altemus' Behind-the-Scenes Attempts to Sabotage Bona-Fide, Genuine National Forest Restoration Efforts of Conservation Groups

By Matthew Koehler, WildWest Institute, May 10, 2014

Montana citizens have a right to know this story about Julia Altemus, especially after her latest opinion piece in the *Missoulian* (<http://bit.ly/1seBPcu>). After reading this account, please ask yourself if Julia Altemus seems like a person that wants to really work together with all Montanans to support bona-fide restoration work on America's National Forests.

Back in 2005 I filed an official Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request with the federal government requesting copies of communications between public officials at the Bitterroot National Forest and Montana timber industry officials.

The FOIA request turned up 930 pages of Forest Service communications with Montana timber industry officials. Some of these communications were quite interesting as they contained very frank discussions regarding soils, old-growth forests, how to deal with public comments and conservation groups in regards to the Bitterroot National Forest's Middle East Fork logging project, the first timber sale in Montana to be done under George W. Bush's Healthy Forest Restoration Act (<http://bit.ly/RxtSnk>).

Here's where timber industry lobbyist Julia Altemus comes in. At the time, in 2005, Altemus was the lobbyist and policy person for the Montana Logging Association. This was just after Altemus worked as a lead staffer for Senator Conrad Burns, during which time Altemus claimed to have written the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.

In October 2005, I read a commentary on the evening Montana Public Radio (KUFM) news program, which outlined our organization's "restoration vision" for public lands. Our organization had just finished up a 4 year bridge-building effort with restoration practitioners, small independent loggers and over 100 conservation organizations around the country. One result of that effort was the development of a set of Forest Restoration Principles (<http://bit.ly/1mKMYjM>), which were supported by over 130 organizations around the country.

My KUFM Montana Public Radio commentary was highlighting these Forest Restoration Principles and also, since 2005 marked the Forest Service's 100 year anniversary, our organization was promoting the next 100 years of National Forest management as the "Restoration Century." Pretty radical stuff, eh?

Well, apparently our genuine, pro-active, bridge-building efforts to work with a broad array of citizens, organizations and restoration practitioners to promote bona-fide National Forest restoration didn't sit very well with timber industry lobbyist Julia Altemus.

I know this for a fact because my official Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request turned up an October 2005 email Julia Altemus wrote to Dave Bull, Supervisor of the Bitterroot National Forest, Debbie Austin, Supervisor of the Lolo National Forest, and some Montana timber mill owners.

Here's what Julia Altemus wrote to the Forest Service supervisors – and other timber industry officials – in response to my commentary outlining our "Restoration Vision" for America's National Forests:

"This is not a commentary....it's an add [sic] and solicitation for money!! The U of M has stooped to a new low to allow them this media to fundraise!We must not allow fringe anti-management groups to dictate management of public lands! This is very dangerous stuff we are playing with here."

I would encourage all Montanans to view Julia Altemus' latest opinion piece in the *Missoulian* (<http://bit.ly/1seBPcu>) in the context of Altemus' words and actions from 2005.

Altemus' actions (only discovered and made public through the luck of a FOIA request) were clearly nothing more than a behind-the-scenes attempt to completely sabotage our organization's restoration vision for America's National Forests and our genuine efforts to work with restoration practitioners, independent loggers and other conservation organizations to find common ground.

Of course, once you know that Julia Altemus was caught red-handed sabotaging the restoration efforts of Montana conservation organizations, you also have to wonder just how often Julia Altemus engages in this type of under-handed, unprofessional behavior. It's very unlikely that this one email in 2005 was the one and only time Julia Altemus engaged in such an under-handed manner.

And just as importantly, how cozy of a relationship with these Forest Service Supervisors must Julia Altemus have if she felt it was OK to sabotage our organization's genuine restoration vision for America's National Forests?

I hope anyone reading this account will now have a better understanding of just how difficult it is for many Montana conservation organizations to develop trust with people like timber industry lobbyist Julia Altemus based on the 100% undisputable and documented fact that she has done nothing but attempted to completely sabotage the genuine restoration efforts of Montana forest and Wilderness protection organizations behind our backs at every turn.

Furthermore, keep Julia Altemus' words and actions in the front of your mind if you go back and re-read her opinion piece. When you read Julia Altemus' making claims like this:

“Over the past few years, mainstream environmental groups and the timber industry have invited the few fringe organizations to enter into a collaborative discussion or process on numerous occasions. However, they decline in favor of the failed status quo of attacking projects through pre-objection and litigation. It is rather disingenuous for these people to cry foul now because they were not consulted. They sealed their own fate long ago by choosing the path of obstruction rather than construction.”

Keep in mind that not only is Julia Altemus intentionally lying to the public with such claims – as Altemus knows full well that groups like the WildWest Institute, Friends of the Bitterroot, Swan View Coalition and WildEarth Guardians are, in fact, active members of “collaborative” groups and within “collaborative discussions.”

But Julia Altemus is also counting on the fact that nobody in the public knows the types of actions Altemus takes behind the scenes to intentionally try and sabotage the restoration and collaboration efforts of conservation groups, which she so obviously has great hatred for.

I mean, if the head timber industry lobbyist in the state of Montana said this type of stuff about your conservation organization and your efforts to move bona-fide restoration work forward, would you feel comfortable working with her?

Again, let these words and actions of Montana timber industry lobbyist Julia Altemus sink in for a minute. Julia Altemus' own words and actions show without a doubt how she really operates behind-the-scenes when conservation groups that she truly despises attempt to work on a bona-fide restoration vision for America's National Forests. But thankfully, through the luck of a FOIA request, we did find out. And now fellow Montanans can see just how Julia Altemus operates:

"This is not a commentary...it's an add [sic] and solicitation for money!! The U of M has stooped to a new low to allow them this media to fundraise!We must not allow fringe anti-management groups to dictate management of public lands! This is very dangerous stuff we are playing with here."

- Julia Altemus (October 2005, in an email she wrote to National Forest Supervisors and fellow timber industry officials, which was obtained via an official FOIA request).