

REGIONAL

Lawmakers worried that Siberian logs are bugged

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fearful of Soviet pest infestations and plant diseases, three Northwest lawmakers called on Agriculture Secretary Clayton Yeutter Wednesday to temporarily ban imports of raw logs from Siberia.

"I'm not willing to play Russian roulette with our forests so that a few big timber companies can make a buck," Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., said.

"There is no acceptable level of risk when the health, perhaps the even survival, of the greatest coniferous forests of the Northwest is at stake," he said.

Oregon Democrats Les AuCoin and Ron Wyden joined DeFazio in asking Yeutter to adopt emergency regulations halting the Siberian imports.

"The prospect of inadvertently introducing a devastating pest or pathogen into the coniferous forests of the Pacific Northwest has us deeply troubled," the lawmakers said in a letter to the secretary.

Failure to take action could result in devastation as great as the infestations of Dutch elm disease or the Asian chestnut blight, they said.

The congressmen cited an internal memo in the Agriculture Department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service that admits little is known about 100 insects, fungi, mollusks and nematodes that the service says could be found in Siberian timber.

An Agriculture Department spokesman said Wednesday the letter had not been reviewed and there was no one immediately available to comment.

Northwest timber companies have been looking for addition-

al raw materials to keep their mills running in the face of domestic logging cutbacks due in part to federally mandated protection of the threatened northern spotted owl.

Louisiana-Pacific Corp. received a test shipment of Siberian logs at one of its Northern California mills last summer and further shipments are planned by at least one other company, DeFazio said.

In the first shipment, the logs were inspected, debarked and fumigated at an Oakland port before they went to the mill, he said.

But the Agriculture Department's internal memo dated Sept. 25 said fumigation probably would not be effective against harmful fungi.

"Insects in the Siberian logs are difficult to detect," said the memo written by J.W. Lightfield, chief operations officer for the inspection service's Biological Assessment and Taxonomic Support Plant Protection and Quarantine in Hyattsville, Md.

"Fumigation will be effective only against insects, mollusks and nematodes. Removal of the bark will reduce the risk for all. Bark removal first and then fumigating will further reduce the risk, especially if both were conducted in Siberia. If treated in Siberia, safeguards should be in place to prevent contamination," the memo said.

The memo said a lack of information makes it difficult to draw additional conclusions.

"In our view, any further importation of logs without full study and regulatory steps to eliminate the risk of such a disaster is unacceptable," one congressman said.

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