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Obama Administration Forest Report an Insult to Oregon

Portland, OR---Today, the Obama Administration is expected to release the findings of the Western Oregon Task Force. The Task Force, a special interdisciplinary team, was [announced](#) by Interior Secretary Salazar on October 14, 2009 following the Administration's decision to scrap the Western Oregon Plan Revisions (WOPR). Unfortunately, instead of offering a plan for moving forward in the absence of the WOPR, the report largely focuses on more bureaucracy and is a tacit endorsement of do-nothing forestry at its worst.

Representatives of the timber industry expressed extreme disappointment in the report. "This is the full set of avoidance strategies by an Administration that clearly does not want to deal with the problems facing forests and communities in rural western Oregon," said Tom Partin, President of the American Forest Resource Council. "During his campaign, President Obama himself called this sort of thing 'Washington-speak for we'll get back to you later.' It's been over a year since the WOPR was withdrawn and now we are handed another list of ways the government will go on failing Oregon's citizens."

The Task Force's Final Report calls for multiple reviews, committees, and processes that sidestep any attempt to resolve the issues that have hampered the management of these federal forests for the better part of two decades. Instead of directly addressing these issues, the Administration adds insult to injury by suggesting Oregon focus on "opportunities for economic diversification in O&C counties" and "redirecting the current budget and performance focus away from timber targets and toward forest health and restoration."

"We had hoped the report would provide clear direction for bringing sustainable management back to the 2.1 million acres of Oregon's O&C county timberlands to support our communities and local governments," Partin commented. "Instead, the report calls for several more layers of bureaucracy. As a former Chief of the Forest Service would put it, this is nothing but 'analysis paralysis'."

The WOPR was completed at the end of 2008 under a timeline dictated by a court order requiring the BLM to comply with the O&C Act.

"It took the BLM five years to complete this plan using the most comprehensive forest planning effort ever undertaken. It took this Administration six months to trash it. Now, after waiting more than a year since the WOPR was withdrawn, it is clear the Administration lacks the will to

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act to meet the needs of local communities, forest health and resiliency,” said Partin. “Communities throughout western Oregon are facing extreme economic dislocation due in part to a lack of timber coming from the BLM forests. Communities in southwest Oregon have been particularly hard hit and are left to wonder if they have become a sacrifice zone for this Administration.”

Unemployment in the counties most affected by the failure to manage these lands (Douglas, Lane, Curry, Coos, Jackson and Josephine) ranges from 12.4 to 16 percent. Counties long dependent on revenue sharing from timber sales also face an economic calamity as the County Payments program will end in 2011.

At the time the Task Force was announced, Salazar released a [package of 62 timber sales](#) cleared to go forward in 2010 under the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP). With great fanfare, the Department claimed that, by focusing on “non-controversial” young plantation thinning sales, nearly 230 million board feet of timber would be available this fiscal year for local mills throughout western Oregon. Now, with a little over two months remaining in the fiscal year, the 866,000 acre Medford district has sold only 2.2 million board feet of timber, less than 3 percent of the annual volume predicted under the NWFP and less than 10 percent of the volume promised in the Salazar sale package.

The Task Force Report admits “the agencies have been managing controversy by designing timber projects (primarily thinning and fuels reduction projects) that can expeditiously proceed. . . . *This opportunistic and risk-avoidance approach results in not implementing projects in areas where they are needed to achieve the full suite of landscape objectives.* This approach to forest management cannot continue indefinitely.”

Instead of holding itself accountable to fulfill the promise that Congress made when it passed the O&C Act to provide “a permanent source of timber supply, protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, and providing recreational facilities,” the Task Force suggests BLM abandon timber targets in favor of “forest health and restoration” targets.

“The BLM’s timber sale program is the only realistic option to maintain the health of these forests,” Partin said. “As Congress foresaw, a sustainable supply of timber provides multiple benefits in clean water, wildlife habitat, jobs, tax revenues to our local governments, and outdoor recreation. We need to do more, not less, responsible management of our natural resources in these economic times.”

“To say the least, we are very disappointed with this report and the Administration’s complete unwillingness to address the crisis facing Oregon’s struggling forest products industry and rural communities. Apparently, we will have to rely on Oregon’s Congressional Delegation to hold this Administration accountable and provide a real path forward for Oregon,” Partin concluded.

The American Forest Resource Council represents forest product manufacturers and landowners throughout the west and is based in Portland, Oregon.