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our charities are vibrant and strong, because people understand it's important to serve something greater than yourself in life. After all, that's what policemen and firefighters and people who wear our Nation's uniform remind us on a daily basis. Our children once again believe in heroes because they see them every day in America.

In these challenging times, the world has seen the resolve and the courage of America. I've been privileged to see the compassion and the character of the American people. All the tests of the last 2½ years have come to the right nation. We're a strong country, and we use that strength to defend the peace. We're an optimistic country, confident in ourselves and in ideals bigger than ourselves.

Abroad, we seek to lift whole nations by spreading freedom. At home, we seek to lift up lives by spreading opportunity to every corner of this country. This is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it. And we know that for our country and for our cause, the best days lie ahead.

May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:08 p.m. in the Chiles Center at the University of Portland. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator Mark O. Hatfield of Oregon.

Remarks in Redmond, Oregon

August 21, 2003

Thank you. Please be seated. Thank you. You know you're in a pretty good country when you see a lot of cowboy hats out in the crowd—[*laughter*]—and when you got horses guarding the perimeter.

Thank you for your hospitality. It is like home, except the temperature seems to be a little cooler and a little more hospitable. But thanks for your hospitality. I'm thrilled to be in Deschutes County, Oregon. I've been planning to come for a while. I'm sad that I had to come to see another forest fire.

We just toured two fires that are burning in the area. It's hard to describe to our fellow citizen what it means to see a fire like we saw. It's the holocaust; it's devastating. We saw the big flames jumping from treetop to treetop, which reminds me about the brave men and women, what they have to face when they go in to fight the fires. I first want to start by thanking those who put their lives at risk to protect our communities, to protect our people, to protect our national treasures, the U.S. forests. I appreciate our firefighters. All those firefighters know something that I've come to realize, that we can thin our forests, that we can use commonsense policy to make the fires burn less hot and protect our forests.

And that's what I want to talk about here. Before I do so, I want to thank Secretary Ann Veneman, Secretary Gale Norton for doing a fine job on behalf of all Americans. I want you to notice that these two ladies are from the West. I appreciate Dale Bosworth, who's the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. I also want to thank Leslie Weldon. Where are you, Leslie? Where? Oh, hi, Leslie. Thank you. Leslie is the Forest Supervisor of the Deschutes National Forest. She was our tour guide. She is a dedicated professional, just like the people she works with from the U.S. Forest Service. I want to thank those who work for the U.S. Forest Service, for the BLM, for serving your Nation in the communities in which you live. I appreciate the hard work you put in. I appreciate your dedication to the preservation and conservation of one of the greatest assets the United States has, which is our land and our forests.

I appreciate your Governor, Governor Kulongoski, who came with me today. I'm honored that he is here. It should say loud and clear to everybody that preserving and protecting our forests is not a political issue. It is not a partisan issue. It is a practical issue that we must come together and solve. So I'm very honored that the Governor is here.

I'm also honored to be with the two members of the legislative branch of our Government in Washington, DC—a great United States Senator, Gordon Smith, and a great Congressman, Greg Walden. I appreciate being able to work with these two fine men. You've just got to know they represent your interests well. They're constantly talking about the people of Oregon. Every time I'm around them, they bring you up. They say, "Let's have some commonsense policy in Washington, DC, to help people help themselves in our State. That's all we want. We

just want the Federal Government to respond in a responsible way.'' And that's what we're here to talk about, how best to be able to do that.

I don't know if you know this, but today are the Waldens' 21st anniversary. Congratulations to you both. Eileen must be a patient soul—[*laughter*]—kind of like Laura. We both married above ourselves, Congressman. [*Laughter*]

Laura sends her love and her best, by the way. She's still in Texas and wasn't able to travel today, but I wish she could come and see how beautiful this country is. See, we both grew up in the desert of west Texas. This is really a beautiful part of the world.

I appreciate the mayors who are here today, Mayor Unger of Redmond, Mayor Teater of Bend, Mayor Allen, Mayor Uffelman, Mayor Elliott. I thank the mayors and the local authorities who have taken time to come and give me a chance to visit with you. I appreciate your service to your communities. I think mayor is a little tougher than being President because you've got to make sure the potholes are all full and the garbage is collected. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate Garland Brunoe, who is the Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, and I want to thank all the tribal members who are here with us today as well.

Today when I landed, I had the honor of meeting a fellow named Curtis Hardy. Curtis is sitting right there. The interesting thing about Curtis is, he's volunteered 5,000 hours over the last 10 years to the Deschutes National Forest. I asked Leslie if he was doing any good. [*Laughter*] She said, ''Absolutely.'' She says it's people like Curtis Hardy that make her job easier. It's very important for people to know that they can take time out of their lives, if they care about their beautiful surroundings, and make a positive, significant difference. Curtis is doing that. Curtis, thank you for setting such a good example, and I appreciate your service.

Ann was right: I was here a year ago. Unfortunately, when I came a year ago, I witnessed the effects of fires. I saw the Biscuit fire and the Squires Peak fire. Both of them were devastating forest fires. They destroyed buildings and homes, changed lives. They destroyed natural resources. The Biscuit fire alone scorched nearly half a million acres, cost more than $150 million. It burned down over a dozen homes. You know, anytime our communities face the devastation of wildfire, it really does test the character of the people. For those whose lives have been deeply affected and probably will be affected by this fire, we send our sympathies, and we wish God's blessings on their families.

The Federal Government can help. We will give grants, and the FEMA grants, all the SBA loans, the different things that happen when there's an emergency. I can assure you, Gordon and Greg will be all over us to make sure we appropriate the proper money to spend.

But the Government has got to do more than just spend money. I mean, we'll spend it, but we've got to effect wise policy, it seems like to me. I mean, how often—we write checks a lot on firefighting, and we'll continue to do that. But it seems like to me we ought to put a strategy in place to reduce the amount of money that we have to spend on emergency basis by managing our forests in a better, more commonsensical way.

The forest policy—the conditions of our forests didn't happen overnight. The experts who know something about forests will tell you that the condition, the overgrown and unhealthy condition, of a lot of our forest land happened over a century. It's taken a while for this situation to evolve. It may interest you to know that today there's 190 million acres of forests and woodlands around the country which are vulnerable to catastrophic fire because of brush and small trees that have been collecting for literally decades. A problem that has taken a long time to develop is going to take a long time to solve. So what we're going to talk about today is the beginnings of a solution. But we've got to get after it now. We have a problem in Oregon and around our country that we must start solving.

You see, the undergrowth issue, the problem of too much undergrowth, creates the conditions for unbelievably hot fires. These forest firefighters will tell you that these hot fires that literally explode the big trees can be somewhat mitigated by clearing out the

undergrowth. And by the way, the undergrowth chokes off nutrients from older trees. It makes our forests more susceptible to disease. We got a problem. It's time to deal with the problem. And that's what we're going to talk about.

Before I talk about the solutions, I do want people to understand that if you are concerned about the endangered species, then you need to be concerned about catastrophic fire. Fires destroy the animals which, obviously, live amidst the raging fire. If you're concerned about old growth, large stands of timber, then you better be worried about the conditions that create devastating fires. The worst thing that can happen to old stands of timber is these fires. They destroy the big trees. They're so explosive in nature that hardly any tree can survive. We saw that with our own eyes, choppering in here. Thinning underbrush makes sense, makes sense to save our species. It makes sense—of animals. It makes sense to save the big stands of trees.

You know, what I'm telling you about a strategy to deal with our forests to make them healthy is not something that was invented in Washington, DC. It's the collective wisdom of scientists, wildlife biologists, forestry professionals, and as importantly, the men and women who risk their life on an annual basis to fight fires. That's who I've been listening to.

Our administration is taking their advice. Congress needs to take their advice. Congress needs to listen to the—[*applause*]. So having listened and realized that we've got a problem, I've proposed a Healthy Forest Initiative. And I proposed it right here in Oregon one year ago. At my direction, the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture and the Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, Connaughton, who is here with us today, on my staff—these three—that's why they're here, by the way. I want you to look at them. They are responsible for putting this initiative into place.

Their job is to cut through bureaucratic redtape to complete urgently needed thinning projects. That was the first task I gave them. We're going to focus on areas where thinning is the most critical, where the damage can be most severe by—caused by fires. We're working with the Western Governors Association to determine projects of the highest priority in each State. In other words, we're setting priorities, and we're getting after it.

We are speeding up the process of environmental assessments and consultations required by law. Look, we want people to have input. If somebody has got a different point of view, we need to hear it. This is America. We expect to hear people's different points of view in this country. But we want people to understand that we're talking about the health of our forests, and if there's a high priority, we need to get after it before the forests burn and people lose life.

We're expediting the administrative appeals process so that disputes over thinning projects are resolved more quickly. We want to hear people. We want them to have a point of view. We want to save our forests, too. That's what we want to do here in America. We want to deal with the problem. Nobody's to blame. The problem has existed for years. Now let us be the ones who start solving the problem. And that's what I'm going to ask Congress to do when they come back.

Our approach relies on the experience and judgment and hard work of local people. Metolius Conservation Area is such an example. Leslie was describing it to me. The Friends of the Metolius, a conservation group, came to the Forest Service with an interesting idea. What I'm about to tell you is called a collaborative effort—to do some commonsense things in our forests to protect them and protect the communities around the forests.

So these good folks came and said, ''Look, why don't we set up some sample plots in the Deschutes Forest to be treated with thinning and burning and mowing and to leave some of the plots untreated, so people can see the difference between a treated plot and an untreated plot, to kind of break through the myths, the mythology, the propaganda of what it means to protect our forests?'' And the Forest Service agreed, and they worked together, and they shared costs. And thousands have now come and have seen good forest management practices in place. They've seen what is possible to do. And I want to thank the folks for working hard in a collaborative way to share your wisdom and

your hard work, to help educate our fellow citizens about the realities of what we're talking about when it comes to maintaining a healthy forest.

Bill Anthony is not with us today—I think he's fighting the fires—deserves a lot of credit for this program, as does Leslie. They're in the process, by the way, of treating 12,500 acres—additional 12,500 acres. I want to thank the Friends of the Metolius. I want to thank the local citizenry here for doing what is right. Ranger Bill says community participation has been critical to the success of the project, and that's the kind of initiatives we like and want. We want initiatives where the Federal Government works closely with the State government, with community groups, conservation groups, local people, in order to do what is right for our country and our States. You see, there's too much confrontation when it comes to environmental policy. There's too much zero-sum thinking. What we need is cooperation, not confrontation.

I appreciate the stewardship contracting programs that will be going on. I hope you do, as well. You see, the thinning projects that are going to go forward should help some of these local communities that hurt. And by the way, I fully understand Oregon's unemployment issue. It's the highest in the Nation. I'm sorry it's the way it is. There are some things we can do to help people. We want people working. We want people to have food on the table.

Stewardship contracting—what that means is, is that private organizations or businesses will be able to do the necessary thinning, and they'll be able to remove small trees and undergrowth, and they'll be able to keep part of what they remove as partial payment. That seems to make sense to me. First of all, somebody's working. It seems like the taxpayers come out okay. After all, if you're able to keep some of the thinning, which protects our forests, as part of the payment, it's a—takes a little load off the taxpayer. The local community's tax base will get better when somebody spends the money they make from thinning the projects, and the forests are more healthy. Stewardship contracting makes sense. It's an integral part of our plan.

I'll give you a quick report. The Healthy Forests Initiative is producing results. Last year, we treated 2¼ million acres of overgrown forests. By the end of the fiscal year in September, we will have treated more than 2.6 million acres of forest and rangeland. We're slowly but surely getting after it, as we say in Crawford, Texas. We're beginning to deal with the problem that we've—that will help make the country, by solving the problem, a better place.

This year alone, we'll spend more than $43 million of forest treatment projects here in the State of Oregon. And as we go forward with the Healthy Forests Initiative, if we can ever get it authorized by Congress, I look forward to working with the appropriators, working with Gordon and Greg, to get the projects funded. We just don't want the initiative authorized; we want the initiative funded so we can solve the problem.

But the initiative I've laid out is one step. Congress needs to act. People ought to understand up there in Washington that—or over there in Washington, way over there in Washington—[*laughter*]—that current law makes it too difficult to expedite the thinning of forests because it allows the litigation process to delay progress and projects for years and years. That's the problem. And those delays, the endless litigation delays, endanger the health of our forests and the safety of too many of our communities.

So I've asked Congress to fix the problem. Gordon and Greg are working hard to fix the problem. The law called the ''Healthy Forests Restoration Act'' would bring government and communities together to select high-priority projects relevant to local needs. In other words, it's part of the prioritization of what I just described to you earlier. It would also direct courts to consider the long-term threats to forest health that could result if thinning projects are delayed. In other words, it says, ''We have a national goal to protect our—one of our finest assets, and that is our forests. And therefore, you—Mr. Judge, make sure you understand that a healthy forest is a part of your consideration when you're listening to these appeals.''

The legislation makes forest health the priority, a high priority, when courts are forced to resolve disputes. And it places reasonable

time limits on litigation after the public has had an opportunity to comment and a decision has been made. Congress must move forward with this bill. It's a good, commonsense piece of legislation that will make our forests more healthy, that will protect old-growth stands, that will make it more likely endangered species will exist, that will protect our communities, that will make it easier for people to enjoy living on the edges of our national forests.

The House of Representatives passed the bill—and I appreciate your good work, Greg. The Agriculture Committee has agreed on a bill. The Agriculture Committee agreed on a bill, and when the Senate returns, they need to pass the healthy forests legislation and get it to my desk.

The administration is also working to help communities of this region by implementing the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan. This plan was designed to protect wildlife and to support a viable woods-products industry in the Northwest. It was designed, obviously, before I arrived in Washington. It's a good plan. It makes a lot of sense. It was a plan forged by conservationists, industry professionals, government officials who came together to decide on a reasonable target for sustainable timber harvesting on a small portion of our forests. The plan calls for harvesting of about a billion board foot of timber per year. It will strengthen our communities. It will help rural America. It will help our homebuilders. It makes sense. It was a promise made to the people of the Northwest. It's a promise I intend to work with the Federal Government to keep.

Good forest policy can be the difference between lives surrounded by natural beauty or natural disaster. And we're watching a natural disaster unfold right here in this part of the world. And we can do a better job protecting our assets. We can do a better job protecting people in the communities. Now it's time for people who represent different parts of the country to come together to see the devastation that takes place out West on an annual basis and allow these good people out West to manage their assets in a way that we'll not only be able to say we've done a job well-done for future generations but we're protecting something that we hold dear, and that is the forest lands of America.

Before I finish, I do want to talk about another conservation issue that affects the people of the West Coast, and that's energy reliability. First, I thought our Government response to the power outage out East and in the Midwest was a good response. You know, after September the 11th, we came together in a way to be able to better deal with emergencies that affected America. The Federal Government, the State government, the local governments all worked in a very close way, and the communications was good. The system survived. The system responded well. We had a lot of good people who didn't panic and dealt with the problem in a very professional way. And I want to thank our citizens out East and up in the Midwest for doing such a fine job of responding to a very difficult situation and being respectful for their neighbor.

And yesterday Secretary of Energy Abraham and the Canadian Minister of Natural Resources met in Detroit. It's the joint effort to find out what went wrong. We're going to try to find out as quickly as we can exactly what caused the rolling blackout. But this rolling blackout and the problem we've got here with hydropower, the problem in California recently should say loud and clear to members of the legislative branch of Government that we've got an energy issue that we need to solve in America.

I called together a—put the task force together and made 105 recommendations for our Government to look at about a comprehensive national energy plan, one that encourages conservation, one that encourages energy efficiency, one that realizes that we've got to be less dependent on foreign sources of energy. And part of that was to recognize that our infrastructure, the electricity infrastructure, needs to be modernized.

And we've taken some action without law passed by the legislative branch. For example, there's a bottleneck that plagued California for years. In other words, electricity wasn't able to move as freely from south to north, north to south, as we wanted. And we're now permitting lines so that that bottleneck can be removed. And the Department of Energy is working with the private

sector to get the lines up and running so we can move more electricity.

And we've been dealing with the shortage of hydropower. As you know, you've got an issue in the Klamath Basin, and we've been trying to come up with reasonable policy so that people can farm the land and fish can live at the same time.

But Congress needs to act. I don't know if you know this or not, but for many years the reliability of electricity in America depended on companies observing voluntary standards to prevent blackouts. I don't think those standards ought to be voluntary. I think they ought to be mandatory. And if there's not reliability backup for electricity, there ought to be a serious consequence for somebody who misuses the public trust. And Congress needs to have that in the law.

We ought to authorize the Federal Government to step in as last resort to put up new power lines where it best serves the national interest. We ought to make investment—new investment in a transmission of electricity easier to make. We've got some old laws that were passed a long time ago that make it harder for people to invest in new electricity lines, new transmission lines. That doesn't make any sense. If we've got a problem, let's deal with it.

The law that passed out of the House of Representatives deals with it. I'm confident—and the Senate passed a bill—in other words, out of the two bodies, they need to get together. I talked to Pete Domenici, the Senator from New Mexico. I talked to Billy Tauzin, the chairman from Louisiana. They both agreed on what I've just described to you as necessary in a new bill, so that we can say we solved the problem; we're modernizing our electricity system so the people of America don't have their lives disrupted like what happened during the rolling blackout that took place last week. So we're going to get us a good energy bill. We need an energy bill, an energy strategy, and we need the will to implement it.

Let me conclude by telling you that I'm incredibly proud of our country. You know, we've been through a lot. We've been through a recession. You're still in it here in Oregon. We had these people attack us because of what we stand for. We love freedom in America, and we're not going to change. We stood tall and strong. We're a determined country, to not only protect ourselves; we're determined as well to protect ourselves by spreading freedom throughout the world. We know that free societies will be peaceful societies. We believe in America that freedom is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to every single human being on the face of the Earth.

We've been through some tough times, and these tough times came to the right nation. Our values are strong. Our people are courageous and strong and compassionate. I love being the President of the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:23 p.m. at the Deschutes County Fairgrounds. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Ted Kulongoski of Oregon; Mayors Alan Unger of Redmond, Oran Teater of Bend, Richard Allen of Madras, Stephen Uffelman of Prineville, and David Elliott of Sisters, OR; Garland Brunoe, tribal council chairman, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; Bill Anthony, Sisters District Ranger, Deschutes National Forest; and Minister of Natural Resources Herb Dhaliwal of Canada.

Remarks at Ice Harbor Lock and Dam in Burbank, Washington

August 22, 2003

Thank you all very much. I appreciate you coming out to say hello. Thank you. Be seated, please. Thanks for coming out to say hello. It's a little different view from the views we have in Crawford. [*Laughter*] The temperature is a little cooler, too, I want you to know.

But thanks for coming. It's such an honor to be here at the Ice Harbor Lock and Dam. I found it interesting that another Texan came to dedicate the dam. Vice President Lyndon Johnson dedicated this unbelievable facility in 1962. He said it's ''an asset of astounding importance to the region and to America.'' He was right in 1962, and when I tell you it's an asset of astounding importance to this region of America in 2003, I'm right as well.