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House of Representatives  
1210 Longworth House Building  
Washington, D.C. 20215

The Honorable Greg Walden:

Below is the op-ed piece I recently sent to the Oregonian newspaper in Portland in support of the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act.

During the early decades of the last century, hundreds of thousands of acres of forest land were destroyed by a series of four catastrophic wildfires in northwestern Oregon. This huge swath of land became known as The Tillamook Burn. The Counties, the State of Oregon, and others immediately initiated a massive restoration effort to recover economic value from the burned timber, stabilize barren slopes to protect decimated watersheds and reforest the denuded slopes by seeding and planting young seedlings. Today The Tillamook Burn is known as The Tillamook State Forest.

It is a working forest providing jobs and funding for county governments by managing the renewable timber resource, habitat for fish and wildlife, clean water for human consumption and industrial use and recreational opportunities for Oregon's growing population. It is even home to species listed under the Endangered Species Act. It is truly a monumental restoration success story because rapid action was taken to transform a devastated landscape into a vibrant and resilient forest.

Unfortunately, if The Tillamook Burn had occurred during this century, on land managed by the federal government, it would likely be a field of brush today and would still referred to as The Tillamook Burn. The dead trees would have fallen to the ground, creating yet another fire hazard. Brush would cover the landscape rather than a blanket of green trees. The diversity of plant and wildlife would be limited to species dependent solely on early successional forest. This is because the federal government has become paralyzed by unending environmental analyses, procedural requirements, endless red tape and litigation. Warner Creek, the Tiller Complex, the B&B, the Biscuit...all catastrophic fires where very little if any restoration has occurred because of procedural gridlock. Federal land managers simply need new tools to restore and recover the ecological values of our forests in a timely manner—ecological values the public wants and expects.

The bi-partisan "Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act", sponsored by Congressmen Greg Walden (R-OR) and Brian Baird (D-WA), is intended to give federal land managers the ability to react to catastrophic events affecting our forests. Whether it is wildfire, windstorms or insect and disease outbreaks, the legislation would require rapid assessment of ecological conditions, promote quick action to assist in recovery, provide additional funding sources to protect forests from further degradation and expedite procedures to speed reforestation efforts. It will restore a common sense approach to restoring forests and their multiple values destroyed by catastrophic events.

Time is of the essence to pass this much needed legislation. Large-scale catastrophic wildfires have become more common in recent years and are expected to continue until the health of our forests is restored. With approximately 190 million acres of federal land at high risk of catastrophic wildfire, restoration efforts will take many years. Rapid assessment of damage, quick action, and funding are needed following such events. The Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act will provide federal land managers the resources and tools to ensure future generations will also enjoy resilient green forests.

Sincerely,

James E. Brown,  
Oregon State Forester 1986 to 2003  
Governor Ted Kulongoski's Natural Resource Policy Director 2003 to 2004