



## Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Doc Hastings

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### **Hastings Calls on Senate to Act on Healthy Forest Management and Jobs Bill**

*“A final bill has to address all the challenges in timber country, not just parochial issues. To do so would ignore our responsibility to properly manage our multiple purpose public lands in all states. We owe it to rural communities across the country to live up to our promises.”*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04) delivered the following speech today at the Western Regional Forest Resources Association Spring Meeting in Pasco, WA. In the speech, Chairman Hastings talked about the House bill ([H.R. 1526](#)) that would put tens of thousands of Americans back to work, provide stable funding for counties to use for education and infrastructure, improve local management of our federal forests, and help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires, and called on the Senate to act (see bold text below).

“I’m pleased to join you today as your lunch speaker here in my hometown of Pasco.

I’ve had the honor of representing this district – the fourth congressional district of Washington - for twenty years.

For the last four I’ve served as Chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources. We have jurisdiction over a wide range of issues involving public lands and many of the related environmental laws.

I realize that some of you may primarily be concerned with private forest land operations, but I truly believe that what happens on our public forests – especially in the West and in particular the Pacific Northwest – should continue to matter to the industry as a whole. To have a robust forest policy with a supply certainty, the public lands need to do their part to contribute to that supply certainty.

The Natural Resources Committee shares jurisdiction over forestry matters with the House Agriculture Committee, but we work closely together and I was pleased that we were able to advance through the Congress some meaningful provisions in the 2014 Farm Bill related to your industry – in particular the language related to runoff from forest roads .

It should be common sense that the Clean Water Act does not require EPA to regulate runoff from forest roads the same as it would regulate discharge from a large industrial plant.

However, with the Ninth Circuit Court interpreting environmental laws, Congress sometimes has to step in and restate the obvious.

Where the Natural Resources Committee has primary jurisdiction in the area of forestry is on public land management issues and certain related environmental statutes such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act.

You might say that we have the more challenging or contentious aspects of forestry issues in our Committee. But we are up to the challenge and we have made it a major focus of our work this Congress.

As you know, here in the West, where so much of the land base is owned by the federal government – the management of Forest Service lands has a huge impact on the forest products industry.

The Forest Service likes to say that their motto is “Caring for the Land and Serving People.” But in my view they too often fall short on both counts.

Case in point. For the last two decades, we have moved away from managing these lands for multiple purposes. Timber harvests from federal lands have dropped by 80 percent over the last 39 years as federal regulations and lawsuits have effectively shut down our national forests.

We have become accustomed to seeing far more of the landscape burned every year in deadly wildfires than we actually manage for timber production. With drought conditions widespread in many areas of the West, we could be in for a bad fire season this year. In the last bad fire year we had in 2012, wildfires consumed more than 9 million acres – that’s an area larger than the state of Maryland.

Another area of concern is with timber harvest revenues declining and wildfires costs going up, the Forest Service has struggled to maintain its obligations to communities throughout the West.

As you know, federal lands do not contribute to the property tax base of local governments. However, forested counties had long been able to rely upon a share of federal timber receipts to help pay for local schools and emergency responders in lieu of the lack of property taxes.

This was a promise made by the federal government to forest counties more than a century ago. But as timber sales declined, so too did the revenue to those counties. With timber revenues dwindling, counties have struggled to find the resources needed to keep teachers in the classroom and police on the streets. Some localities have even been pushed to the brink of bankruptcy.

Congress provided what was supposed to be a short-term solution in 2000 by passing the Secure Rural Schools Act, which provides direct taxpayer funding in lieu of the timber receipts. This was intended to be temporary six-year bridge to help communities as they worked to diversify their economies and as they waited for the federal lands to return to a more balanced management.

Unfortunately, we have had to extend these temporary payments year after year as many counties have struggled to diversify their economics to substitute for the family wage jobs previously supported by federal harvest activities. This has been exacerbated as the Forest Service continues to spend half its time fighting wildfires and the other half fighting lawsuits. This is a situation that is not sustainable.

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. This is especially true when lack of policy fails to address the fundamental problem of declining forest management. I believe a new approach is needed now.

This is why we in the House passed the bipartisan legislation, H.R. 1526, the Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act. This legislation would restore active management to our federal forests, while at the same time living up to our commitments to rural communities.

The bill requires responsible timber production on at least half of the Forest Service's commercial timberlands. This requirement would be from Forest Service designated timber lands, not environmentally sensitive areas or wilderness areas.

In order to create needed certainty, the bill streamlines the NEPA process and makes it harder to delay federal action through endless litigation.

By helping to restore active forest management, this bill is estimated to create over 200,000 direct and indirect jobs.

The bill 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 those wildfire risks.

Recognizing that States and counties are often better at managing forestlands than the federal government, we give them a greater say in the management of these lands.

**Our legislation passed the House last September on a bipartisan vote, but, six months later, we're still waiting for the Senate to act.**

**While I would not expect the Senate to take everything that we are proposing, I do want to see some engagement from them on this issue. Instead, there has been virtually no activity on forest policy in the Senate.**

**At most, the Senate has looked at what I would call a piecemeal bill that offers regulatory relief for one or two specific areas of the country. That is not acceptable to me.**

**A final bill has to address all the challenges in timber country, not just parochial issues. To do so would ignore our responsibility to properly manage our multiple purpose public lands in all states.**

**We owe it to these rural communities across the country to live up to our promises.**

I recently announced my intention to retire at the end of the year, but I can assure you that I will be pushing as hard as I can to advance this cause over these next eight months.

If you care about these issues, I encourage you to reach out to your senators when you get home. Your engagement in the public process as an individual, and through associations like this, is essential.

Working together, we can have federal forests once again contributing in a responsible and sustainable way to a thriving forest products industry, creating family wage jobs, and supporting rural communities.”

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