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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

November 7, 2003

The Honorable Kathleen Clarke  
Director  
Department of the Interior, BLM  
1849 C Street, NW, Mailstop 3331  
Washington, DC 20249

Dear Director Clarke,

During our scheduled phone conversation this weekend I would like to bring to your attention an issue that is of tremendous importance to family ranchers in Oregon. As you know, the cattle industry represents a critical component of the ongoing viability of Oregon's rural economy. Oregon's ranchers produce some of the highest quality livestock in the nation and tragically have been hit hard over the last decade by droughts, down markets, and increasing government regulations. Adding to these challenges has been the loss of forage by the increasing number and size of catastrophic wildfires that occur in the region. Working in concert with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Oregon Cattlemen's Association (OCA) is proposing the creation of a local citizens' wildland fire response program to combat the increasing incidence of wildfires. Upon completion, this program would allow local citizens in rural and frontier communities to participate in the initial attack phase of wildfire suppression.

As you are well aware, catastrophic wildfires destroy wildlife habitat as well as the forage available for livestock grazing. This program would focus on the estimable goal of protecting the natural resources on BLM lands. By working together, members of the program and the BLM will further increase communication and cooperation leading to early notification and suppression of wildfire in frontier areas. Expedited initial attack response will assist wildland fire dispatchers by providing quick information regarding fire behavior, access routes, hazards and resources needed for fire suppression.

OCA understands that in order to participate in the program, group members will be required to meet federal minimum training and fitness requirements as outlined by the National Wildland Coordinating Group for wildland fire suppression. Further, group members understand the need for communicating and coordinating with BLM wildland fire dispatch during the intense and dangerous initial attack phase of fire suppression. Stressing these requirements for training, fitness, coordination and communication will underscore that firefighter safety will be the primary emphasis in any wildland fire operation.

I understand that the OCA proposal mirrors a cooperative agreement between the Nevada BLM and a citizen "Wildfire Support Group" established to provide mutual assistance for fire suppression on federal lands. I am deeply appreciative of your leadership on this issue and would request that you direct the Oregon BLM to work with OCA in crafting a similar agreement. I look forward to speaking with you concerning this proposal during our scheduled call this weekend. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Walden".

Congressman Greg Walden  
Member of Congress

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