



UNITED STATES SENATOR ★ SERVING THE CITIZENS OF IDAHO

LARRY CRAIG

NEWS RELEASE

[HTTP://CRAIG.SENATE.GOV/PRESS/](http://craig.senate.gov/press/)

For Immediate Release
June 28, 2007

Dan Whiting (202) 224-8078
Sid Smith (208) 342-7985

THIMBY – Thin My Backyard **by Senator Larry Craig**

The front page of the *New York Times* carried the news to residents of the East Coast – a picture of the Angora Fire around Lake Tahoe. Media outlets around the country broadcast similar messages, documenting the tragedy that resulted from mismanaging our forests.

Ten years ago, I worked with Senator Feinstein of California, the Clinton Administration, and others to promote a responsible fuel-reduction project in the national forests around Lake Tahoe. Preservationists jumped into gear and blocked the project. The destruction you see today could largely have been prevented if this project had moved forward.

Unfortunately, too often, our land management is brought to a screeching halt by preservation groups who use lawsuits to relegate land management to pushing paper. This is exactly what they want – no management of the land.

However, we need to manage our public lands for future generations. As any gardener knows, you can't grow a garden by sitting back and letting "nature" take its course. Even Teddy Roosevelt, the President who created our national forests and parks, evangelized this. He said, "Conservation means development as much as it does protection." Ironically, many of the preservationists blocking management of public lands practice management on their own lands. Case in point – according to the *Washington Post*, Jake Kreilick of the Wild West Institute is using a chain saw to thin trees on his own land outside of Missoula while blocking similar projects on public lands in Idaho and Montana.

Maintaining forest health holds a special significance for Idahoans. Like many western states, a large chunk of Idaho is composed of federal lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The forest products industry is important to the economy of our state, but harvesting trees provides more than just jobs. It also helps enhance the protection of wildlife, habitat, water quality, and those citizens who live close by.

We know neglected forests soon become unhealthy, and the resulting diseased, dead and dying trees become fuel for wildfires. Just ask the residents of Bonners Ferry, Idaho, who saw wildfire destroy their community watershed in 2003, jeopardizing the drinking water for the 5,000 plus residents. Determined not to let it happen again, they worked with the Forest Service, Kootenai Tribe, and other stakeholders to develop a restoration plan that involved active management. Guess what – the preservationists have sued. I sure hope they aren't looking for a drink of water the next time fire ravages Myrtle Creek.

[MORE]

More than 30 years of environmental litigation forced neglect of our public lands. The result is managing fire by fighting fire. Not only is this the most costly alternative, it is also the most dangerous. The best mitigation to fire is a properly managed forest. After all, fire is natural and necessary. Well-managed forests are much more capable of surviving a fire, which in turn preserves vital habitat for our wildlife and protects sensitive watersheds. Unfortunately, the catastrophic fires caused by mismanagement scar the landscape, sterilize the soil, and, all too often, destroy homes and lives.

Let's leave active management of our public lands to the professionals. If we do, the next picture of the West in the *New York Times* just might be our healthy, vibrant forests.