



OREGON'S SENATOR JEFF MERKLEY

The Wildfire-Resilient Communities Act

Due to an ever more chaotic climate, the risk of severe and catastrophic fires only grows. In 2017, 71,500 wildfires burned 10 million acres nationwide, the second-largest figure on record in terms of acreage burned. In 2018, nearly 9 million acres burned. The problem is the Forest Service lacks the funding and the boots on the ground to implement badly need fuels reduction projects.

Year after year, fire suppression eats up more and more of the Forest Service's budget and personnel. Between 1998 and 2016, the number of Forest Service fire personnel grew by over 6,000 employees. At the same time, the number of employees for other critical work, like planning timber sales, thinning projects, trail maintenance, decreased by 7,000. The result: Less resources for proactive forest management and a multi-million acre backlog of projects.

Across the country, our communities have been threaten by increasingly severe wildfires. Even communities not directly impact by flames were inundated with smoke. We must do more to reduce the risk of catastrophic blazes. We can accomplish this by investing in more fuels reduction, empowering local communities, and expanding opportunities to collaborate.

The Wildfire-Resilient Communities Act would create economic opportunities in forest-dependent communities while reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires by:

- Creating a \$1 billion fund to provide stability and allow the Forest Service to increase the pace and scale of catastrophic wildfire reduction projects.
- Empowering federal agencies to work with local communities to plan and prepare for wildfires.
- Permanently reauthorizing the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program and allows more projects to receive funding in a given fiscal year.
- Creating a County Stewardship Fund that would provide payments to counties equal to 25% of stewardship contract receipts on federal land within their counties.