

## Guest Opinions “Related” To Primary PSS Tax Measures

### August 25, 2015. Greg Walden. *Forestry bill deserving of support* (Guest Opinion)

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#### GREG WALDEN

Around Oregon and throughout the West, another fire season is well underway. Overstocked, diseased, and bug-infested forests are at risk of the massive and catastrophic wildfires that clog our air with smoke and threaten our streams. All this while our mills are starving for a reliable supply of timber and people need jobs. It's clear the status quo isn't working for our forests, our communities, or our environment. We can do better.

The U.S. House of Representatives has approved a bipartisan bill — the **Resilient Federal Forests Act** [emphasis added] — that would help reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires and bring active management back to our federal forests. Through active management, we can clean up our forests, prevent these unnaturally large fires, protect our air, and put people back to work in our forested communities.

Our bill puts into place much needed reforms to federal forest policy. For example, the bill repeals the arbitrary and outdated prohibition on harvesting trees over 21 inches in diameter on national forests in eastern Oregon. "Temporarily" put in place in 1997, this rule still hasn't been removed 20 years later. This flawed, one-size-fits-all rule illustrates just how broken federal forest management has become. The restriction greatly limits forest managers' ability to address site specific needs of the forest on the ground and has only served to further tie up projects in endless appeals and litigation.

Our plan also gives the Forest Service greater flexibility to move quickly on projects to reduce the threat of fire around our rural communities, streamlining projects developed through local counties' community wildfire protection plans.

Right now, after a fire, the Forest Service is able to reforest less than 3 percent of areas burned. This plan would accelerate the removal of timber after a fire (to help pay for replanting), and requires a large percentage of the area impacted be reforested within five years. Just like we do after other natural disasters, we ought to clean up and rebuild after wildfires. As we saw earlier this summer on the Buckskin Fire in Southern Oregon, failing to clean up only leads to future fires in old burn scars full of fallen trees and snag that prove difficult and too dangerous for firefighters.

This bill also cuts costs and streamlines rules for timber production on legislation pertaining to Oregon's unique O&C Lands. The Bureau of Land Management recently unveiled new management plans for these lands that would fall short of the needs of local communities for a

reliable supply of timber to fund essential local services like schools, roads, and law enforcement. The bill tells the BLM to go back to the drawing board, and propose new plans to actually provide sustainable timber production for Oregon's rural communities as required by law.

Finally, the endless cycle of "fire borrowing" — forcing the federal government to use wildfire prevention funds to pay for fighting fire — is ended under this bill. It fixes how we pay to fight fire by allowing the Forest Service to apply for FEMA disaster funds to pay for firefighting. This treats wildfire as the natural disasters they are, similar to hurricanes or tornados.

The Resilient Federal Forests Act will improve the health of our forests and our rural economies. During the last session of Congress, the House twice passed bipartisan legislation I worked on to reform federal forest policy. The Senate failed to take up forestry legislation. However, with new leadership in that body I'm hopeful that the Senate will take meaningful action on forestry legislation. We cannot let this opportunity pass us by again. Our forested communities have already waited too long. Now is the time to act.

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Greg Walden represents Oregon's Second Congressional District, which covers 20 counties in southern, central, and eastern Oregon, including the Grants Pass area of Josephine County.