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House Committee Takes Major Step Toward Improving Management of Federal Forests

The American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) today praised the House Committee on Natural Resources for advancing significant legislation to improve management of federal forest lands for the benefit of rural, forested communities. The comprehensive legislation, spearheaded by Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (R-WA), incorporates several forestry solutions including a bipartisan proposal to rationalize management of Western Oregon's BLM "O&C" timberlands. "We applaud the approval of this bill and its underlying purposes, which are to provide predictable timber harvests and restore the health of federal forest lands while also generating a long-term source of revenue and jobs to rural, forested communities, rather than a mere extension of Secure Rural School subsidies," said AFRC President Tom Partin. "This bill also provides a needed solution for the very unique O&C Oregon timberlands managed by the BLM. Oregon Congressmen DeFazio, Schrader and Walden should be acknowledged for the hard work they put into crafting this balanced and comprehensive solution."

"Congressman Hastings also deserves a lot of credit for including ideas and concepts proposed by other western Congressional delegations that will provide local and statewide solutions to restore the health of forests and communities", said Partin. "The 'Healthy Forest Management and Wildfire Prevention' concepts offered by Congressmen Tipton (R-CO) and Gosar (R-AZ) certainly will help in high wildfire risk areas. Congressman Labrador's 'Community Forest Management Demonstration' proposal will allow counties to have a larger role in actively managing parts of local National Forest Lands on a pilot basis," Partin said.

Partin said Congress should take quick action to pass federal forest management legislation because it will help remedy the many problems that are now occurring in federal forests and nearby rural communities, such as:

- Timber harvests in our National Forests are down by 80% over the last 30 years and fuel loadings continue to grow.

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- The lack of forest management has deprived rural counties of revenue needed to fund teachers, schools and roads: caused a decline in timber production, costing tens of thousands of jobs; and created unhealthy forests—susceptible to catastrophic wildfires and bug infestations.
- Wildfires in 2012 burned 9.3 million acres, while the Forest Service only implemented timber management activities on 200,000 acres. The amount of acres burned each year and the cost to suppress wildfires continues to grow each year.
- Bark beetle epidemics have infested over 40 million acres of National Forest land since 1996.

“We desperately need the Congress to take action on the ‘Restoring Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act’ and renew the federal government’s commitment to actively manage our Forest Service and BLM forests for the benefits of schools and counties. Action is long overdue to provide a lifeline to our rural, forested communities while keeping our forests healthy and productive for future generations,” Partin said.

The American Forest Resource Council represents forest product manufacturers and landowners throughout the west and is based in Portland, Oregon.