

A **draft** position of the Coos Chapter, Oregon Society of American Foresters

The Coos Chapter, OSAF advocates that with the expiration of S.1608 that timber harvest on federal forest lands (BLM and USFS) be increased so that there will be an integrated balance between social, economic and environmental values in the management of these lands. This action will provide funds needed by counties to support schools, roads and needed services such as law enforcement; it will cause these lands to be actively managed to promote forest health and provide the multiple values they were chartered by congress to achieve; the local milling and manufacturing infrastructure will be supported to provide family wage jobs and promote long term intergenerational community stability. Presently our country is experiencing unsustainable trade and budget deficits. Increasing timber harvest from federal forest lands should decrease the import of foreign wood products which will reduce the trade deficit. Increased supplies of federal timber will increase forest products industry activity and employment, favorably affect local economies thru the economic multiplier effect, and decrease or eliminate the present county dependency on federal appropriated funds thereby incrementally reducing the budget deficit. This action is tiered to and supportive of the position of the Oregon Society of American Foresters on Commercial Timber Harvest on Public Lands adopted on February XX, 2007.

Issue On January 3, 2007 the Coos County Commissioners announced that because the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act has expired, that the county would be forced to layoff nearly one-quarter of its work force whose funding was dependent on this legislation. This action will severely affect all government services provided by the county including law enforcement, social services and many others. Coos county residents will suffer from this reduction. While congressional representatives are actively trying to renew this federal program it may only be restored at a lower funding level or for a short period of time. The Coos chapter's position is that Congress should consider and pass legislation that insures a sustainable level of timber harvest is conducted on federal forest lands that achieves the above balance of values.

Background

Congress enacted in 1908 and subsequently amended a law that requires 25 percent of the revenues derived from National Forest System lands be paid to States for use by the counties in which the lands are situated for the benefit of public schools and roads. Likewise in 1937 Congress enacted and subsequently amended a law that requires 75 percent of the revenues derived from the revested and reconveyed grant lands, managed by the BLM, be paid to the counties in which those lands are situated to be used as other county funds, of which 50 percent is to be used as other county funds. These funds were not a "gift" but recognition from Congress that by its decision to secure federal ownership of these lands that it was depriving counties, in which these lands were situated, of revenues they would otherwise receive if the lands were held in private ownership.

Up until the early 1990's Coos and other counties received significant revenue from the sale of timber from the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management managed forest land. The counties, logically, became dependent on these funds to provide needed services to its citizens. Beginning at this time, however, legal decisions and appeals involving the endangered species act dramatically reduced federal timber harvest. In the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, Congress recognized this trend and ameliorated its adverse consequences by providing an alternative annual safety net payment to 72 counties in Oregon, Washington, and northern California in which Federal timber sales had been restricted or prohibited by administrative and judicial decisions to protect the northern spotted owl and other endangered species.

Also in 1993, President Bill Clinton initiated a process that resulted in the signing of a Record of Decision for the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) in 1994. The five key principles of this plan are: never forget human and economic dimensions of issues; protect long-term health of forests, wildlife and waterways; focus on scientifically sound, ecologically credible and legally responsible strategies and implementation; produce a predictable and sustainable level of timber sales and non-timber resources; ensure that Federal agencies work together. The NWFP had a stated goal of harvesting 1 billion board feet of timber per year. After 10 years of operation there was a high degree of dissatisfaction with this plan. Environmentalists disagreed with efforts to weaken the survey and manage requirements (since resolved by court decisions in their favor). The Bush administration and forest industry officials were very concerned because of continued lawsuits, appeals, and rigid rules for survey and manage requirements that the NWFP has produced only about one-third of the planned timber harvest volume. The Northwest Forest Plan has not produced the balanced integration of social, economic, and environmental values that its key principles require. The fiscal crisis that many counties are now experiencing has made that obvious.

The 1993 Act (above) which was providing payments to counties was expiring in 2000. In its place Senators Wyden and Craig sponsored S1608 - The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. This legislation directed that \$1.3 billion over a 6 year period be paid to Oregon counties for education, roads and county services. Since this act has expired these payments to the counties will end.

Discussion

While expiration of S1608 has resulted in the current funding crisis for Coos County, the root cause of this situation is the dramatic reduction in timber harvest from the 1980's to the present (an average of 4 billion board feet to less than 400 million board feet). Complicating the renewal of S 1608 is the huge and unsustainable budget deficit our country is now experiencing and that we should all be concerned about. The Coos chapter advocates that in the short term, something like S1608 should be enacted to alleviate the immediate crisis. In the long term, however, new federal forest management legislation is needed that establishes harvest levels that truly balance social, economic, and environmental values.