

Board of Commissioners



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Honorable Jeff Merkley
United States Senate

Re: Support for the Post-Wildfire Environmental
Emergency Assistance Act

Dear Senator Merkley,

Umatilla County Board of Commissioners supports the Post-Wildfire Environmental Emergency Assistance Act. This legislation directly addresses a longstanding gap in federal wildfire policy: communities struck by destructive fires that trigger Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAGs) frequently face toxic debris, hazardous materials, and environmental contamination, yet are ineligible for assistance because they do not meet the threshold for a major disaster declaration.

As wildfires increasingly behave like industrial incidents—destroying housing stock, critical infrastructure, wells, septic systems, fuel sources, agricultural facilities, vehicles, and consumer hazardous goods—the consequences extend far beyond suppression. When burned debris and hazardous materials are left to local governments alone, the result is not just delayed recovery, but preventable risks to public health, groundwater systems, fisheries, agricultural land, and entire regional economies.

By authorizing debris removal and post-fire hazardous cleanup under the Stafford Act's FMAG authority, and by enabling the Environmental Protection Agency to provide technical assistance where it is most needed, this bill recognizes the modern realities of wildfire recovery. It strengthens the federal toolbox without creating new bureaucratic burden, and it enables local jurisdictions to act quickly, responsibly, and cost-effectively to protect residents and natural resources.

This legislation is a pragmatic and timely reform. It reflects the urgency communities face after FMAG-level fires and aligns federal resources with current wildfire impacts nationwide. It also offers a commonsense approach that protects rural and urban communities alike without expanding government programs or creating new mandates, making it a policy solution that is both environmentally responsible and fiscally conservative.

Umatilla County Board of Commissioners supports this measure and appreciates your leadership in modernizing recovery authorities so they better match current wildfire impacts across the United States.

Sincerely,

Celinda A. Timmons
Chair, Board of Commissioners

