



FORESTS FOREVER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 8, 2006

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Walden salvage logging bill dies with 109th Congress

Next year's political climate will be less welcoming

A bill that would have exempted logging after wildfire and other “natural disturbances” from the public comment and inter-agency consultation requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) will not be brought up before the current session of Congress closes.

“Forests can recover from wildfire without the help of the timber industry,” said Paul Hughes, executive director of Forests Forever. “They’ve been doing it for eons.”

“The Walden bill would have ignored both the latest forestry science and the public’s right to be involved in the decision-making process.”

According to the Associated Press, Sens. Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Gordon Smith (R-OR) on Dec. 6 said there was not enough time left in the 109th Congress to pass H.R. 4200, the “Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act.” The senators go home for the year today.

“There was little bipartisan support for a salvage bill in this Congress,” Smith said.

The salvage logging bill, introduced last November by Reps. Greg Walden (R-OR) and Brian Baird (D-WA) in the House, would have allowed the U.S. Forest Service to log and build roads after forest fires, droughts, storms, and other vaguely defined “natural disturbances.” The bill would have exempted the Forest

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Service from the requirements of NEPA and the Endangered Species Act. Salvage projects would have been rushed through on an “emergency” basis, ignoring ecosystem, watershed, and wildlife protections.

The bill passed the House on May 17 by a vote of 243 to 182, but then languished in a Senate committee for the remainder of the session.

“Thanks to continuing pressure from concerned citizens, scientists and environmentalists, the bill was unable to gain traction in the Senate this year,” Hughes said.

The bill’s sponsors may try to introduce the bill again in the next session of Congress. But as a result of November’s election, Democrats will control both houses next year. Conservationists and scientists have been outspoken in their criticism of the bill, and it is unlikely to find much support among the incoming Democratic representatives and senators.