

Sens. Wyden, Crapo introduce wildfire funding amendment

By George Plaven
East Oregonian

Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden is once again working with Idaho Republican Mike Crapo on legislation to fix wildfire funding.

Wyden and Crapo introduced an amendment to the Senate's proposed energy bill on Tuesday that would end "fire-borrowing," where land management agencies shift money from other programs to cover the cost of fighting large wildfires.

Wyden described fire-borrowing as "budgetary quicksand" that drags down every program at the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. The amendment would establish a new Wildfire Disaster Relief Fund — which is similar to how the federal government pays for other natural disasters.

A summary of the amendment says it will free up roughly \$300 million in funding for active land management and fire prevention.

"We know that disaster-scale wildfires are going to continue to be a threat," Crapo said. "We can better prepare for the increasing costs of



A small plane drops retardant over an Oregon wildfire.

Courtesy photo

wildland fire suppression by providing land managers and firefighters the certainty needed to plan and allocate resources properly without robbing from other priorities during each fire season."

Congress passed a spending bill in December that increased fire funding for one year, but the senators said this amendment will provide a long-term

solution. The legislation has support from 21 co-sponsors in the Senate, 145 co-sponsors in the House and more than 250 groups representing hunters, anglers, timber companies and conservationists.

The amendment also includes several provisions for forest management, including measures to fast-track thinning projects recommended by a collaborative working group. Collaboratives must include scientists, conservationists and land managers, as well as local governments, tribes and industry.

Projects would still need to comply with local forest plans and federal laws, but could move forward more quickly if they meet certain criteria.

Finally, the amendment includes several environmental provisions such as permanently authorizing the Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails Sedimentation Program, which lets the agency decommission roads and replace other unnatural fish barriers.

Wyden followed up Tues-

day's energy bill amendment with another on Wednesday, this time working with fellow Oregon Democrat Jeff Merkley. They proposed requiring the Energy Information Administration to publish monthly data about new flammable liquids carried by rail.

The EIA already started publishing crude-by-rail data in March. This would expand the program to provide the same information for ethanol and liquefied natural gas.

"Railroads have become synonymous with shipping crude oil and ethanol, and in a few years may well become synonymous with shipping liquefied natural gas," Wyden said. "Taxpayers deserve timely, transparent and reliable information on flammable liquids moving through different regions by rail, and the very real safety concerns that go along with it."

The senators introduced these amendments to the Energy Policy Modernization Act, which the Senate is considering this week.

Forest Service initiates Lostine Corridor project

Wallowa County Chieftain

The U.S. Forest Service is seeking public comment on the Lostine Corridor Public Safety Project, located along an 11-mile road corridor into the Eagle Cap Wilderness in Wallowa County. The road travels along the Lostine Wild and Scenic River and provides access to popular developed recreation opportunities.

The Lostine Corridor has many historic and recreation values, including seven campgrounds and three developed trailheads. Private land with residential developments is located within the corridor. For many decades the vegetation in the corridor was only lightly managed. As a result, forest stands are in decreasing health and pose high risks to the public.

The primary concern and purpose of this project is to address the public safety issues in the corridor. Secondly, the project will address risks to the other values in the corridor including infrastructure (homes, cabins, recreation improvements, roads), the natural resource values. To reduce risks to these values the Forest Service is proposing the following within the project area boundary (approx. 2,110 acres):

- Removal of hazard/danger trees that pose a risk to people

traveling within the corridor, historical sites, and infrastructure.

- Creation (through removal of vegetation) of defensible space around identified historical areas (ex. Lostine Guard Station).

- Remove fuels to increase canopy spacing and decrease both ground and ladder fuels and to decrease the risk of potential high intensity wildfires.

- Thin dense forest stands to improve forest health and resilience to insects, disease and wildfire.

The project also will assess opportunities to provide wood products for local markets, including firewood, through implementation.

The Forest Service encourages those who are interested in this project to become involved in the planning process by providing comments on this project and visiting with USFS staff.

Please submit written comments to: Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Wallowa Mountains Office; Attention: Lostine Public Safety Project (Sitka Pence), P.O. Box 905, Joseph, OR, 97846.

Email comments to sitkapence@fs.fed.us. To submit comments by telephone, or for more information about the project, please contact Sitka Pence at (541) 426-5689. Please submit your comments by March 10.

Immunization updates due

Wallowa County Chieftain

Feb. 17 is School Exclusion Day, and the Oregon Immunization Program is reminding parents that children will not be able to attend school or child care starting that day if their records on file show missing immunizations.

Under state law, all children in public and private schools, preschools, Head Start and certified child care facilities must have up-to-date docu-

mentation on their immunizations, or have an exemption.

For information about requirements and exemptions, visit the division's vaccine exemption website at www.healthoregon.org/vaccineexemption.

Additional information on school immunizations can be found at the Immunization Program website at www.healthoregon.org/imm. Follow the Oregon Immunization Program on Facebook.



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Have a Happy Valentine's Day!

Treat your sweetheart to ice cream or a smoothie and snuggle up with a baked pizza to go!



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