

OPPOSE H.R. 4200: The Walden Logging Bill

An Assault on Public Involvement, Public Forests, and Restoration Science

The Walden bill sacrifices accountability and transparency in federal decision-making by casting aside the most important law the public has to provide meaningful and informed input on federal projects, the National Environmental Policy Act.

H.R. 4200 advocates cookie-cutter solutions to complex problems, and would likely promote “recovery” projects that would impede rather than enhance the restoration of our nation’s public forests. Further, it attempts to broadly authorize “catastrophic event recovery projects” after nearly any weather event, including fire, rain, wind, snow, or drought.

In addition, the Walden bill creates powerful incentives for federal agencies to divert scarce resources away from hazardous fuel reduction projects intended to protect communities before a fire occurs.

Show Me the Science

In Galileo’s time, conventional wisdom held that the earth was the center of the universe. Today, many say that natural disturbances provide rationale for logging our forests. Science has proven that many of our assumptions about our world do not accurately reflect reality.

- The title of a January 2006 Oregon State University study says it all “Post-Wildfire Logging Hinders Regeneration and Increases Fire Risk” (www.sciencexpress.org)
- In his testimony before the House Resources Committee, expert witness Dr. Jerry Franklin stated, “timber salvage is most appropriately viewed as a ‘tax’ on ecological recovery.” (November 10, 2005)
- Often cited work by D.B. Lindenmayer et al appeared in the Policy Forum of Science Magazine in February 2004. It states, “Salvage harvesting activities undermine many of the ecosystem benefits of major disturbances.”

No Environmental Protections

There are no protections in H.R. 4200 for streams or riparian areas, critical wildlife habitat, old-growth forests, roadless areas, fragile soils, or other environmentally sensitive lands and resources. The legislation overlooks the very aspects of our National Forests that make them a valuable public benefit, such as the clean water they provide for many of our communities.

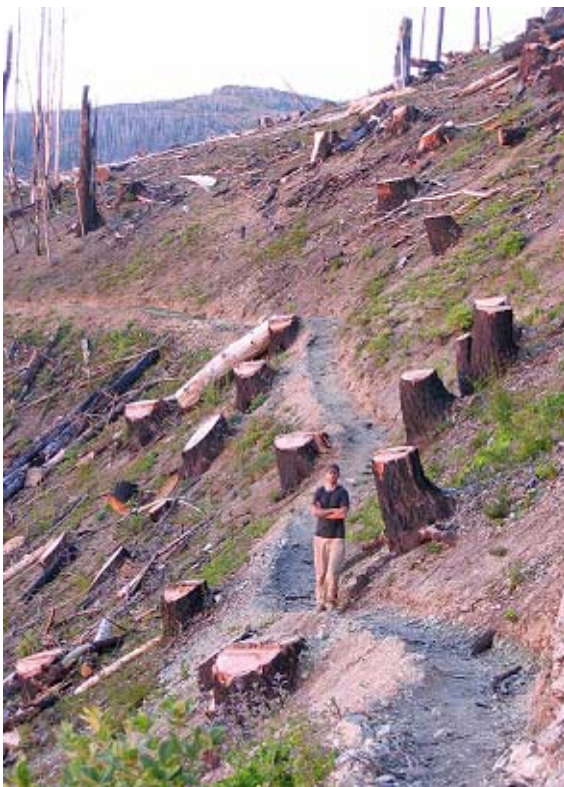
One Size Fits All Approach Doesn’t Fit

H.R. 4200 seeks to exempt all projects authorized under the bill from the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the primary law that requires federal projects to undergo a basic look-before-you-leap review (Sec. 103). One of the most important aspects of NEPA is the requirement that agencies provide the public with reasonable alternatives to their proposed project. In contrast, H.R. 4200 seeks to create a list of “cookie-cutter” treatments, such as post-fire logging, that could be implemented in nearly any situation (Sec.104) and defines “catastrophic event” so broadly as to invite abuse (Sec 3).

Haste Makes Waste: The Walden logging bill would put public forests and water quality at risk

Post –Fire Logging

Our National Forests are very ecologically diverse. Forest soils are often most fragile and subject to erosion after a forest fire. Post-fire logging and associated road construction have been shown to harm soils, impede forest recovery, and increase fire risk. Moreover, the standing old growth that remains provide the very nutrients that will be needed by the forest to recover over the long-haul through their slow decay. These are also the very trees targeted by most post-fire logging projects, which usually leave the smaller diameter trees and logging waste behind and thereby increase the fire risk.



*The Babyfoot Lake trail “post-treatment,”
Biscuit project, Southwestern Oregon*

Public Awareness Cast Aside

Exempting projects from NEPA also cuts out meaningful and informed public involvement in government decision-making. NEPA fosters collaboration and transparency by providing the public information about the proposed project and its environmental impacts, in addition to a range of reasonable alternatives for both the public and the agency to consider. In contrast, H.R. 4200 sets up an “our way or the highway” approach with severely tight timelines and a public process that will effectively undermine the citizens ability to be meaningfully involved in federal decision-making.

Shortcutting the Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act serves as a safety net for threatened and endangered fish, wildlife and plants. H.R. 4200 would weaken requirements of the landmark Act (Sections 104(e)(1) and 105(c)(1)), giving the government a license to kill or harm threatened or endangered species and their habitat in order to rush through logging projects. The Act already allows for emergency exemptions in matters of national security and threat to human lives, but H.R. 4200 tries to manipulate the emergency exemption to let logging proceed in situations that are not true emergencies.

Community Protection Takes a Back Seat

H.R. 4200 creates incentives to shift agency efforts away from much-needed community protection projects. By focusing resources and time on destructive logging projects, the agency will be diverted from projects that could actually decrease fire risks, such as clearing brush and trees in areas near communities.

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Oppose the Walden Logging Bill: the wrong answer for our nation’s forests