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House Republicans Call for Changes to Wildfire Prevention Policies

SALEM, Ore. - House Republican Leader **Jeff Helfrich (R-Hood River)** and state Representatives **Ed Diehl (R-Stayton)** and **E. Werner Reschke (R-Klamath Falls)** are calling for legislative action to improve wildfire prevention and suppression efforts next session. Oregon has recently experienced severe wildfires, covering over [1.5 million acres](#) - the largest area in the United States.

“Lives, property, and livestock are lost when fires ravage our state. This is the direct consequence of bad policy. The legislature should make a good-faith, bipartisan effort to reform its forestry management approach to better balance safety and concern for the environment. Doing so will benefit all those who live under the risk of wildfires,” **said Leader Helfrich.**

The representatives identified four core policies that need to change to make Oregon a safer state:

1. The Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) has prevented responsible logging in much of the state. Managing Oregon’s forests does not mean ignoring them until they are on fire. The legislature should reform the HCP to allow responsible economic use and undo its overly aggressive expansion.
2. Oregon's war on the timber industry must end. The logging industry plays a vital role in clearing out deadwood and decreasing the severity of fires. Seven sawmills have closed this year due to anti-business policies. Republicans support reforming burdensome regulations while treating the lumber industry as partners in conservation.
3. Oregon must invest in more early warning and prevention resources and increase our support to firefighters. Oregon Republicans previously introduced bills to promote and protect firefighting efforts. These bills included HB 2491 (2023) which would prohibit volunteer firefighters from being held civilly liable for good faith firefighting efforts and

HB 2953 (2023) which would allow the state forester to fight fires on federal lands within Oregon. Neither bill received a public hearing during the 2023 session, and Republicans plan to re-introduce the legislation in 2025.

4. Some of the wildfires in this state have started because of homeless encampments that do not engage in safe practices in vulnerable areas. Now that the Supreme Court has allowed states to ban camping on public grounds, the legislature must reverse 2021's HB 3115 and strictly prohibit these encampments. The state should also take common-sense safety steps like those described in 2023's HB 2940, which requires state agencies to comply with regulations we already require private entities to follow for fire safety.

Reschke and Diehl added the following statements:

"We all support responsible environmental practices that protect our forests for future generations," **said Rep. Reschke**. "But these fires are the result of 40 years of bad policy choices that have gone past conservation and put the lives of Oregonians at risk, not modern living improvements. It's simply not true that we have to allow deadwood to pile up, constantly increase land use restrictions to protect our environment, or allow dangerous homeless encampments in vulnerable areas."

"The fires that have ravaged our state were the largest in the country, and put Oregonians and regional firefighters needlessly at risk," **said Rep. Diehl**. "We cannot keep doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results. My district is still recovering from the effects of the 2020 wildfire season, and bad policy is compounding our problems instead of solving them."

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