

Opinion / Politics

Walden applauds resilient forests act

For the fifth time in five years, Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) voted to pass legislation to improve federal forest management and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires that ravage Oregon and much of the West every year. The Resilient Federal Forests Act (H.R. 2936), which Walden helped craft, addresses the growing economic and environmental threats of catastrophic wildfire that scorched over 678,000 acres of land across Oregon this year.

“My intensity on this issue is almost that of the fires we fight,” said Walden. “We can reduce the size and intensity of fire up to 70 percent, if we do the kinds of projects that thin out the forests and allow us to better manage and be better stewards of our federal forests that are contemplated as a result of this legislation.”

Walden has led the call to action on forest management reform following a historic wildfire season in Oregon and across much of the West. The Resilient Federal Forests Act will bring proper management to federal lands in Oregon to improve the health and resiliency of forests, and reduce the unnatural fuel loads that increase the threat of devastating wildfires.

“In Oregon, this bill would take away an arbitrary prohibition on harvesting trees over 21 inches in diameter that’s tied the hands of forest managers,” continued Walden. “We clarify the timber production man-

dates of the unique O&C lands in southern and western Oregon to deliver the underlying statute and actually have it enforced. And when fires do happen, we would exchange this for a new, healthy forest and grow green trees that sequester carbon and restore a landscape that we in the West so enjoy,” concluded Walden, holding a jar of ash to illustrate the effects of catastrophic fires that Oregonians endure each summer.”

The Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017 provides federal land management agencies immediate tools to increase the pace, scale and cost efficiency of forest management projects without sacrificing environmental protections. In crafting this legislation, Walden included several Oregon-specific provisions, including:

Streamlining project planning in southern and western Oregon

Removes costly and time-consuming Survey and Manage requirements on Northwest Forest Plan lands. These requirements cost the agency about \$21 million annually and can take up to two years to complete, delaying needed fire prevention projects.

O&C Lands

The O&C Lands in southern and western Oregon are uniquely managed by the BLM for timber production under the requirements of the O&C Act. Timber harvests have lagged below these requirements and this legislation makes clear the O&C Act mandates at least

500 million board feet in annual timber harvest.

Improving forest restoration in eastern Oregon forests

Removes the arbitrary prohibition on harvesting trees over 21 inches in diameter that stands in the way of land managers and local collaborative efforts to restore forest landscapes. This prohibition was issued temporarily over 20 years ago, and never removed.

Promptly address the overcrowded, diseased and insect infested forest lands that pose a risk for catastrophic fire:

Streamlined planning process for projects up to 10,000 acres to treat forest stands suffering from insects and diseased trees, to reduce hazardous fuels, and to protect watersheds. To incentivize collaboration, this authority expands to 30,000 acres for collaborative or Community Wildfire Protection Plan projects that have had success in Oregon.

Ensures the Forest Service and BLM can promptly clean-up after wildfires by removing burned, dead trees and replant our forests following an Environmental Assessment. Includes requirements that the agencies replant 75 percent of the affected area.

Creates a pilot program, allowing some forest projects to go through arbitration, cutting through litigious gridlock by requiring opponents to come to the table with an alternative proposal rather than just saying “no”.

Oregon receives Real ID Act extension

The Department of Homeland Security has given Oregon another extension for compliance with the federal Real ID Act.

Oregon-issued driver licenses, instruction permits and identification cards will continue to be accepted at airports for the purpose of accessing federal facilities where individuals are required to present an identification document for access through at least Oct. 10, 2018.

Because Oregon is working to comply with the federal law, the state will likely qualify for additional extensions until it can begin to offer Real ID Act-compliant driver licenses, instruction permits and ID cards.

Oregon is targeting July 2020 to begin offering compliant cards as a new option for customers.

The most common federal use of state-issued ID is for air travel. Starting Jan. 22, 2018, the Transportation Safety Administration will require Real ID Act-compliant identification or state-issued ID from states with exceptions, like Oregon, for boarding commercial aircraft for domestic flights.

Oregon already meets the majority of Real ID requirements. The primary changes remaining

include:

Scanning and storing documents customers submit to prove identity and lawful presence in the U.S.;

Verifying some of those documents such as passports through federal systems; and

Verifying the applicant doesn’t have a current license or ID card in another state.

The way Oregon issues cards, and the cards themselves, are already very secure.

DMV verifies legal presence and identity, uses facial recognition to guard against identity fraud, and has multiple security features embedded in the cards.

However, DMV does not store copies of customers’ identity documents, and does not use some national electronic verification systems created for Real ID.

Oregon DMV is in the early stages of a multi-year project to update its computer systems and business processes.

The new driver license and ID card system will include the Real ID Act-compliant card option.

For more information about DMV’s Service Transformation Program, visit <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/DMV/pages/>

STP/STP_Information.aspx.

Under the Real ID Act, identification from a state that is in compliance with the act or has an extension for compliance, or another form of ID acceptable for federal purposes, is required to access certain federal facilities.

This includes, but is not limited to, military bases and nuclear power plants.

The requirement does not include entering the public areas of a federal building or other federal facility where identification is not required for access.

There is no requirement to show a Real ID Act-compliant ID to enter a federal facility for accessing health or life-preserving services (including hospitals and health clinics), law enforcement (including participating in law enforcement proceedings or investigations), or to participate in constitutionally protected activities (including a defendant’s or spectator’s access to court proceedings and access by jurors or potential jurors), to vote or register to vote, or to apply for or receive federal benefits.

For details on the Act, visit the DHS website: <https://www.dhs.gov/real-id>.

— GUEST OPINION —

OHA’s \$74 million mistake

By Dennis Richardson

I have stated in the past that, from my conversations with citizens across the state, one thing is clear: Oregonians want increased accountability for how their tax dollars are spent. That’s why, on May 17, 2017, my office released our first Audit Alert, notifying the Oregon Health Authority of immediate concerns uncovered during our ongoing audit.

“The Audit Alert flagged millions of dollars of improper payments made for ineligible recipients. During the months that followed, OHA removed more than 54,000 ineligible recipients from their system.

“It has now come to light, thanks to recent reporting by The Oregonian, that OHA additionally misspent more than \$74 million of federal Medicaid funds on improper payments. Some of these improper payments must be repaid to the federal government, thereby endangering Oregon’s already



Submitted Photo

Dennis Richardson is Oregon’s Secretary of State.

precarious budget situation.

“I appreciate the new OHA director’s public disclosure of longstanding mismanagement of taxpayer funds. It’s the first of many necessary steps current leadership should take to improve transparency, efficiency, and accountability to Oregon taxpayers.

“The Secretary of State’s Improper Medicaid Payments Audit report is scheduled to be released in the coming weeks. The thorough findings will reveal the mismanagement and waste of substantial amounts of taxpayer money. Stay tuned for that report

— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

BMTD billing is bogus

To the Editor:
I have recently had a billing for Blue Mountain Translator District (BMTD) appear on my tax bill. I called the BMTD office and was told that my form requesting exemption was indeed in their office but that I would have to pay the \$100 then request a refund. I was also made to understand that BMTD seldom gave refunds. I called the Baker County Assessor’s Office and was told that they could not remove the charge from my tax bill. Several calls took place between my house and these offices without any resolution. I spoke with some neighbors and discovered that I wasn’t the only one incorrectly billed and that one party had proof that they’d sent in their exemption form to BMTD last year but had to pay the assessment and never got their money back. I depend on Social Security for my income and am barely able to save enough to pay my taxes. I was more than a little upset when I was told that I had to pay it even though it wasn’t my fault.

Esther Young
Baker City

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