



National Federation of Federal Employees

Affiliated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers

Forest Service Council

We work for America every day



William R. Dougan, President

Mike Bunten, Secretary-Treasurer

May 14, 2006

Rep. Greg Walden
U.S. House of Representatives
1210 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Rep. Brian Baird
U.S. House of Representatives
1421 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Walden and Baird:

On behalf of the Forest Service Council of the National Federation of Federal Employees, International Association of Machinists, the union that represents approximately 25,000 Forest Service employees across the country, I am writing to express our union's support for H.R. 4200, the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act.

As one of the groups on the front line of public lands management, we saw how destructive the forest fires were that swept through the West beginning in 2000 were. Once the fires were finally contained and put out, we saw a second, less publicized, disaster – our inability to begin important salvage and reforestation efforts that would begin the process of regenerating our national forests.

Simply put, the Forest Service lacks the appropriate tools and authorizations to immediately begin salvage and reforestation projects. The agency is further hampered by various groups that opposed the quick removal of damaged trees and forced delays through needless administrative appeals and lawsuits that have more to do with politics than forest health. The combination of these factors has slowed the restoration process to less than a snail's pace.

While the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, which we supported, did a good job of streamlining the approval process for necessary thinning projects that will help reduce the risk of new fires, it did not do anything to expedite salvage and reforestation projects after the fire. The Forest Service Council believes H.R. 4200 takes the next logical step that will continue the move toward healthier public forests.

First, we strongly support the expedited procedures set forth in the bill that will allow salvage and reforestation programs to begin as quickly as possible after the catastrophic event. By

putting in place pre-approved procedures, we can avoid the all too prevalent problem of “analysis paralysis” that is largely driven by the fear of lawsuits.

Next, the legislation makes use of the guidelines established under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to set the rules for administrative appeals and litigation. Rather than setting a whole new set of rules, the bill lets everyone know the rules of the game. Moreover, it clearly defines what can and cannot be done in a salvage project and keeps in place current laws that ensure a safe environment and provide for public notice and input.

Finally, the bill funds additional research that is necessary to help us better understand how fire affects forestlands and will help us better plan for future recovery management decisions.

Therefore, we support the legislation and look forward to working with both of you to secure its passage.

Sincerely,



William R. Dougan
President, Forest Service Council