

Dear Representative Cate and members of the committee:

My name is Sam Drevo and I write as a wildfire survivor that had both home and business buildings burn in the Santiam fires in Gates Oregon.

The post fire trauma started shortly after our evacuation, and continues to this day. I saw downed power lines and learned about power line ignitions contributing to dozens of local ignitions that burned down my house and our community. Then I saw excessive cutting of places that I hold dear and that are special to canyon residents.

Pacific Power decided not to de-energize power lines despite over 48 hours of advanced notice of a 100 year wind event during an extreme fire risk time period (drought, low humidity and high energy release potential.) They knew it was coming and they know that power line ignitions had ignited and burned down other drought ridden rural communities in the West, including Paradise, California.

As to the power companies, I ask that you act to hold the power utility industry to account.

Will you require that executives and managers shut the power off when extreme weather events coincide with extreme fire risk time periods? We cannot let them burn Oregon down again. Will you require them to report all ignitions within 24 hours after they happen? We have to put measures in place that hold them responsible.

My 75 year old Mom and I have not started to rebuild, and we are still clearing "hazard trees" cut by the utility. Since the fire we have struggled to rebuild our lives and get a roof over our heads.

ODOT, Pacific Power and Oregon Department of Forestry have come into our communities and cut dead trees, but they have also cut lots of surviving live trees. They have spread wood chips and created a big mess. I understand ODOT spent close to 300 million dollars and their contractors have made but our rivers and scenic byways were trashed in the process.

On multiple occasions last summer, it was too hot to stand on the lots for more than 5-10 minutes. The lack of canopy or shade from trees made the summer heat extremely uncomfortable, and the excessive cutting has diminished much of the remaining canopy that wasn't charred by the fires. The temps in the cut over areas are unbearable.

The impact of losing all my most prized worldly possessions - childhood and family photos, US Team uniforms, National & World Championship medals, awards & over a decade of 35mm slide photography has been very hard on me emotionally. The excessive cutting has compounded the pain and is in my face every time I come back to the community.

Our go to, favorite hiking area Monument Peak was just clear cut by the Oregon Department of Forestry. The area was lightly under burned and now it is a wasteland of slash piles and disturbed soils. ODOT cut live trees down to the river bank. Marion County has clearcut wide swaths from Hwy 22 to Elkhorn along the Little North Fork.

Yes the loss of our community and favorite neighbors has been difficult. It did not have to happen.

Seeing outside contractors take advantage of us and add insult to injury has been painful.

The continued, excessive cutting of live and non hazardous riparian vegetation in the name of making us safe adds insult to injury and hurts my personal recovery and the future of my river outfitting business.

The ecological damage continues and the scenic beauty of the area will be affected for generations. The shutting down of roads (FS-46 & 224) for over 18 months with inadequate communication by (ODOT & US Forest Service) about re-opening plans (while extreme clear cutting occurs out of the public eye) is appalling.

While I would prefer to report or highlight community improvement, most people I speak with from the area continue to struggle. Yes, rebuilding is occurring sporadically in the community, and staying busy is a good way to cope with devastation, but the struggle is real and the consequences of these fires and consequential clear cutting will impact this area for generations.

I have chosen to get involved with the "Resilient Headwaters" project to help rebuild trails in the canyon, and while I am excited to learn more about a "rails to trails" program, I am dismayed that the re-planting effort has not gotten more attention. Re-planting trees should be a top priority, and ensuring that drip irrigation is installed or that a watering program is included so the young trees don't succumb to dying off in the first year - like so many young trees recently planted trees that died during the heat dome of 2021.

Trying to find ways to help rebuild the community is daunting since very time I come back, more and more of the forest is being cut down. As a small business owner in the Outdoor and Tourism industry, I am trying to find a silver lining to the years of investment I have put into the community of Mill City and Gates OR, but the closed roads, clear cutting, and lack of real initiative to replant makes me more distraught.

Thanks for listening and I ask that you advocate for the millions of dollars going to the Mt Hood and Willamette National Forest prioritize revitalizing these burned and now cutover lands, including the many Recreation sites that have yet to receive any attention. Also I ask that you prioritize state and federal dollars to preparing our communities for fire - starting with a focus on working from the home outward.

Sam Drevo
Former resident now lot owner, Gates, OR





