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BUSH ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS: FEDERAL LAND MANAGERS SET RECORD-LEVEL ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF PRESIDENT'S HEALTHY FORESTS INITIATIVE

Agencies More Than Tripled Hazardous Fuel Reduction Efforts from 2000

BEND, Ore., Oct. 12, 2004 – Council on Environmental Quality Chairman James L. Connaughton, Agriculture Under Secretary Mark Rey and Interior Assistant Secretary Lynn Scarlett today announced that federal land management agencies have surpassed all of their hazardous fuels treatment targets for 2004 under the President's Healthy Forests Initiative. The administration officials were joined by U.S. Congressman Greg Walden here today for a tour of a Healthy Forests Restoration Act project and to celebrate the initiative's successes in restoring forest and rangeland health and protecting communities from wildland fire.

“President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative is a model of bipartisan partnership and public and private cooperation, said Connaughton. “The state of Oregon is one of Healthy Forests' best examples of how communities can work together with the federal government to produce significant environmental benefits. The forest restoration work has improved the safety of communities near the forests and the habitat for the abundant wildlife that live here.”

Since President Bush took office, federal land management agencies removed hazardous fuels from more than 10 million acres of public lands—twice the pace of the previous 8 years. In 2004, the agencies treated more than three times the number of acres that were restored in 2000, with more acres than ever being treated near homes and communities.

By Oct. 1, 2004, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and the U.S. Department of Interior's land management agencies had treated 4 million acres and exceeded their 2004 goal of 3.7 million acres. Of these acres, some 2.3 million were in the wildland urban interface, where houses meet or intermingle with wildland vegetation.

“Federal land management agencies made an unprecedented number of acres healthier and safer for communities thanks to President Bush's initiative,” said Rey. “Not only have we exceeded our targets for this year, but we expect to continue stepping up our efforts to prevent the risk of catastrophic wildfires and restore forest and rangeland health with the new legislative tools provided by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.”

In Oregon, federal land management agencies removed hazardous fuels from more than 907,000 acres of public lands since 2001. In 2004, agencies treated more than 335,300 acres, 120,900 more than last year. Of the 335,300 acres, 126,300 acres were in the wildland urban interface.

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This year the agencies worked on 55 HFI and HFRA projects in Oregon totaling 85,823 acres and have planned nine projects using the new authority under HFRA totaling 61,561 acres for FY 2005.

“Collaborative efforts are the key to identifying lands for treatment. Public land managers have formed partnerships with state, Tribal and local parties to identify the areas in the greatest need of treatment,” said Scarlett. “Together, we are investing in the future of communities and our natural resources by reducing the threats from wildland fire.”

Announced in August 2002, the President's Healthy Forests Initiative is an ongoing commitment to care for America's forests and rangelands, reduce the risk of catastrophic fire to communities, help save the lives of firefighters and citizens and protect critical natural resources. President Bush signed into law the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 in December 2003. It aims to reduce the threat of destructive wildfires by streamlining the process for approving high-priority fuels reduction and restoration projects while upholding environmental standards and encouraging early public input during project development.

To view the report, visit the interagency website--which now has a new real-time reporting system for hazardous fuel reduction projects throughout the country, at <http://www.healthyforests.gov>.

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