December 11, 2009

WASHINGTON, DC- Congressmen Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Kurt Schrader (D-OR) worked to secure jobs in rural communities today when they sent a letter to Chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, George Miller. Chairman Miller will be the key author in any job creation legislation Congress may consider. Rural communities in Oregon are facing severe economic challenges with levels of unemployment as high as 19%. As Congress begins to consider a potential jobs package, it is essential for the recovery of rural communities that any legislation include a major investment in our public lands. This would help address the huge maintenance backlog facing our public land management agencies while simultaneously creating and sustaining thousands of family-wage jobs.

“Rural counties in Oregon are already suffering from high unemployment and teetering on the economic brink. We need jobs and we need them now. Any major jobs package should include an investment in our nation’s neglected public lands. It is a win-win—simultaneously creating family wage jobs and addressing the health of our nation’s forests,” DeFazio said.

“Our rural communities have been in a recession for two decades,” said Schrader. “We need to do everything possible to promote economic development opportunities in these communities and, that requires a substantial investment in our public lands.”

The letter is below:

December 11, 2009

The Honorable George Miller

Chairman

House Committee on Education and Labor

2181 Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, DC, 20515

Dear Chairman Miller and Chairman Obey:

We are writing to request that you consider including a major investment in our public lands in any upcoming “Jobs Bill.” Rural communities in our districts are facing severe economic challenges with record levels of unemployment. A major investment in our public lands would help address the huge maintenance backlog facing our public land management agencies while simultaneously creating and sustaining thousands of family-wage jobs.

Below is a list of some of the types of projects that are “ready to go” and will put people back to work immediately doing critically important jobs on America’s public lands. Moreover, investment in public lands projects has a strong stimulative effect on local economies and creates private sector jobs that cannot be exported.

Hazardous Fuels/Biomass Utilization Projects

The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management received a combined $255 million in the Recovery Act for hazardous fuels and biomass projects. The agencies were able to obligate 50% of the funds in the first nine months, which were used to treat 125,000 acres.

Even with these substantial investments, the Forest Service and BLM could spend a combined $1 billion per year for hazardous fuel reduction and biomass utilization projects. Since 2003, over 40 million acres of forestland have burned in the United States, which has dramatically impacted our rural and forested communities. These projects would help reduce the threat of wildfire, protect lives and property, help generate renewable energy for local communities, and provide merchantable timber for local mills.

It is estimated that for every $1 million invested in hazardous fuels and biomass utilization projects, 29 family-wage jobs are created and $2.1 million in economic activity is generated.

Healthy Forest Projects

We can do more responsible forest management on our public lands to improve the health of federal forests, reduce the risk of fire, and to protect important ecosystems. Millions of overstocked or fire-suppressed
acres of federal forests could benefit from restorative thinning. Besides the obvious benefits to our forests, restoration projects would create and sustain jobs in rural communities by generating millions of board feet of timber. Such projects would also help preserve the disappearing timber infrastructure that sustains and supports rural and timber-dependent communities.

Similarly, restoration projects would greatly aide in combating woodland disease infestation. Currently, western forests are being ravaged by invasive bark beetle infestation, with some counties reporting up to 78% of their forested areas being diseased. Providing more funds to combat this epidemic will create more jobs while promoting healthy forests.

It is our understanding that dozens of NEPA-approved projects in our congressional districts

await federal funding before implementation can occur. Federal funding is also needed to identify and plan additional forest restoration projects so that job-creating projects can be developed and offered to the private sector quickly.

Every $1 million invested in forest restoration projects and thinning creates or retains 13 jobs and generates $2.2 million in economic activity. And for every one million board feet in timber volume, 12 jobs with an average salary of $43,000/year are created or saved.

Deferred Construction and Maintenance Projects

Earlier this year, the Forest Service and BLM faced a combined deferred maintenance backlog of over $10 billion. This backlog includes road maintenance, road decommissioning, trail maintenance, and fish passage and culvert construction. The agencies received a combined $905 million of Recovery Act funding for construction and maintenance projects on federal lands, leaving a deferred maintenance backlog of over $9.2 billion. At current budget levels, it will take our land management agencies 100 years to address the maintenance backlog.

Federal investment in America's public land infrastructure has a strong stimulative effect and enormous job creation potential. For every $1 million invested in equipment-intensive activities such as road and trail maintenance, road decommissioning, and culvert construction, 20 jobs are created and over $2.3 million in total economic activity is generated. This means investing $9.2 billion to address the growing maintenance backlog on public lands could create an

estimated 184,000 jobs and generate over $20 billion in economic activity.

Rural communities surrounded by public lands are among the hardest hit by the current economic recession. A Jobs Bill including robust investment in our public lands would serve two important goals: putting Americans back to work and addressing the unsustainable backlog of work that must be completed in order to restore forest health. We strongly urge you to include a major investment in hazardous fuels, biomass utilization, forest restoration, and deferred construction and maintenance projects in any forthcoming Jobs Bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Peter DeFazio	Kurt Schrader	Walt Minnick
Member of Congress	Member of Congress	Member of Congress

John Salazar	Brian Baird	Steve Kagen
Member of Congress	Member of Congress	Member of Congress