

## **Forest Fire Response: Rep. Walden's bill speeds up process to allow salvage and reforestation after fires**

### **NEWS-REVIEW EDITORIAL**

November 14, 2005

This nation's method of reacting to catastrophic fires in national forests is so painstakingly slow it borders on the ridiculous.

It takes a year just to develop a plan. And, as sure as it is going to rain in Oregon this winter, environmental lawsuits will follow, further delaying any salvage logging and subsequent restoration for at least another year, perhaps more.

Trouble is, time is of the essence after a fire. Once trees die, they begin to dry out, and they continue to lose value, month after month. In many cases, by the time plans to harvest some of the timber are finally approved, there isn't enough value left to make it worthwhile.

As a result, dead but commercially valuable timber is wasted, and there is no money from timber sales to pay for restoration and replanting.

Eastern Oregon Congressman Greg Walden is co-sponsor of a bill that sets a speedy timetable to respond after catastrophic events, requiring months, not years.

Dubbed the "Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act," the bill has some 100 congressmen signed on as co-sponsors.

Although it quickly drew criticism from anti-logging organizations, it included enough restrictions to counter protests. For example, it would not allow harvest in wilderness areas, national parks or monuments, and it prohibits the construction of permanent roads. It also not only requires replanting after any salvage logging, but requires that native or beneficial plants be planted, and prohibits forest plantations of one species.

Some of the concern on the part of conservation groups is understandable. Areas that have been burned are particularly sensitive to erosion and the damage from logging, and some fire-killed trees should be left to provide refuge and return nutrients to the earth. This bill, however, does not free the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management from ensuring that logging does no lasting damage. Post-fire logging must be done carefully and avoid especially sensitive areas.

Yes, forests can repair themselves in time after fires. However, the time it takes for a healthy young forest to be growing again in that spot can be cut by less than half with replanting.

Protestations that all fire-burned areas should be off-limits to logging and subsequent replanting don't stand up. A recent survey of Oregonians showed a strong majority favor allowing timber salvage and replanting after forest fires.

Our national forests can handle a reasonable level of sustainable timber harvest without harm.

This bill, speeding up the process of reasonable levels of harvest followed by replanting after a large fire, is a sensible way to help meet that goal.

Lawmakers should get behind Rep. Walden's bill.