

**Statement of Rep. Greg Walden for the Legislative Hearing on the Crooked River Ranch  
Fire Protection Act**

**May 12, 2016**

Thank you, Chairman McClintock and Ranking Member Tsongas, for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to make comments on my legislation, the Crooked River Ranch Fire Protection Act (H.R. 5132).

The community of Crooked River Ranch is bordered by the eastern boundary of the Whychus-Deschutes Wilderness Study area that has become overstocked with juniper and presents a serious fire threat to the homes in the area.

Located on a peninsula at the convergence of the Crooked and Deschutes river canyons, the community's 5,500 residents have one entrance and exit in an emergency.

The buildup of juniper and other fuels led the county and local community to place the area in the highest risk category for exposure to catastrophic wildfire under the Jefferson County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Unfortunately the WSA greatly limits the options for effective and efficient fire prevention activities, depriving local firefighters the opportunity to work with the BLM to create the defensible space they need and is recommended by state and federal agencies.

Today you will hear more from Crooked River Ranch Fire Chief Richard Hoffmann about the dangers they face, and the obstacles this WSA places on his department's ability to protect property and lives.

The local community is well aware of the danger they face from the poorly managed public land they have for a neighbor and the threat wasn't lost on one special interest environmental group either. Unfortunately they saw that threat as an opportunity to try and extort support for a broad wilderness designation covering over 18,000 acres.

Unpleased with the tone and direction of environmental group's approach, the community – including the homeowner's association and the fire department – came to me with a proposal to just address the paramount concern of fire protection for public safety.

This legislation accomplishes that goal by simply moving the WSA boundary back to the canyon rim and adjustment affected less than 900 acres. No transfers of land or anything like that.

The community is just looking for the opportunity to work with the BLM to better manage this area of land to provide much needed fire protection and some peace of mind for Chief Hoffman, his firefighters and all the residents of Crooked River Ranch that live each day with a tinderbox next door.

But they need our help to get there, and moving this WSA will allow them to efficiently and effectively get that fire protection work done.

Thank you again, Chairman McClintock and Ranking Member Tsongas for holding this hearing today. I hope that my legislation can move swiftly through the legislative process and be on the House Floor soon so we can do our part to ensure the BLM is being a good neighbor and help protect the 5,500 residents at Crooked River Ranch.