

Walden: Forest bill foes' clearcut claims off base

Congressman also praises president's \$330 billion tax cut

By Jeff Duewel
of the Daily Courier

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden told the Grants Pass Gateway Rotary Club on Thursday that the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 should be implemented soon, and that opponents' claims of impending 1,000-acre clearcuts are off base.

Walden also talked to Mayor Len Holzinger and City Manager Bill Peterson on Thursday, and visited a water intake relocation project in Gold Hill. Today, the District 2 Republican was scheduled for seven appearances in Medford and White City before 4 p.m. in his 147th round trip to his home district since taking office in 1998.

Ten days ago, the House passed the bill, introduced by Walden and Scott McInnis of Colorado, by a 256-to-170 vote, authorizing streamlined environmental review to treat 20 million acres of forests at risk of fire. Walden said the Senate Agricultural Committee would take up the bill in June.

"I've been working on this for two years," said Walden, who pointed out that 42 Democrats voted for the bill.

"I think most of us recognize something needs to be done. I like my forests green, not black and I'd like to see some people get back to work. We need to get on with it. I'd hate to see it messed up. Too much is at stake."

Walden also said that opponents of the bill focusing on the possibility of 1,000-acre clearcuts are misguided.

"This has been horribly mischaracterized," Walden said. "It absolutely, positively isn't true. In the Northwest the largest clearcuts allowed are 60 acres."

Title 4 of the bill calls for "silvicultural assessments" of not more than 1,000 acres to combat beetle infestations, assessments which include timber harvest, thinning, prescribed burning and pruning. Universities and forestry schools will be enlisted to study beetle infestations and ways to combat them.

The bill also allows the assessments to be excluded from National Environmental Policy Act documentation in environmental impact statements or environmental assessments.

Walden said he'd heard so much about the 1,000-acre clearcuts he asked Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth to address it.

In a letter, Bosworth stated that the bill does not allow large clearcuts without environmental review.



TRAVIS GAGNON/Daily Courier

Congressman Greg Walden speaks during an appearance in Grants Pass on Thursday.

In Oregon and Washington clearcuts in national forests may not exceed 60 acres west of the Cascades, and 40 acres east of the Cascades.

Bosworth said projects would "still be subject to NEPA analysis

and all other applicable laws and regulations that guide the administration of national forests."

Last year a bill sponsored by Walden and District 4 Rep. Peter DeFazio, and touted on the front steps of the Josephine County Courthouse,

died before Congress ended.

DeFazio said the Walden-McInnis bill does not provide any funding, nor does it adequately address the urban-wildland interface near the edges of towns.

A bill co-sponsored by DeFazio and Rep. George Miller of California called for 85 percent of funding to be for thinning within one-half mile of communities. That bill was defeated.

"Do you think 1/2-mile out would solve the problems in the Applegate or Illinois valleys?" Walden said.

"There's no scientific basis for determining that."

Walden praised President Bush's \$330 billion tax cut signed into law earlier this week.

"About \$20 billion will come to states like Oregon. It'll help. There's going to be more dollars right here in Grants Pass, Medford and John Day. This should spur some purchasing in the small business world."

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R-Ore.

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