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It's not a radical bill

The salvage bill sponsored by Congressmen Greg Walden of Oregon and Brian Baird of Washington won strong support in the House Agriculture Committee. The vote, 33 for and only three against, suggests that this bill is not nearly as controversial as the opposition by environmental groups would indicate.

The bill is inspired by common sense. Its guiding principle is that after a federal forest is hit by a disaster, foresters should be able to move quickly to do what is best under the circumstances. If they decide that the burned trees should be salvaged, this should be authorized quickly before the logs lose value. But the bill doesn't say forest managers must decide on salvage. In many cases, burned forests should be left alone to restore themselves by natural processes. The key is that professional foresters, informed by science and taking into consideration a host of factors, including the role of the forests in supporting the local economy, should be able to take action swiftly before the passage of time and appeals rob them of what may be the best alternative.

Critics of some aspects of the bill, including 4th District Democrat Peter DeFazio, say the Forest Service already has the power to move quickly.

If so, the vast majority of the Agriculture Committee in the House — and the majority of the Resources Committee earlier — would not have taken the action they did.

Let us hope that final action on the bill in the House is quickly followed by approval in the Senate as well. (hh)

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