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### Another Fire?!

"Another fire?!" This phrase became a common reaction watching the news this past summer. Accounts of new and relentless fires raging across large portions of Idaho's forests built upon each other, contributing to west's worst fire season in five decades. The devastation they caused to property and the cost of controlling them were tremendous. I, as the head of Idaho's forest services, would use the information from these fires to begin looking at a new approach to maintaining the health of our forests.

Instead of working against the fires, we should work with them, allowing them to run their natural course with the least amount of damage to property as possible. As layers of debris continue to layer the forest floor, protected against fires, the risk of larger fires rises. To counter this issue, fires should be allowed to burn using preventive procedures only when they run into direct contact with personal property. This way, the fires will be more frequent but smaller and use less of the forest service's resources to control. The natural benefits of fires such as clearing of debris and producing new trees contribute to the health of the forest.

The health of a forest affects our environment in multiple ways, and is just as easily affected by our actions. The introduction of foreign species into the forests has greatly impacted the ecosystem. Non-native animals and plants with few natural predators very easily overtake the native organisms and push them towards extinction. These situations disrupt the natural ecosystem and balance in the forests. As these effects take place, the health of the forests is jeopardized.

Watershed health, harvest rates, role of native insects and disease, role of wildlife, and the biological diversity of the forests are all important reasons to strive for a healthy forest. The freshwater that runs out the forest is used by us as well as fish such as salmon. The harvesting of trees is essential for building, but is also a controversial issue. I would solve this issue by allowing lumber to be taken

from areas burnt by fire, instead of taking from another part of the forest. These partially burnt trees could be used in many of the same ways, without as much destruction of healthy forest. The lumberjacks would be in charge of planting seeds across the sites to ensure biodiversity of the forests. Without the many benefits of the forest, society would be at a great loss. Using these new techniques would protect our forests for future generations as they get to enjoy the assets of a healthy forest and the beauty of nature.