

Washington, DC – To follow is the statement of Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) from today's debate on the House floor of legislation to address fuel loads in our national forests. Blumenauer supported legislation proposed by Congressmen George Miller (D-Calif.) and Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), offered as a substitute to a bill sponsored by Congressmen Scott McGinnis (R-Colo.) and Greg Walden (D-Ore.):

"I rise in support of the Miller-DeFazio-Rahall-Conyers substitute. This proposal represents a narrower approach than the McGinnis-Walden bill. It concentrates funding and fire prevention activity where it is most needed: in the sensitive interface areas surrounding communities. Eighty-five percent of the funding under the proposal must be spent in and around communities and water supplies. Logging is kept out of controversial areas. The substitute also shortens the appeals process, but doesn't shut out the public or tamper with judicial review. And, of great importance, the amendment also starts rebuilding the trust between the two sides in this ongoing debate over how to address excess fuel buildup in our forests.

"By requiring the federal government to work with states, communities, and even private landowners to reduce fuel loads, this proposal represents a small step that people can agree on. Less controversy means more progress in terms of fire prevention and encourages communities to revitalize their small timber industries and to harvest timber in a sustainable manner.

"In the long term we need to look at the bigger picture. Decades of fire suppression policy, the removal of older, more fire resistant trees from the forest system, and the increasing number of citizens living in forested areas have created a situation in which both people and forest ecosystems are vulnerable. We can, and should, prioritize solutions to the problems associated with building houses in forestlands. We need to concentrate the bulk of our investments in areas where people are living in harm's way.

"This annual controversy over wildfire prevention and forest management that we are witnessing in the West will continue until Americans change our view of the environment and the places we choose to live. The cooperation of individuals, local governments, and federal agencies is mandatory. I hope we can continue this important conversation."