



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Doc Hastings

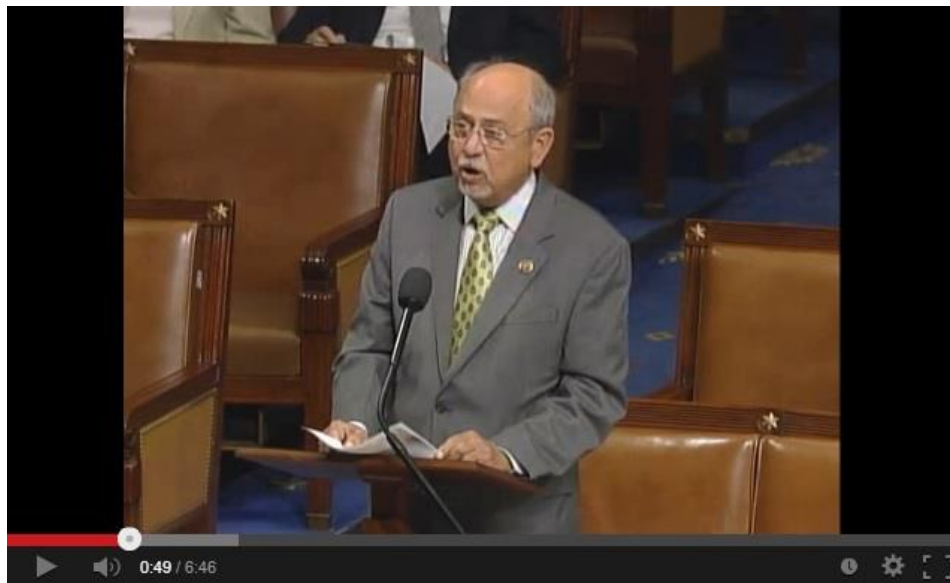
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Chairman Hastings: Our Federal Forests are Being Badly Managed and There Have Been Devastating Consequences

“H.R. 1526 is a long-term solution to put Americans back to work, restore forest health and help prevent catastrophic wildfires”

WASHINGTON, D.C. – House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings delivered the following statement on the House floor today in support of H.R. 1526, the *Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act*:



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“Mr. Chairman, over the last few months deadly wildfires, specifically in California, Arizona, Colorado and other western states, have highlighted the growing problem with our current federal forest management.

Like all public lands, our national forests should, unless otherwise designated, be open for multiple-use – for everything from recreation to job-creating economic activities. But instead, federal regulations and lawsuits have effectively shut down our national forests. Timber harvests have dropped by 80 percent in the last 30 years in these forests. While the Forest Service once averaged over \$1 billion annually in revenues, it now spends \$2 for

every \$1 it produces.

Our federal forests are being badly managed and there have been devastating consequences.

First, rural communities are struggling to survive and no longer have stable funding to pay for vital services. The federal government made a promise over a century ago to actively manage our forests for the benefit of rural schools and communities. Under federal law passed in 1908, the U.S. Forest Service has historically shared 25% of all timber revenues with rural counties containing National Forest land. Since the federal government doesn't pay local taxes, counties depended on this revenue to help fund essential needs like schools and local infrastructure.

But as timber sales declined, so did the revenue in those counties. And counties struggled to find the resources needed to keep teachers in the classroom and police on the streets.

Congress provided a short-term solution in 2000 by passing the Secure Rural Schools Act, which continued to provide funding as timber sales declined. SRS was created to provide "transition payments" over a six year period while these counties diversified their economies. But the fact is: their economies are built on natural resources. In this case – timber.

With a national debt measuring in the trillions of dollars, it is becoming increasingly difficult to finance this program that costs several hundred million dollars annually – especially when it fails to address the fundamental problem of declining forest management. A new approach is needed now.

The federal government's lack of forest management has cost tens of thousands of American jobs. These forests are the backbone of these communities' economy. From the logging, to the mill work, to the truck drivers – our forests put thousands of people to work.

Additionally, as I have mentioned, the lack of active forest management has caused the significant degradation of forest health and made them increasingly susceptible to bug infestations and catastrophic wildfires.

Last year, 9.3 million acres of national forests burned in wildfires. As comparison, only 200,000 acres were harvested by the U.S. Forest Service. This means that 44 times more acres burned compared to those acres that were responsibly harvested. We cannot continue to sit idly by while wildfires rage, homes are destroyed, and lives are lost.

H.R. 1526, the Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act is a long-term solution to put Americans back to work, restore forest health, and help prevent catastrophic wildfires by renewing the federal government's commitment to actively manage our national forests.

The bill requires responsible timber production on at least half of the Forest Service's commercial timber lands – areas that were specifically identified by the Forest Service for timber harvest.

By helping to restore active forest management, this bill would create over 200,000 direct and indirect jobs and would provide nearly \$400 million in savings over 10 years.

As required by law since 1908, H.R. 1526 would share 25 percent of the revenue from the timber sales with the counties containing national forest land. The bill also allows a short-term extension of Secure Rural School payments to provide funding to counties as the Forest Service transitions back to active management.

H.R. 1526 would also help prevent deadly and catastrophic wildfires by focusing on hazardous fuels reduction and empowering states to take a more active role in reducing the risk of wildfires.

Finally, this bill recognizes that states and counties are often better at managing forest lands than the federal government. States have shown that they are able to produce more revenue from timber lands than the federal government. For example: Washington state is able to harvest 7 times as much timber and generate 200 times the revenue on 1/4th the land area as the Forest Service.

This bill would allow counties to actively manage portions of National Forest land through the creation of “Community Forest Demonstration Areas.”

HR. 1526 has broad support. Over 140 local and national organizations, including 68 counties in 17 different states, have endorsed this vital, common sense legislation to restore active forest management and protect American jobs and livelihoods.

These communities, their families and their businesses deserve better than the status quo and the current failure of federal forest management.

Thank you and I reserve the balance of my time.”

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