

News Release...

U. S. Senator Ron Wyden

For Immediate Release

January 16, 2009

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Wyden Asks Obama for Forest Restoration Funding

Senator Leads Efforts to Win Stimulus Boost and Jobs for the Nation's Rural Communities

Washington, DC— Seeking to put rural job growth and forest restoration on the President-elect's agenda, Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), chairman of the Public Lands and Forests Subcommittee of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, brought a bipartisan group of senators together to cosign a letter he sent this week to President-elect Obama asking him to include funding for forests restoration and hazardous fuels reduction projects in his economic stimulus plan. Wyden was joined by Senators Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Jim Risch (R-Idaho), Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Tim Johnson (D-N.D.), and Tom Udall (N.M.).

“In Oregon, this funding will create good, family-wage jobs in the rural communities that face the greatest threats from catastrophic forest fires due to millions of acres of unhealthy, choked, overstocked forests,” said Wyden. **“We are reminding President Obama that it's not just urban areas that are hit hard by this recession.”**

This funding will help create jobs in the tens of millions of acres of choked unhealthy forests

From October 2006 to 2008, Oregon lost 17 percent of its wood products manufacturing and logging jobs. The funding requested would help shore up job prospects in rural communities dependent upon such labor. The United States Forest Service estimates that hazardous fuels projects on their lands could yield some 50,000 direct jobs nationally and Oregon, with its large percentage of public forests, should be a key recipient of such funds.

Today's letter asked that the stimulus package at least fully fund the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, which has not received full funding since its authorization in 2003. In addition, the funding request addressed forest thinning, which is a key element of Wyden's proposed Oregon Forest Restoration and Old Growth Protection Act. The bill plan seeks to restore balance to our forests by managing the millions of acres of choked forests on our federal lands while protecting our remaining old growth forests.

Further information about the Oregon Forest Restoration and Old Growth Protection Act can be found at: <http://wyden.senate.gov/forestproposal.cfm>.

The text of the letter follows:

January 14, 2009

President-Elect Barack Obama
Obama-Biden Presidential Transition Project
Washington, DC 20270

Dear Mr. President-Elect:

As you work to craft an economic stimulus proposal, we urge you to include funding for critical forest health and restoration projects on our nation's public lands. Last month, several of our Colleagues sent a letter urging that the economic stimulus legislation include \$10 billion over two years for the land and water resource management agencies in the Department of the Interior and the USDA Forest Service to restore the physical and natural infrastructure that they manage. This is a critically important need. The USDA Forest Service and the Department of the Interior have suffered significant budget constraints, with budgets that have been flat or declining for more than a decade, while fire suppression costs have increased dramatically. As a result, a number of critical projects have remained unfunded. In particular, we wish to highlight a specific area of need within this request – that for funds to help restore our nation's forests.

Numerous hearings before the Energy and Natural Resources Committee have illustrated the dire consequences of the budget shortfalls on the health of our nation's forests. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act passed in 2003 authorized \$760 million annually to be used for hazardous fuels reduction projects. Since its enactment, this legislation has never received full funding, resulting in dangerous fire-threatened fuel levels building up in our nation's forests, even as projects that have received the needed environmental review pile up. The GAO and the USDA Inspector General have both testified before the Energy and Natural Resources Committee that these fuels are building up faster than they can be removed.ⁱ At the very minimum, stimulus legislation should fully fund the Healthy Forests Restoration Act authorization at \$760 million a year so that this situation can be addressed – for two years it would be a \$1.52 billion investment. However, there is significant indication that more funding would be necessary and could readily be utilized. The Forest Service recently prepared an estimate of projects appropriate for stimulus legislation that identified \$2.75 billion worth of Federal lands hazardous fuels reduction projects, generating roughly 50,000 direct jobs.ⁱⁱ Some 1.4 million acres of Forest Service lands could be treated immediately with fully prepared NEPA reviewed projects; another 5 million acres could be ready for treatment within a year. At the Energy and Natural Resource Committee's hearing in December on investments in clean energy and natural resources projects and programs to create green jobs and to stimulate the economy, experts testified that at

least \$1.4 billion in additional funds are needed annually to make significant inroads into reducing ecological and community risks to wildfire.ⁱⁱⁱ

Significantly, a number of these projects would provide both ecological and economic benefits. These projects have a proven track-record of quickly creating jobs in rural communities – places hard hit by the recession and where people are likely to rapidly return a large portion of their wages to the economy. The projects would also lead to significant cost savings in the long-term as the reduction of the hazardous fuel loads and the restoration of forest health would help prevent uncharacteristic and costly wildfires. The fire budget has been eating a larger and larger share of the natural resource agencies' budgets and taking money from other projects that are important for the communities, the species and the habitats that depend on our nation's forests. Last year alone, USDA Forest Service and Department of Interior spending on fire suppression was over \$1.85 billion. The Forest Service has estimated that with significant investment in hazardous fuels reduction and forest restoration, fire suppression costs could be reduced by half in 5 years time.

Many forest experts agree that we need to act quickly to save our nation's forests from imminent destruction. As they face increasing pressures from a changing climate and expanding insect populations, many of our nation's most majestic landscapes are themselves threatened by the failure to address forest health concerns. These projects will help ensure that these forests will be around for future generations to enjoy.

With the economic and ecological challenges that face our nation, such an investment would be both wise and appropriate to include in upcoming stimulus legislation. In fact, such investment is critical especially to our rural communities where the hit from the recession has been particularly severe and whose residents are least likely to directly benefit from the other programs proposed for the stimulus package. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Senator Ron Wyden
Senator Jim Risch
Senator Max Baucus
Senator Dianne Feinstein
Senator Jeff Bingaman
Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Jeff Merkley
Senator Jon Tester
Senator Tom Udall
Senator Tim Johnson

ⁱ*The status of the federal land management agencies' efforts to contain the costs of their wildfire suppression activities and to consider recent independent reviews of and recommendations for those efforts: Hearing before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, 110th Congress, 2nd Session. (January 30, 2007)*

ⁱⁱ *Green Jobs: Economic Stimulus Through Training and Land Restoration (rev. 6.5 b)*, Forest Service.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Investments in clean energy and natural resources projects and programs to create green jobs and to stimulate the economy: Hearing before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, 110th Congress, 2nd Session. (December 10, 2008), testimony of Cassandra Moseley, Ph.D. citing to GAO, Wildland Fire Management: Important Progress Has Been Made, but Challenges Remain to Completing a Cohesive Strategy, GAO-05-147, January 2005.*

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