



July 25, 2017

Senator Lisa Murkowski, Chairman  
Senate Energy & Natural Resources  
Committee  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member  
Senate Energy & Natural Resources  
Committee  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Mike Lee, Chairman  
Senate Energy & Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests,  
and Mining  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Ron Wyden, Ranking Member  
Senate Energy & Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests,  
and Mining  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Murkowski and Lee and Ranking Member Cantwell and Wyden:

On behalf of the American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) and its members, thank you for the opportunity to comment on S. 1548, the Oregon Wildlands Act. During the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, AFRC sent a similar letter to the Committee regarding S. 1699, a previous version of the Oregon Wildlands Act. Since then, two major decisions by the previous Administration have further restricted public access and science-based management of Federal lands in Western Oregon.

In August 2016, the Obama Administration finalized the Resource Management Plans (RMPs) for the statutorily unique O&C Lands, which are required by law to be managed for “permanent forest production.” Despite the clear timber harvest mandate of the O&C Act of 1937, the RMPs only allow sustainable forest management on *20 percent* of over 2 million acres of some of the most productive forestland in the world. Meaning, since the Oregon Wildlands Act was introduced last Congress, more than 1,800,000 acres of O&C Lands and other BLM lands in western Oregon have been administratively designated for conservation purposes.<sup>1</sup>

In January 2017, days before leaving office, President Obama used the Antiquities Act to nearly double the size of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument (CSNM) in Southern Oregon. The expansion further eroded the O&C land base by thousands of acres, will reduce the availability of timber harvests to the local manufacturing base by as much as 6 million board feet per year (the equivalent of 72 direct jobs per year in the hardest hit rural communities), and will create

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<sup>1</sup> Page 82, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Resource Management Plans for Western Oregon  
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user conflicts and access issues for private landowners within the highly fragmented, “checkerboard” landscape. It is within this context, we offer our updated comments.

AFRC and its members care deeply about the health and sustainability of public forestlands. In fact, the business model and future success of AFRC members is *dependent* upon the responsible management, ecological health, and long-term sustainability of our national forests and BLM lands.

AFRC and its members also care deeply about the vitality of rural communities in which they work, live, and recreate. Our members employ thousands of rural Oregonians and generate tens of millions of dollars in economic benefits to communities and the state – to say nothing of the charitable contributions, volunteer hours, scholarships, sponsorships, and investments our members make in their communities.

**But rural Oregonians faces serious challenges, including an economic crisis.** Consider, for example, that last year Josephine County’s last sawmill, Rough & Ready Lumber, closed its doors, despite having retooled in an effort to run its mill on smaller logs more readily available under current forest management regimes. The closure of the 90-year-old, family-owned business resulted in the loss of employment for 85 Oregonians in Cave Junction, which is equivalent to the loss of thousands of jobs in Portland.

While data is sparse, one of the best ways to track local economic conditions it to examine the number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. The number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch is a key indicator of poverty levels in a county or school district. In 1999 (the year before the original Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument was created by President Clinton), 37.1 percent of students in Jackson County (home of the monument) were eligible for free or reduced lunch. In 2017, the year the monument was expanded by President Obama, 54.1 percent of students in Jackson County are now eligible for free or reduce lunch.<sup>2</sup> While the CSNM may or may not bring more seasonal visitors to rural Oregon, it does not appear to be improving the overall quality of life of those living next to the monument – including our children.

Additional designations in western Oregon will only exacerbate the dire economic conditions in rural communities that have not seen any relief – much less an economic boom – from recreation and tourism promised from wilderness, Wild and Scenic, and national monument designations and expansions.

**Rural Oregonians face a social crisis.** Secure Rural Schools payments to rural Oregon that support essential services such as sheriff patrols, jails, road maintenance, mental health, and education have declined significantly and have now expired with dwindling hope that future support payments will be renewed by Congress. Even if payments are renewed in the current Congress, they will only provide a fraction of historic SRS and timber receipt levels. Property tax constraints imposed by the Oregon Constitution and the Federal Government’s control over a huge percentage of Oregon’s forestland (as high as 70 percent in some counties), severely restricts Oregon counties’ ability to meet the most basic government functions. Unless there is a

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<sup>2</sup> Oregon Department of Education, Free and Reduced Lunch Reports. 1999 and 2017. Found at: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/sfda/reports/r0061Select2.asp>

change in how revenue is generated in rural Oregon, these responsibilities will eventually be assumed by the State of Oregon and Oregon taxpayers.

**Rural Oregonians face an ecological crisis.** Unlike a majority of Oregonians who live in or near a metropolitan area, those living in rural, forested communities suffer disproportionately from our national forest health crisis. Overstocked, unnatural, and fire prone public forestlands expose private property, private forestlands, houses and schools, drinking water supplies and watersheds, and wildlife habitat to unacceptable economic and public safety risks.

Oregonians are working in good faith to find balanced, comprehensive solutions to all of these crises. Just over the last five years, representatives from the forest products community, environmental advocates, elected officials and local leaders, and other interested stakeholders have reinvigorated efforts to come to the table in order to craft solutions with the goal of increasing economic, social, and ecological health in rural Oregon. In fact, AFRC members have collectively spent thousands of dollars defending the collaborative process and collaborative groups in Federal court.

Oregonians' willingness to engage in challenging conversations to resolve our state's crises culminated in two legislative efforts. During the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, Senator Wyden and Senator Merkley introduced legislation (S.132) intended to double BLM timber harvests in Western Oregon, create jobs, generate receipts to rural counties, and to protect some of Oregon's most iconic places (including some of the places in S. 1548). Three members of Oregon's House Delegation worked during the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress to pass bipartisan legislation (Title III, H.R. 1526) to achieve similar economic, social, and ecological outcomes for Oregon's BLM O&C Lands. These efforts clearly demonstrate that Oregon's Congressional Delegation understands that in order to find a durable solution, the solution must be balanced and comprehensive.

AFRC has been, and will continue to be, a proactive and constructive partner in helping find a balanced, holistic solutions to rural Oregon's crises, which S. 1548 does not accomplish. It would not sustain or create additional family-wage jobs in rural Oregon (tourism, recreation, and scenic values would continue under the status quo without S. 1548's designations). It would not address the plight of rural communities nor generate substantial county revenues to provide basic services. It would not address the forest health crisis in Western Oregon or reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires (it would arguably increase the risk of wildfires due to the lack of proactive management).

AFRC strongly believes the best way to *undermine* progress on a durable solution to Oregon's rural crises is to pass unbalanced solutions promoted by a handful of interest groups. The controversial Resource Management Plans and Antiquities Act expansion of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument over the opposition of local counties, elected officials, and residents has generated significant controversy and fueled multiple lawsuits from all sides. Passage of this bill would further weaken relationships, undercut trust between stakeholders, and tip the scales in favor of a single priority.

Again, AFRC and its members care deeply about our public lands and our rural communities. We believe in compromise and finding realistic and implementable solutions. That is exactly

why AFRC cannot support S. 1548 in its current form and strongly urges the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources to continue directing its attention and focus to comprehensive forestry legislation that will address rural Oregon's economic, social, and ecological crises.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Travis Joseph". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Travis Joseph, President  
American Forest Resource Council