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**SAVE OUR FORESTS—SAVE OREGON!  
A Rural and Coastal Community Perspective**

**I'm Court Boice, a Curry County Commissioner, and a 4<sup>th</sup> generation resident of this beautiful Southwestern corner of Oregon. We are a remote, rural—even a frontier community, according to some. But we are also relevant! Among our most valuable assets are our Forests: we are home to the highest quality, and fastest growing Evergreen trees (the Douglas Fir), found on the planet! Our Conifer forests, however, are in dire jeopardy due to the past two years of devastating fires—catastrophic, actually, invoking the name of “Nuclear Forest Fires.” No other county in Oregon has been hit harder! With an eye on prevention, protection, and preservation, I have committed myself to improving our Federal Forest Management Policies, and the curtailing, in large measure, of such future devastations. Starting off a New Year with the goal of more safe, healthy, and prosperous living and working conditions, through the implementation of sound, effective, and remedial policy changes, we can all unite to save and secure our Oregon Forests.**

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**

**Going back to the Silver (1987), and the Biscuit (2002) Fires, the largest in Oregon history (with the loss of 110,000 and 498,000 acres, respectively), it's unfathomable to assess the horrific impact these “non-normal” fires, have wreaked upon my County, and upon our sacred, Southwest Oregon area. Irrecoverable losses!**

**Fast forward to the most recent Fires: The 2017 Chetco Bar (191,000 acres) and the 2018 Klondike (175,000 acres), both within our Rogue River/Siskiyou National Forest region—a region once renowned as the most wild, most unique, most rugged, most beautiful—AND the most productive National Forest in America! During the last two Fire Seasons, our Curry, and neighboring Josephine, Counties, have seen the total destruction of almost 450,000 acres. It's estimated that (even if possible), it will take a minimum of 40 years for the return of any measurable, healthy Oregon Forests to emerge with proper ecological balances in place. Due to these abnormal fires, the Douglas Fir, as well as the Pine, may never take root, leaving the future to Hardwood Forest Dominance. Tragically, our poorly managed--and incredibly volatile “Ground Fuels,” come equipped with the promise of more Catastrophic Fires!**

**History gives us clear warnings: We only need to look barely beyond Oregon's emergencies, to the two consecutive years of heart-wrenching, unspeakable tragedies in California, with the loss of hundreds of lives, and thousands of homes and structures—not to mention the countless deaths of animals, to give us a wake-up call. Obvious data leaves no doubt that the “Cal” out-of-control ground fuels are minor compared to the dense load of our “Forested” out-of-control ground fuels, found in our Oregon backyards—especially mine. The staggering economic losses are almost impossible for my County citizens to even attempt to calculate (much less, overcome)...and furthermore, the time- consuming expense and analysis would be prohibitive!**

## **THE TRAGEDY AND THE URGENCY:**

**While I'm very thankful that we didn't lose any lives or structures in the Klondike Fire, the collective losses-to-date are astonishing. Unfortunately, I've been unable to get neither aid nor assistance for the nine families who lost their homes in the Chetco Bar Fire, in August 2017.**

**Here's some sobering facts and statistics:**

**It's estimated that 10 Million birds and wildlife were incinerated—TEN MILLION sentient beings!**

**Water and Air quality, have been horribly compromised.**

**Fish Habitats, are terribly affected.**

**Trillions upon trillions of Microbiological-Organisms have been obliterated within the severely damaged soil.**

**Miles of Back Country Roads are now Decommissioned.**

**Half of our Oregon Redwoods were burned, with the resultant decline of our priceless “Carbon Storage.”**

**Many of our Native American Cultural Sights were decimated.**

**Recreational Areas have been ruined for at least two generations.**

**As if all this isn't enough to shine a glaring light on our tragic, yet urgent, need for immediate action, we are hit with unconscionable low limits of “allowable” Post Fire Burned Timber Salvage Acres, leaving us with yet more unchecked fuels for the next “Monster Fire!”**

**Policies such as limited-to-no-access wilderness roads, make it highly problematic, if not nearly impossible for the Forest Service to fight these Fires after the first dozen or so, days. The perfect—and predictable recipe for disasters of this magnitude, for those fires starting in the Wilderness areas in particular, are a mix of huge measures of heavy winds, low humidity, high heat, and massive ground fuels. And it's a recipe that's been handed down over the last 31 years, with 6 devastating incidents, taking mammoth tolls on our health, as we choked on the smoke, and with burning eyes, saw ash fall on everything we cherished about this once pristine land. Our landscape of the past, so verdant and lush, is now deforested by the ferocious Fires' wind explosions, making barren hundreds of thousands of acres, and destroying Oregon's rich Heritage. And the damage doesn't sequester itself to just our rural areas, as may be recounted with the Eagle Creek Fire in the Columbia River Gorge territory, with its expansion of risks, reaching as far as the Portland Metropolitan Area. Welcome to our World! Metro Oregon, listen to our rural voices: “You are our hope--and we are your hope!”**

**With the understanding that there are both “good” fires, as well as “evil” ones, the people who call this haven, home, know this: we must wisely manage—and wisely harvest our cherished Forests, or we will succumb and suffer to an annual onslaught of these “Mega Fires,” and the ensuing damage to both our Rural and Urban communities. It is avoidable, with a united front and commitment with our Local, State, and Federal Partners, to take aggressive action at once.**

Other detrimental policies with the intent to preserve the environment, are actually responsible for our deforestation, exacerbated health problems, reduced air and water quality, and the decline of many animal species. For almost four decades now, many of us have attempted to accommodate that small, but powerful “fringe” cadre of environmental zealots. Those who “protect” the environment at any and all costs by ignoring the hard facts, have put themselves in the position of owning these horrendous consequences. These serial litigators, with their obstructionist tactics, often file law suits before the managing agencies barely begin their management requirements and legal processes. These activists have trashed their own once-respected environmental community reputations. Now, they must come to the table of reality and completely change their misguided agendas, and incinerate those policies (not our forests!), that have left us with these massive, miserable, and life-threatening failures! Their “bent” to control nearly everything continues unabated, and in their attempt to “teach” us to merely accept the era of “Catastrophic Fires,” they reap the frightening results that they themselves have created.

Lastly, our Rural communities simply can't survive economically without an adequate and predictable supply of Federal Timber. All Oregonians must pull together for immediate resolutions that include a sustained yield of future timber supply, not only for Curry County mills—but for all Oregon mills. If it is true that our Northwest Region will be allowing additional annual timber harvest contracts within our public lands, better times may be ahead. BUT, unless we vigorously incorporate every prudent and proven tool (and yes, admittedly, some are ancient—but fully effective)...unless we utilize every means possible to better manage our National Forests...unless we change our outdated Federal policies, and fiercely challenge illogical paths, our forests, that “great Oregon advantage,” will see further unquantifiable loss. It is nothing short of a National Security Issue!

I hope I'm wrong, but I believe we're heading for even greater risks, as we march toward the 2019 Fire Season. We are appealing to everyone to simply assess the 2017 and 2018 fires in this part of the State. Dreadfully, they have cost the U.S. Forest Service and the Oregon Department of Forestry, a combined total of nearly \$300 million to combat. Our once magnificent Oregon Forests—the envy of the entire world, are sadly being transformed from the revered and gorgeous Natural Resource Assets into the most Dangerous and Deadliest of Liabilities. I must state, however, that we currently have in place powerful, experienced, and committed leadership in our Rogue River—Siskiyou National Forest. I submit to the entire country, in my strong, but humble opinion, that the Oregon Department of Forestry is simply the very best of the fourteen Western States. My confidence is bolstered by the hope of our U.S. Forest Service once again returning to a Great Agency status! But they, along with the Oregon Department of Forestry need robust Public Support. It's incumbent upon us that our State takes the reins in leading and legislating for the necessary changes.

There is a narrow window for us to plan for the next brutal Fire Season. Many caring and insightful citizens have been doing everything possible to responsibly and respectfully alert the populous—and the agencies, of our plight. Born in Gold Beach, with a family history in logging, I am invested in what we have here—no one could appreciate it more! I raised my sons in the Rogue River Wilderness, accessible only by Jet Boat and raft. My mission is clear: to fight to protect what's left, by preventing future cataclysmic “Nuclear Fires.” How will Oregon respond, is the question? The time to act for tough new action is NOW. My people simply cannot accept a third consecutive Nuclear Fire Season! Our County is united, and we will do everything within our power to unite Oregon—indeed, the West, in preserving our Country for future generations.

**THE SOLUTIONS:****New Approach--New Model: Catastrophic-Fire Prevention...**

- 1) **Reduce Ground Fuels--Immediately put people to work: 100' Thinning and Fuels reduction on each side of every possible back-country road.**
- 2) **Increase Herbivores--Reduce the Oregon Cougar Population by half...No Wolves on the West side of the Cascade. We must bring back the Deer and Elk that consume the dangerous fuels.**
- 3) **Increase Road and Trail Access--Our Forests inhabit very rugged terrain. The wilderness fires are quite difficult to extinguish after the first 2 weeks, due to limited-to-no-access.**
- 4) **Increase Timber Sales--One of the the most valuable components to stop “Nuclear Fires.” Our trees are growing out of control—and faster than we can harvest them. It's the great Oregon advantage—renewable resource!**
- 5) **Support Wildland/Urban Interface-- Living in rural areas also brings the added responsibility of the property owners to “fire-wise” their homes and land—for themselves, as well as in the best interest of their neighbors.**
- 6) **Increase Allowable Burned Timber Salvage-- The final ruling on the Chetco Bar Fire was 2.5% of the total burned acreage. Not only is the wanton waste shockingly unacceptable, but it leaves yet a greater level of additional fire fuel, as each dead snag is extremely explosive! There are literally millions of them alone in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness! It is crucial that we develop strategies for SW Oregon to reduce the fire risk, and at the same time tie severely limited access and firefighting to post-fire salvage. The two are not mutually exclusive.**
- 7) **Institute New Litigation and Lawsuit Reform--Stop those lawyers who continually win by default, profiting off of the PREVENTION of sound Forest Management, and, in the process, compromising our children's future.**
- 8) **Change the Endangered Species Act, E.S.A.--Revise the standards for qualifying a species as listed, threatened, or endangered--easing the de-listing requirements.**
- 9) **Change the National Environmental Policy Act, N.E.P.A.--Replacing the outdated, time-consuming, and expensive Act, by implementing realistic amendments that will ultimately be a huge part of the solution: Saving our Forests!**

**We have a unique opportunity to deliver on these policies (and promises) to our citizens, by offering solutions that restore responsible natural resource management and rural, timber-based employment.**

**We ask Oregon's Leaders to take aggressive action with our Federal Partners, in not wasting one day. Time is running out. We must not gamble with Oregon's future.**

**OUR CITIZENS' LIVES—AND LIVELIHOODS DEPEND UPON SWIFT REFORM!**

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