

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Testimony

House Resources, Forestry Subcommittee

Statement of Congressman Greg Walden

August 3, 1999

Madam Chairman, members of the Forestry Subcommittee, I am here today to speak about a bill that is of utmost importance to the health and welfare of the constituents of my district. Senate Bill 416 is a bill that will convey a parcel of land for use by the City of Sisters, Oregon, for the development of a sewage treatment facility. It has strong bipartisan support from its co-sponsors Senators Wyden and Smith and passed unanimously in the Senate. It also has the support of my fellow Oregon Representative Peter Defazio.

Sisters, Oregon is a popular tourist town surrounded by the Deschutes National Forest. Unfortunately, it lacks a wastewater treatment facility to support the residents who must use septic systems. There is a critical need for a treatment facility due to the failure of many aging septic tanks in the community. There is a current and immediate health threat from surfacing effluent, which is leading to maggot infestation in some yards. In their packets, Members have pictures of examples of what the people of Sisters are enduring. During the summer months, in order to accommodate tourists who often recreate in the surrounding federal lands, the city must place approximately sixty portable toilets throughout the town.

Even though the city is economically distressed, it has put together a financing package of approximately \$7 million for a wastewater treatment facility. Unfortunately, additional funds to acquire land for the treatment facility and for the disposition of the treated wastewater are beyond the residents ability to pay, and pose a huge financial burden to the community.

I am pleased to announce that we are working towards an agreement between the Forest Service and the city that would allow this much-needed wastewater treatment facility to be built. The city is willing to waive the hook-up fees for the Forest Service's existing hook ups and provide free sewage treatment for a period of years to be determined. We expect the final details to be worked out before tomorrow's markup.

This is a classic win-win for the community and for the federal government. The federal government saves tens of thousands of dollars in hook up fees, and future treatment expenses and the residents of Sisters will have a treatment facility that will eliminate the health hazards that they face.

Madam Chairman, I strongly support this legislation and look forward to working with my colleagues on the Committee to address the desperate needs of the residents of Sisters.

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