

May 9, 2006

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representative
H232 United States Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We recently read about a group representing a very small handful of wildland firefighters, the Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology and their opposition to legislation critical to the future health of our national forests and rural communities. We represent the majority of the organizations and individuals who are the first responders in our national forests to catastrophic natural disasters like wildfires, tornadoes, hurricanes and ice storms. We strongly support and endorse the bipartisan Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act (HR 4200) introduced by Representatives Greg Walden (R-OR), Brian Baird (D-WA) and Stephanie Herseth (D-SD) and cosponsored by 145 of their colleagues. Our employees are the firefighters, airplane and helicopter pilots, hazard tree fallers, and support personnel who put their lives on the line as they respond to disasters in our national forests. Natural catastrophes impact our nation's treasured forests on a regular basis. Wildfires, tornadoes, ice storms, bug infestations and windstorms are frequent occurrences which often leave our national forests dead and in need of recovery and restoration. HR 4200 would deliver the critical, science-based tools needed to repair these forests after disaster strikes them.

When dead and dying timber is left to rot in our in our national forests, excessive fuel loads build which result in hotter, faster burning, uncontrollable wildfires. The fuels and intense wildfires they produce not only impair the environmental health of our forests, watersheds and airsheds; they also pose significantly greater danger to our firefighters and the communities they try to protect. Current law simply doesn't allow the science-based, proven and quick treatment of our forests after a catastrophic act of nature damages them, but HR 4200 would provide the badly needed tools to our professional forest managers who would decide the best course of action after a disaster occurs. It is critical to the future of these forests, and to the communities affected by their health, that federal land managers are able to rapidly assess damage, determine environmentally sound action plans and get to work recovering damaged forests.

Another significant benefit of this legislation is that it encourages public participation, follows an overwhelmingly bipartisan and congressionally approved appeals and litigation process and requires collaboration with states, local governments, tribes, colleges and universities, and other interested parties.

When it comes to the health of our national forests as well as the health of our firefighters and other first responders, we have a responsibility to get to work restoring lands damaged by catastrophe. The Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act would help do just that. We are united in our strong support of it and urge the House to pass it as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

The undersigned wildfire fighting associations and entities representing over 12,000 firefighting professionals and 330 companies.

Debbie Miley
Executive Secretary
National Wildfire Suppression Association
250 member companies - Over 11,000 employees
working for fire or fire related companies operating
nationally.

Tom Eversole
Executive Director
**American Helicopter Services & Aerial Firefighting
Association**
15 member companies - Helicopters and Fixed Wing
Aircraft operating nationally.

Mike Wheelock
President
National Environmental Fuels Association
Contractors involved with reducing hazardous fuels
primarily in the Western United States.

Bruce Ferguson
President
Ferguson Management Company
Firefighter Company (Emergency Services) –
25 years experience with 200 to 300 employees operating
Type 2IA Crews and Engines nationally.

Don Pollard
President
GFP Inc.
Firefighter Company (Emergency Services) –
15 years experience with 125 employees operating Type 2
IA crews nationally.

Michael Fahey
President
Columbia Helicopters Inc.
750 employees with 10 helicopters for firefighting
operating nationally.

BL Kafman
President
Croman Corp.
Firefighting company with 150 employees which also
operates helicopters in the Western United States.

John Bennett
President
Northwest Contract Firefighters Association
35 member companies operating nationally.

Eric Helpenstell
Operations Manager
Pacific Wildfire International
228 employees operating nationally

John Bennett
President
Enterprise Unlimited

Rick Dice
President
PatRick Corp.
Firefighter Company, (Emergency Services) – 35 years
experience with 200 employees operating Type 2 IA crews and
engines nationally.

Rich Denker
Executive Director
Western Forest Fire Services Association
23 member companies operating nationally.

Shari Downhill
President
N.W. Timber Fallers Inc.
Hazard Tree Faller Teams operating nationally

Nelda Herman
President
Oregon Firefighting Contractors Association
20 member companies operating crew, engines, water tenders
and other ground support for fire and emergency services
nationally.

Don Moss
President
Strike Back
60 employees operating crews, engines, water tender, and
sanitation facilities

Eric Helpenstell
President
Pacific Wildfire
Engines and water tenders.

Paul Washburn
President
Washburn Contract Services Inc.
Over 26 years experience in fire and emergency services with 40
employees operating nationally.

Mike Wheelock
President
Grayback Forestry
Firefighter Company, (Emergency Services) –
33 years experience with 200 to 300 employees operating Type
2IA crews and engines nationally.

Mark Gibson
General Manager
TL Forest Products
21 years experience in fire with 30 employees operating
helicopters in the Western United States.