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AFRC Calls on Congress to Do the Right Thing and Protect the People of Crooked River Ranch

Portland – Today, AFRC President Travis Joseph responded to an alarming [Bend Bulletin Editorial](#) that highlights Congress’ failure to act on consensus measures urgently needed to protect rural Oregon communities and public forests.

Congressman Greg Walden proposed carefully crafted legislation to protect the Central Oregon community of Crooked River Ranch by allowing fuel reduction activities within a nearby “Wilderness Study Area” where thinning activities are currently prohibited. The bill, which enjoys broad local support, would modify the Wilderness Study Area boundary to allow fire prevention activities on 600 acres immediately surrounding the community. These 600 acres are only 3% of the study area administered by the BLM and Forest Service.

The legislation easily passed the House this summer and was approved by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. However, final passage of the public safety bill and its inclusion in a public lands package has been reportedly blocked by Senator Ron Wyden. According to Bend Bulletin reporting, Senator Wyden is demanding the Crooked River Ranch measure only move forward if controversial designations of thousands of acres of wilderness contained in the “Oregon Wildlands Act” also be included.

“The people of Crooked River Ranch need help from Congress,” said AFRC President Travis Joseph. “As we have offered repeatedly over the last several years, including in a [letter to the Oregon Delegation last month](#), we are committed to compromise and a bipartisan, comprehensive approach to managing our federal forests to achieve environmental, social, and economic benefits,” Joseph continued. “Our forests are facing unprecedented challenges. This should bring diverse interests together to break the endless cycle of conflict, develop realistic solutions, and help solve these problems. But trying to use urgent public safety needs during the last days of Congress to pass unbalanced, controversial bills is not the solution.”

“Before the Delegation moves forward with hundreds of thousands of acres of additional wilderness and conservation measures in Western Oregon – where families, communities, and businesses were devastated by months of fire and smoke – we encourage them to take these measures directly to rural communities and offer some explanation. The communities deserve to know why making fire prevention and public access more difficult; why increasing the risk of wildfire and damage to public and private property; and why exposing at-risk populations to more black carbon and toxic smoke – which is what the Oregon Wildlands Act will do – are the right solutions for Oregon families and communities still suffering from the trauma and chaos of this year’s fires.”

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About the American Forest Resource Council

AFRC is a regional trade association whose purpose is to advocate for sustained yield timber harvests on public timberlands throughout the West to enhance forest health and resistance to fire, insects, and disease. AFRC does this by promoting active management to attain productive public forests, protect adjoining private forests, and assure community stability. It works to improve federal and state laws, regulations, policies and decisions regarding access to and management of public forest lands and protection of all forest lands. The ultimate goal of AFRC's programs and initiatives is to advance its members' ability to practice socially and scientifically responsible forestry on both public and private forest lands.