

FORESTS: 678,000 acres burned in Oregon this summer

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for other conservation and restoration programs.

In a statement Wednesday, Wyden said communities are put in danger and fire prevention work is left undone because of the backward fire budgeting system.

“It’s past time for Congress to make it a top priority to end fire borrowing, stop the erosion of the Forest Service becoming the ‘Fire Service,’ and start treating wildfires like the natural disasters they are,” Wyden said.

The Forest Service has spent more than \$2 billion so far on wildfires nationwide in 2017, setting a new record. Nearly 8 million acres of forest have been consumed by fire this summer, including 678,000 acres in Oregon.

The problem, Walden said, is a lack of active management in the forests, which has resulted in a buildup of overly dense and dead tree stands ready to burn.

“I don’t want to see our forests continue to go up (in flames) like they are,” Walden said during a meeting Thursday with the *East Oregonian* editorial board.

More than three-quarters of the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests are at moderate to high risk for uncharacteristic fire, according to the Northern Blue Mountains

Coalition, a group dedicated to increasing forest thinning and logging. Across the country, 58 million acres of national forests are at high or very high risk of severe wildfires — an area equal to the size of Pennsylvania and New York combined.

“We’ve got to deal with these forests,” Walden said.

A version of the Resilient Forests Act has passed the House each of the last four years. It focuses on measures to speed up the pace of restoration, providing categorical exclusions for certain projects to expedite environmental review.

Projects that would qualify for categorical exclusion include hazardous fuels reduction, salvaging dead trees, protecting watersheds or improving wildlife habitat. The bill caps project sizes at 10,000 acres, or 30,000 acres if they are developed by a multi-interest collaborative group.

The bill also directs the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a pilot program to resolve lawsuits filed against forest management through arbitration, rather than heading to court, and would prevent plaintiffs from recovering their attorney fees in such cases under the Equal Access to Justice Act.

Opponents of the legislation, however, claim it would severely undermine environmental review and cater to the interests of the timber industry. Steve Pedery, conservation director for

Oregon Wild, described the bill as a wish list for timber lobbyists.

“It’s really about maximizing the profits of logging corporations over the health of our public lands, and the ability for Americans to enjoy them,” Pedery said.

Specific to Eastern Oregon, the Resilient Federal Forests Act would allow logging of trees more than 21 inches in diameter. Individual forest management plans would also no longer be subject to the National Environmental Protection Act — the Blue Mountains Forest Plan, which includes the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur forests, is 13 years overdue for its latest revision.

Speaking Sept. 14 to the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Walden urged support for the bill as a means to jump-start forestry reform.

“Year after year, we have catastrophic wildfires on federal lands, some of which have been set aside and managed in a way that they have no management,” Walden said. “So if you want to do something that is extraordinarily important, join us in reforming the way we manage our precious public lands and federal forests to reduce the fuel loads.”

As for fire borrowing, a bipartisan group of senators has introduced the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act to ensure the firefighting

budget does not eat into the fire prevention budget, and allow projects to proceed with greater financial resources.

In the same joint statement with Wyden, Merkley said it is time to reverse what has become a vicious cycle.

“The way we fund wildfire suppression today is counterproductive and crazy,” Merkley said. “As this fire season has proven all too vividly, robbing from forest health and fire prevention programs to pay for suppression only creates a vicious cycle of bigger and bigger fires.

The bill would work by capping the firefighting budget at the most recent 10-year average, with any additional funding for fighting wildfires coming from federal disaster relief coffers. That would place wildfires more in line with other natural disasters, such as the hurricanes that have devastated parts of Texas and Florida.

Supporters include other Western lawmakers from across the political aisle, including Idaho Republicans Mike Crapo and Jim Risch; Colorado Republican Cory Gardner and Democrat Michael Bennet; California Democrat Dianne Feinstein; Washington Democrat Maria Cantwell; and Utah Republican Orrin Hatch.

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WALDEN: Working on regulating self-driving cars

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After North Korea’s nuclear weapons, he said cyber warfare was the biggest threat to national security. Much of what is being done is classified, Walden said, but he could say that as chairman of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, after “every one of the briefings I go to, I feel a little bit better.”

Cybersecurity in the private sector is more difficult for Congress to deal with. Walden said Equifax CEO Richard Smith has been asked to testify in front of the Committee on Energy and Commerce about the massive security breach the company recently experienced, which may have exposed the social security numbers of more than 143 million people. He said it was frustrating to read in the media that the company had used “admin” as both the username and password for one database.

“I can’t fix stupid,” he said. “I can punish it, but I can’t fix it.”

During lunch with the Rotary Club Walden also gave a rundown of some of the issues he has been working on. The Committee on Energy and Commerce is working with the Food and Drug Administration on a regulatory overhaul that will allow new drugs to reach the market faster. The

committee re-authorized and re-wrote the “Brownfield sites” program that assists communities in cleaning up industrial lands that are contaminated but below the level of a Superfund site. They approved safe drinking water legislation that appropriates \$8 billion over 5 years to combat lead contamination through means like replacing old drinking fountains at schools.

They also sent legislation to the House floor that would take nuclear waste stored in “oddball” locations around the country and seal it up in Nevada’s Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository.

“It’s secure in theory, but it ought to be permanently secure in Yucca Mountain,” Walden said.

He said he has also been working with companies in Silicon Valley and Detroit to find a way forward on regulating self-driving cars. Walden said cars have always been regulated “bumper to bumper” at the federal level, so that cars purchased in one state can be legally driven in any other, and he believes self-driving technology should be handled the same way.

“The car of the future will be a computer with doors and wheels,” he said.

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CLARK: Met his wife while serving in the Peace Corps in the ’60s

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the International Veterinary Medical Congress Prize. The organization praised Clark for his work developing guidelines for livestock disease control and cross-boundary trade of live animals. Nine countries around the Horn of Africa have so far adopted the guidelines.

“Dr. Clark has been absolutely instrumental in improving the safety of animals and humans in developing African countries,” said Dr. Tom Meyer, AVMA president. “For decades, he has worked alongside local communities and U.S. and foreign government agencies to initiate programs that are both practical and easy to implement.”

While Clark searches for simplicity, getting to this goal takes plenty of effort and experimentation.

In designing a safer strategy for chicken slaughter, for instance, Clark and his fellow researchers did lots of testing, first with plastic bags. The struggling chickens tore them with their feet, so the testers opted for a sturdy pot called a halla. With USAID funding, the researchers conducted focus groups with women, incorporating their feedback. The women assisted in designing a poster that showed the process with pictures.

In the summer of 2015, Clark helped train 900 veterinarians and thousands of home health workers to do home visits armed with flyers and rubber chickens used for



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Arthur Clack holds a rhinoceros femur next to his own leg as a comparison.

role playing.

In the end a new protocol only works if it gets used by those for whom it’s intended. Women in the focus groups were asked, “Is this something you will use?”

“The women said, ‘Of course, we’ll use it — we’ve seen our friends die,’” Clark said.

One beautiful thing about

such a simple fix, he said — “it’s a minor variation from what they already did.”

Clark endorses a slow and easy approach when tackling animal disease problems in foreign cultures.

“Americans are drawn to be productive. We go crashing into situations with the presumption we know best, but we don’t. The first



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Veterinarian Arthur Clack points out the ridges on an elephant’s tooth at his home in Pendleton.

thing to do is stop, listen and learn,” he said. “We’re dealing with people and their livelihoods. We cannot afford to make mistakes that we walk away from while they starve.”

Clark’s combination of brains and empathy make him effective.

“Dr. Clark’s approach is at once collaborative, deeply respectful and profoundly attuned to the unique needs of the populations he serves,” Meyer said.

Clark, who served as Oregon State Veterinarian until 2004, regularly takes his expertise to East Africa to prevent and mitigate large-scale animal disease.

Clark’s love affair with

that part of the world began in the 1960s. He met his wife, Barbara, in what is now Tanzania where both served in the Peace Corps. They married in 1968 in a ceremony that included a wedding ring made from the cross-section of a wildebeest tail. The couple, which raised five children, remained in the country seven years before returning to Oregon for Clark’s 22-year career with the Oregon Department of Agriculture. In “retirement” he contracts with agencies such as USAID to work in Africa, Egypt and several Middle Eastern countries to do livestock disease control work.

Artifacts from his

adventures dot his Pendleton home — a hedgehog hide, an elephant-hair bracelet, spitting cobra and puff adder fangs, aardvark claws, a stag beetle shell and elephant bones he gathered from the terrain. He uses one of them, a scapula, as a marker at the top of his driveway.

“Turn at the elephant scapula,” he tells people in giving directions to his home.

People should call first, though, because Clark might be off on his next mission. Soon he will head to Bangladesh on another avian influenza-related project.

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GRADUATION: Nookie’s hires extra staff for weekend

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expensive or unfeasible because of a lack of infrastructure.

Some local proprietors said their businesses would suffer if the ceremony leaves town.

“A lot of people come into town to support the kids,” said Nakul Butta, owner of Hermiston’s Rodeway Inn. “If it’s in Tri-Cities, then that year we’re not going to have the local economy booming.”

Butta said his business does see an uptick around graduation.

Shelley Bowden, the assistant manager at Shari’s, said she thought the move would have a major impact on local businesses.

“We definitely see a spike in business, usually about a week before,” she said.

Monica Todd, the manager at Nookie’s Restaurant, said the move would decrease sales for that weekend.

“It’s a big push for us,” she said. “It would probably take about 30 percent of our revenue each day.”

Todd said typically, graduates get a free dessert that weekend, and

they see an increase in pre-order and to-go sales. She said some of that will likely still go on if people come back from Tri-Cities to celebrate in Hermiston.

Todd said while graduation isn’t the busiest weekend of the year for Nookie’s, she has to hire extra staff for that time.

“It’s one of our more prominent weekends,” she said.

She said they understand finances have to be considered, and the district has to do what’s best for them.

“We’ve just been waiting for the decision so we can adjust,” she said.

Jaishree Narain, manager and owner of Best Western Hermiston Inn, said even though graduation is only one day, missing those sales would affect her business.

“Our hotel is fully booked, and our restaurant (Denny’s) is very busy too,” she said of graduation weekend. “It will affect us. We want local businesses to stay local.”

Narain said she had hoped to see graduation move to the

EOTEC grounds.

Hermiston School District employees said it was important for business owners and families to note that the board of directors had not yet made a decision about the graduation venue.

“The possible economic impact on the community has been a point of conversation in this discussion,” said Communications Officer Maria Duron in an email to the *EO*. “That being said, with a tentative start time of 7 p.m., there would be time for dinner in Hermiston prior to attending the event. I would also fully expect that local hotels, restaurants, etc. would be positively impacted by graduation parties that could take place in Hermiston throughout the weekend.”

Duron said it was likely that out-of-town guests would likely stay in Hermiston, to be close to the family members they were here to celebrate.

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Excitement bubbles up at BYU as caffeinated soda now on sale

PROVO, Utah (AP) — Mormon church-owned Brigham Young University ended a six-decade ban Thursday on the sale of caffeinated soft drinks on campus, surprising students by posting a picture of a can of Coca-Cola on Twitter and just two words: “It’s happening.”

The move sparked social media celebrations from current and former students, with many recalling how they had hauled their own 2-liter bottles of caffeinated sodas in their backpacks to keep awake for long study sessions.

The university never banned having caffeinated drinks on campus, but held firm to the ban on sales even when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in 2012 clarified that church health practices do not prevent members from drinking caffeinated soft drinks.

The ban has been in place since the mid-1950s. But officials with the school of 33,000 students in Provo, Utah, said Thursday that increasing demand prompted the change.

Students were abuzz about a change that meant they’ll no longer have to make off-campus runs to load up on their favorite caffeinated sodas to jolt their sleep-deprived brains.

“It’s about time,” said Sara McLaws, a junior advertising and graphic design major from Park City, Utah. “BYU is a great school but it’s behind in some ways. Just the small change of allowing caffeinated beverages — because it’s not against our religion — it’s high time.”

As cafeteria workers stocked refrigerators in the student center food court with caffeinated Diet Coke, Coca-Cola and Mr. Pibb, students joked about it being the “best day ever.”

“I absolutely love it. It’s been a big game changer, even just day one,” said McKay Murphy, a junior statistics major from Springville, Utah. “I’m a really big fan of caffeine and just soda in general so it’s nice to have it on campus with easy access.”