



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

Chairman Doc Hastings

## **H.R. 1526, Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act** *Title-by-Title Summary*

- H.R. 1526, *Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act*, renews the federal government's commitment to manage federal forests for the benefit of rural schools and counties and to improve forest health. It will put Americans back to work; provide stable funding for counties to use for schools, roads and emergency services; improve local management of our federal forests; and help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

### **Title I: Restoring our Commitment to Rural Communities**

- The Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program was created in 2000 by the federal government as compensation for rapidly declining timber sales due to federal regulations and lawsuits. This lack of active federal forest management for over a decade has destroyed tens of thousands of jobs; deprived rural counties of revenue to fund schools, roads, and emergency services; and made our National Forests increasingly susceptible to devastating wildfires and invasive species.
- This title reestablishes the priority of actively managing our forests and promotes responsible timber production on Forest Service commercial timber lands – areas that were specifically identified by the Forest Service for timber harvests.
- It is a common sense, long-term solution that will provide a stable and sustainable revenue stream for rural schools and counties, create over 68,000 direct jobs and nearly 140,000 indirect jobs, strengthen rural economies, promote healthier forests, reduce the risks of forest fires, and decrease our reliance on foreign countries for timber and paper goods.
- Specifically, this title requires the Forest Service to produce at least half of the sustainable annual yield of timber each year and, as required by law since 1908, share 25 percent of receipts with the counties; protects the environment by requiring projects to complete National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultations, while streamlining the process to avoid frivolous and lengthy delays, lawsuits, and bureaucratic red tape; and provides an extension of Secure Rural School payments to allow counties to transition back to payments from active forest management.

### **Title II: Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention**

- The title will help improve forest health and prevent catastrophic wildfires by allowing greater state and local involvement in wildfire prevention on federal lands.
- Last year, 9.3 million acres burned due to forest fires and was the third worst fire season on record for acres burned. Meanwhile only 200,000 acres were harvested last year by the U.S. Forest Service. This means that 44 times as many acres burned as were responsibly harvested and restored.

- The lack of common sense management to remove excess growth are making our forests increasingly susceptible to catastrophic wildfires that threaten public safety, the economic livelihood of communities, water supply, and forest health.
- Title II directs the Secretary of Agriculture to implement hazardous fuels reduction and forest health projects on at-risk lands and high-risk areas designated by the Governor of a state. It also allows states to propose forest health projects to the Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management for implementation.

### **Title III: O&C Trust, Conservation and Jobs**

- This title, based on bipartisan language from House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Peter Defazio (OR-04), Rep. Greg Walden (OR-02), and Rep. Kurt Schrader (OR-05), would address the federal forest lands currently managed by the Bureau of Land Management in Western Oregon, known as “O&C Lands.”
- These O&C Lands exist only in Oregon and federal law provides specific statutory direction that they be managed for timber production, but have been impacted by the same regulatory restrictions as Forest Service lands.
- This title would establish a Board of Trustees to manage a majority of the O&C Lands under the Oregon Forest Practice Act and distribute revenues from timber harvest to the O&C Counties. The remaining O&C Lands would be transferred to the Forest Service and managed under the Northwest Forest Plan.

### **Title IV: Community Forest Management Demonstration**

- This title, based on legislation from Rep. Raul Labrador (ID-01), would improve local forest management by allowing counties to actively manage portions of National Forest land through the creation of “Community Forest Demonstration Areas.”
- The bill would allow a total of two million acres nationwide to be enrolled as Community Forest Demonstration Areas. The area would be managed by an Advisory Committee appointed by the Governor of the state.
- States have proven to be able to better manage forest 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 1/4<sup>th</sup> the land area as the Forest Service.

### **Title V - Reauthorization and Amendment of Existing Authorities**

- This title allows a short-term extension of SRS payments to provide funding to counties as the Forest Service (or counties under title III & IV) transitions back to active management.
- It also extends and expands two popular forest management authorities currently in use by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management – Good Neighbor and Stewardship Contracting. These authorities authorize the agencies to contract with a state forestry agency to conduct projects on federal lands and allows them to trade “goods for services” – i.e., trade timber in exchange for restoration work by a contractor.