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Bennet Logging Bill, S. 670: \$60 Billion to Subsidize Destructive Logging

The deceptively-named “Protect the West Act of 2025”, S. 670 (Sen. Bennet, D-CO), proposes \$40 billion in taxpayer subsidies to conduct “restoration and resilience” projects—at least half of which would be conducted on federal public lands (Sec. 8). Section 6 includes a few provisions that are promoted ostensibly as environmental mitigation sideboards but which, in reality, are largely meaningless or unenforceable and thus function mainly as greenwashing. For example, Section 6(d)(3) says that projects on federal lands must be conducted in the “wildland-urban interface” (WUI), but the definitions section of the bill (Sec. 2) uses the Healthy Forests Restoration Act definition for the WUI, which is so expansive that it includes most public forests in most regions. In Section 6(e)(2), the three top items on the list that describes how “restoration and resilience” projects will be prioritized are all well-known euphemisms for commercial logging of mature and old-growth trees and post-fire clearcut logging, such as “thinning” and “fuel breaks”. One of the several priority categories in Section 6(e)(2) mentions projects that would “reduce hazardous fuels by focusing on small-diameter trees”. This language is a notorious smokescreen for commercial logging, since the Forest Service defines “small” so broadly that it includes over 95-99% of the trees in the forest, and the word “focusing” means that large trees can and will be logged too. Section 6(e)(2) also includes projects that “maximize the retention of old and large trees, as appropriate for the forest type”—language that has never been enforceable in court, and which explicitly allows commercial logging of mature/old trees.

Another \$20 billion would be allocated to fund additional “restoration and resilience” projects (Sec. 8), with the disbursement of the funds to be decided by an “Advisory Council” (Sec. 4), the majority of which would likely be comprised of people from logging and fossil fuel companies, other developers, and agencies and entities involved in commercial logging.

S. 670 is a wasteful logging industry Trojan Horse—one that ignores the fact that hundreds of climate scientists and ecologists are telling Congress that “thinning” and other commercial logging makes climate change worse and tends to increase wildfire intensity (<https://bit.ly/3BFtIAg>).