

Forest maintenance: a responsible solution to

Although the dry summer air has been replaced by rain and snow, the damage caused by Washington wildfires continues to increase in the form of flooding and landslides. These fires have had lasting impacts on the people who were displaced and the communities who have been burdened by the costs of rebuilding.

Even in the dead of winter, we must not forget that last year's wildfire season wiped out over one million acres and destroyed more than 300 homes, making it the most destructive season in our state's history. We remember the sacrifice of three U.S. Forest Service firefighters lost in the Twisp River Fire: Tom Zbyszewski, Andrew Zajac, and Richard Wheeler. We pray for recovery for those who were gravely injured.

We do not want next summer to be another one for the record books. That is why we are working proactively in Congress now to implement measures that would help prevent future wildfires and better assist communities hit the hardest by natural disasters.

Throughout the past year we visited areas ravaged by fire and the firefighters who serve them. We've also held round table discussions with



GUEST COLUMN

*Reps. Dan Newhouse,
Cathy McMorris Rodgers and
Dave Reichert*

community leaders to identify actions we can take to protect our region from devastating fires. One of the most promising strategies to prevent and contain wildfires is restoring the health of our forests. For decades, inadequate federal forest management has allowed our forests become overgrown, disease ridden, and vulnerable to wildfires. This lapse in forest management programs is partially a result of a failed funding model. Currently, emergency wildfire response does not have the same budget process as other natural disaster responses, such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods.

Throughout most of the last decade,

year after year the U.S. Forest Service has exhausted funds allocated for wildfire suppression long before the fire season has ended, forcing them to dip into other accounts intended for forest health and management activities. This has left the agency with few resources available to clean up hazardous fuels and maintain healthy forests. As these past several summers have proven, if we do not have sufficient funds for management programs, then our national forests will continue to be a tinderbox, waiting to be lit by a match or struck by a bolt of lightning.

Realizing this dangerous cycle, we have supported measures in Congress that would clean up our fire-prone forests and strengthen our management programs. We are cosponsors of the Wildfire Disaster Fund Act (H.R. 167) which ends the Forest Service fire borrowing and treats wildfire response budgets just like every other natural disaster.

This past July, we voted for and the House passed the bipartisan Resilient Federal Forests Act (H.R. 2647). This legislation will ensure that processes are in place to better clean up our forests, and would save critical forest

management funds by authorizing the U.S. Forest Service to borrow Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) when they need additional resources to fight fires instead of taking funds or interest intended for management. We are cosponsors of the Wildfire Prevention Act (H.R. 2178), introduced by Cathy McMorris Rodgers, which would make forest maintenance projects easier and less costly for the Forest Service and stakeholders to implement. Specifically, this legislation would make it easier and less costly for the Forest Service and stakeholders to implement responsible timber harvest efforts, which is an important wildfire prevention and additional economic opportunity for our rural communities. Rotting or diseased timber protecting the health of the surrounding ecosystems, a habitat, and the beauty of that folks throughout our state have enjoyed for generations.

Washington State and its communities impacted throughout our rebuilding, and we have already seen throughout our communities are pleased that FEMA has

From our readers

Kids more important than any savings

I appreciate the difficulties we are encountering as we address the issues around aging facilities and budget challenges. The prospect of replacing buildings that are funded with public dollars does at some point lead to the necessity of passing a bond that at least 60 percent of the voting public will support. As the superintendent of the Omak School District, I am very much aware of the challenges, considering we will need to replace some facilities at a cost in excess of \$40 million in the very near future. Whether you believe it or not, that is the easy part.

When I say that replacing the buildings is the easy part, I am comparing that to replacing the kids. We could tell our families that our school facilities are outdated so they can move to another community. That would solve the overcrowding issues, but what does it do to families? Here is what I am trying to get at - sending our offending youth to another community gets them out of an aging facility, but it also gets them out of sight, out of mind, out of their families and into the prison pipeline. Is that what county commissioners are after here?

Some of our students have been in juvenile court and are struggling with a number of distractions and trauma in their lives. OBHC provides active mental health counseling services on all of our campuses. They are served at school, because their families have no means to take them for treatment. Moving them to a facility over 100 miles away could have a devastating effect on their lives and their families.

We need to keep our youth in our communities so that local resources and family members are available to help redirect them. Dealing with decaying buildings is a short term, and admittedly challenging, bit of work, but abandoning young people is not acceptable under any circumstances. The questionable savings that may be achieved by outsourcing our children, pale in comparison to ruined lives and destroyed futures.

Leadership takes courage to go down the right path for the sake of the community. Buildings matter only to the extent that they serve the people, and budgets can be programmed to meet those needs. A commission of committed leaders can find a way to renew or replace aging facilities and keep our children in our community. We cannot afford to lose even one child. Please partner with your local school districts in building futures for every child, not destroying lives and

limiting futures.

**Erik Swanson, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Omak School District #19**

Obama should be able to choose

Republicans by and large oppose political correctness. Then when you see all Republican presidential hopefuls wearing an American flag pin on their lapels, you have to wonder. I find it pretty incredible how politically correct so many Republicans appear to be including our 4th district representative, Dan Newhouse. The leadership of the Republican Party calls for President Obama to not nominate someone to fill the vacancy left by the departed Antonin Scalia. Dan Newhouse falls right in line. Their reasoning (if you can call it that) is that since Obama is in the last year of his presidency, the American people should have a say in the matter when they elect the next man or woman president. Well, who elected Obama two times by overwhelming majorities? By that reasoning Newhouse who is in the last year of his term should stop voting, suggesting, and recommending things in the current congress. I just don't feel comfortable in his declaring March 19th

National Raccoon Day. Lea important decision up to the representative during his own year. What's good for the gander for the gander.

Rob

Another memo Mat Classic

Another memorable year Classic held in the Tacoma was our 25th year attending awesome event. One of the was seeing Dave Mitchell restate B coach of the year, a deserved honor. This year wrestler win his fourth state teammates from Granger, and the other a freshman, wrestle finales, with the freshman v overtime.

A junior from Lakeside undefeated with a career record and O, with a chance to make Washington State history by the first four year high school to go undefeated. We had the of watching Meritt Fink of I win an emotional champion over a tough Warden wrestler remarkable young man. And Trevor Peterson winning his