

Castle Opposes Logging Legislation Portrayed as Environmentally Friendly, Calls it a Sham -- May 17, 2006

Washington, D.C. -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle today voted no on the Forest Emergency Recovery & Research Act (H.R. 4200), presented as an environmentally friendly bill, but which Rep. Castle called a sham, saying that it instead weakens current environmental laws and regulations. The bill would establish new procedures for federal agencies to expedite salvage logging projects under the guise of rehabilitating federal land after 'catastrophic' events, such as fire, floods, or other disasters.

"I voted against this legislation because it would weaken the environmental laws and regulations associated with our national forests. While claiming to establish an improved response system to forest fires and other catastrophic events, it instead allows agencies to bypass environmental review on an expedited basis in order to address circumstances beyond what most would view as "emergencies." The authority given in this bill is a significant and unnecessary environmental rollback of our landmark environmental protections, like the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act." Castle said.

Castle outlined the following concerns with the legislation:

- 1) The bill does not apply just to what most of us would view as catastrophic or emergency events that come without warning and require urgent action. The bill also covers events that occur gradually, including drought, which are covered by current law. The bill also sets no clear standard for how serious an event would have to be to be considered a "catastrophic event" and thereby covered by the bill.
- 2) The bill exempts planning that occurs well in advance of any emergency from normal environmental reviews.
- 3) The bill sets no parameters for how the public is to be notified about or comment on the key activity in the bill - the evaluation the Forest Service makes to determine how to respond to a "catastrophic event."
- 4) Actions under the bill are exempt from key provisions of the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act.
- 5) The peer review required by the bill may not be truly independent or scientific, and its results are unenforceable.
- 6) There are no limits to the number of acres that can be covered by the bill.

