



FORESTS FOREVER

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Dueling forest recovery bills introduced in House

Logging and tree farms versus forest ecosystem restoration

Two bills now in Congress take very different approaches to helping forests recover from wildfire, windstorms or other natural disturbances.

Today, Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR) introduced the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act in the House. This bill would exempt logging after “natural disturbances” from the oversight and public participation provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Not only concerned with wildfire, the bill is written so that “disturbances” such as rainstorms and droughts could trigger the logging exemptions.

In October, Rep. Tom Udall (D-NM) introduced an alternative forest rehabilitation bill, the National Forests Rehabilitation and Recovery Act (H.R. 3973). Udall’s measure would mandate a scientific approach to post-disturbance forestry, setting up five pilot projects to study the restoration of forests after natural disturbance. The Udall bill explicitly excludes old-growth forest, wilderness and roadless areas as sites for rehabilitation pilot studies, and allows public input in the planning process. It also sets up a national oversight committee of scientists to monitor the forest recovery projects.

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Walden's bill, on the other hand, proposes logging, roadbuilding, and tree planting as a necessary response to forest fire and other disturbances. Yet logging after a fire is very destructive: soil is compacted and root systems damaged by heavy equipment, stream quality degraded by sediment runoff. Harvesting burned and dead trees removes nutrients from the forest ecosystem. Overall, logging delays forest recovery rather than enhances it.

“How did the forests restore themselves before Rep. Walden came along?” said Paul Hughes, executive director of Forests Forever. “Walden's bill is not about forest restoration. Rather, it is a revenue transfer— from taxpayers' pockets to the coffers of the timber industry.”

A hearing on the Walden bill will be held on Nov. 10. The bill may also be considered by the House Resources Committee on the same day, and could be sent from there to the House floor.

“Forests Forever supports the scientific approach of Udall's bill,” said Hughes. “At the same time, we condemn the Walden bill and its singleminded focus on timber sales for private profit.”