



November 9, 2005

The Honorable Greg Walden  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Walden,

Thank you for introducing the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act (H.R. 4200) as it is vital to many of Oregon's rural communities. It may seem odd that one of the leading tourism groups in Oregon would make this a priority; however, the Oregon Restaurant Association (ORA) has done just that.

Since the decline of the timber industry in the 1980's, we have been asked to make the tourism industry a replacement economic base for Oregon's rural communities. The weather in Oregon makes July and August critical months in which industry makes a large portion of their yearly profits. Following Labor Day, most people do not want to travel through the mountain passes due to bad weather. Therefore, a majority of travelers come to these areas in the summer, and industry members are left to hope they will get enough business to help keep their businesses afloat for the rest of the year.

In recent years, there have been two major catastrophic fires in Oregon – the Biscuit fire in Southern Oregon and the B&B Complex fire in Central Oregon. These two fires made natural resource issues important to many of the retail businesses across Oregon, but most importantly to restaurant and lodging properties. The major fires come in the hottest time of the year, mostly August. Damaged trees have made the forests complete fire hazards, and as we have seen several times in Oregon, once these fires get started, they are hard to stop. The fires burn a long time and spread to large areas. The Biscuit fire shut down Grants Pass and parts of Jacksonville for several weeks. The B&B Complex fire shut down the City of Sisters for 30 days.

These catastrophic fires have an impact on surrounding communities as well. Travelers do not know which roads are closed or fear the fire may spread to additional areas, so they stay home. The lack of summer tourism traffic makes the winters very lean in our rural communities. We will never be able to prevent these fires altogether, but we do need ways to control the high risk we face now. Fire fighters need a better chance to

control the fires from the beginning, and Oregon's tourists and citizens need to have a reasonable belief they will not be cut off for long periods of time. This helps tourism to continue in the face of fire season, and protects our rural firefighters.

Anything you can do to assist with this problem would be greatly appreciated by the tourism industry, and especially by the communities that are rebuilding and praying every summer that another fire does not destroy their sense of safety and their livelihood. If you need any additional information, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Perry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bill" and the last name "Perry" clearly distinguishable.

Bill Perry  
Director of Government Relations