



Oregon Forest Products Industry Outlines Continued Opposition to Wyden Oregon and California Land Grant Act

Senate Committee Also Holds Hearing on National Forest Ecosystem Improvement Act to Improve Health of Federal Forest Lands.

The Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee today held a hearing on the Oregon and California Land Grant Act of 2015 (S. 132), legislation sponsored by U.S. Senator Ron Wyden to change the management of O&C timberlands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The committee also held a hearing on the National Forest Ecosystem Improvement Act of 2015, legislation introduced by U.S. Senator John Barrasso to expedite ecosystem restoration projects on National Forests across the country.

Representing Western Oregon forest products manufacturers, American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) President Tom Partin highlighted how the Wyden O&C proposal lacks balance and won't address the needs of rural, forested communities. S. 132 is identical to Senator Wyden's proposal from last year (S. 1784), which was opposed by Oregon's forest products industry and the affected counties in Western Oregon.

"The Oregon and California Land Grant Act of 2015 would set aside 69 percent of the O&C lands as conservation areas where sustainable timber management is prohibited," Partin said. The remaining 31 percent would be subjected to the bill's new regulations and arbitrary forestry restrictions that will reduce harvest levels while providing no certainty that projects will actually be implemented. Unfortunately, the bill in its present form will not help our financially-distressed counties, will not solve the socio-economic problems in our rural communities, and will put forests of all ownerships further at risk of catastrophic wildfire. The Douglas Complex fire, which burned nearly 49,000 acres of private and BLM forests in 2013, serves a reminder that the lack of management has destructive consequences."

Despite claims the bill would "double" timber harvest levels on O&C lands, an [analysis commissioned by the Association of O&C Counties](#) suggests the legislation would result in long-term sustained harvests of only 85 to 171 million board feet (mmbf) per year, far less than the 1.2 billion board feet the O&C lands grow naturally and lower than current meager levels of approximately 200 mmbf.

"While we have serious concerns with Senator Wyden's O&C proposal, we are encouraged that the Committee is reviewing legislation to restore the health of our National Forests such as the National Forest Ecosystem Improvement Act to improve management on federal lands across the nation," Partin said.

[Testifying in opposition to S. 132](#), Steve Swanson, President and CEO of family-owned Swanson Group of Glendale, Ore., said the industry remained unified in opposition to the legislation. But he expressed the industry's commitment to working with Sen. Wyden and other members of the Congressional delegation on a solution that balances economic and environmental goals.

"Western Oregon's rural, forested communities are in dire need of a durable, workable solution, Swanson testified. "We need a solution that provides the remaining critical milling infrastructure with a predictable supply of raw materials; we need a solution that is going to get Oregonians back in the woods proactively managing our forests to reduce disease, insect, and fire risks. And, we need a solution that reflects the unique legal mandate of the O&C Lands, which is to provide permanent, sustainable timber harvests in Western Oregon."

Swanson testified that any effective O&C solution requires sufficient harvest levels to protect infrastructure and jobs; legal certainty against obstruction and delay; and stable and adequate funding for rural communities. He said Oregon's industry has agreed in the past to a compromise that would set aside a majority of O&C lands for permanent conservation, and would continue to work with other stakeholders to help achieve a balanced solution.

"Our industry has come to the table – and will continue to come to the table – to find a durable, workable compromise for the O&C Lands," Swanson said. "In fact, the timber industry supported the House O&C proposal, which dedicated more than half of the O&C Lands to conservation purposes while dedicating less than half to sustained yield timber production with sufficient legal certainty. While that was a difficult negotiation, it was the right thing to do for our communities and federal forests."

"Senator Wyden, despite our position on your bill, I want to assure you that our industry remains totally and completely committed to working with you and the rest of the Oregon delegation to find an effective, compromise O&C solution before we see further economic declines in our rural communities. Most rural communities that are dominated by federal forest ownership can't simply create alternative industries that defy the realities of their geography. With some of the most productive forestland in the entire world we would be foolish to even suggest it. Instead we should be taking steps to ensure that we restore active, sustainable management to the BLM O&C lands. We are excited to work with you in order to accomplish that mutual goal."

Swanson applauded the committee for its consideration of the National Forest Ecosystem Improvement Act, testifying the bill will help expedite critical forest health projects and support forest collaboration while upholding federal environmental laws.

"S. 1691 includes important provisions to address the primary factors limiting the management of our national forests today, namely litigation and cost and time required for the Forest Service to satisfy the analysis paralysis that constrains forest management projects," Swanson said. "With at least 65 million acres of national forest at risk to insects, disease, and catastrophic wildfire, S. 1691 includes an important – albeit modest – mandate to accomplish at least 1 million acres of mechanical restoration treatments annually. The legislation seeks to address analysis paralysis by placing reasonable limits on the size scope of the analysis required for these ecosystem restoration projects."

###