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OPINION

Readers respond: Reduce wildfire risk by rewarding forest thinning

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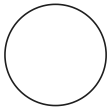
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Every Oregonian knows fire season: watching forecasts, smelling smoke, hoping our communities are spared. That experience should push us toward preventing extreme wildfires, not just fighting them. Oregon took a step forward in 2025 with its first permanent investment in wildland firefighting. But we cannot keep spending hundreds of millions each year only on suppression. We must also reduce risk before fires start.

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Decades of fire exclusion have left many forests choked with small trees and brush. Science tells us to thin these forests and build fuel breaks, but that work needs to pencil out financially. Much of this material has little commercial value, and removal costs remain high. Without a market for this low-value wood, restoration at scale remains too expensive.

One of us works in Oregon's forestry sector, the other in conservation. We don't agree on everything, but we agree cost should not dictate the safety of our communities or the health of our forests.

We support the [Wildfire Reduction Markets Expansion Act](#) sponsored by U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley and U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz. It fixes a flawed definition of [woody biomass](#) in the [federal Renewable Fuel Standard](#); the current definition prevents waste wood and sawmill fiber from qualifying as feedstock for renewable biofuels. Creating demand for this material could help make more forest health projects viable, without changing how forests are managed.

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