

DISSENTING VIEWS

At the October 1, 2009 Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands hearing where H.R. 2781 was considered, Rep. Schrader, the sponsor of the legislation, testified:

Under my bill there is approximately 420 acres of timber management acres or “matrix” lands that would be impacted. While this represents a relatively small amount of impacted timber lands, I am sensitive to the reduction. Therefore, as the committee moves forward, I would ask the Chairman and Ranking Member to work with me and my staff to ensure there will be no net-loss of the acres available for timber management as a result of this legislation.

Mr. Schrader was right to identify a no net-loss provision as an essential part of the bill in light of Oregon’s 11% + unemployment rate and the collapse of the wood products industry that was once a powerful piston in the state’s economic engine. A recent report by the Pew Center on the States cited Oregon as one of nine states that could follow California into a budget abyss. The timber industry is a large part of the tax base in many communities throughout the Northwest. The recent recession has sharply accelerated the decline of the industry but for close to a decade Congress has helped offset the loss of timber receipts by creating and reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools program which has cost billions of dollars. To simply continue to lock up more and more lands to appease special interest groups without finding other lands to offset these lost acres is not only fiscally and economically irresponsible but environmentally ignorant, as well.

However, the Democrat majority on the Committee not only failed to add the language Mr. Schrader called for in their bill, they also blocked a vote on an offset timber land amendment. By rejecting the amendment, the Democrat majority produced a bill that denies resources to an economy that is languishing as well as a funding source for schools. Each acre that is whittled away is an acre that could have been used to pay for another teacher, needed public infrastructure, or even firefighting equipment.

ROB BISHOP.

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