

## Timber Harvest on Federal Forests: A Positive Response to the Expiration of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (PL 106-393).

A position of the Coos Chapter, Oregon Society of American Foresters (OSAF)

**With the expiration of PL 106-393, the Coos Chapter of the OSAF advocates increases in timber harvests on federal forest lands (BLM and USFS) to promote a stronger and better integrated balance between social, economic and environmental values in the management of these lands. This approach will provide funds needed by counties to support schools, roads and services such as law enforcement; it will emphasize active management to promote forest health and provide the multiple values Congress intended to achieve on federal forests; it will support the local milling and manufacturing infrastructure, provide family wage jobs, and promote long term intergenerational community stability. The U.S. is now experiencing very large trade and budget deficits. Increases in timber harvest from federal lands can help reduce the import of foreign wood products and these deficits. Increasing the timber supply from federal lands can enhance the forest products industry, employment, and favorably affect local economies through the economic multiplier effect, and reduce or eliminate county dependency on federal appropriations.**

### Issue

On January 3, 2007 the Coos County Commissioners announced that, because the federal Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (PL 106-393) had expired and its mandated payments to counties lost, the county would be forced to layoff nearly one-quarter of its work force. This reduction is expected to severely impact most government services provided by the county, including law enforcement, social services and many others. Congressional representatives are actively trying to renew this federal program but it may only be restored at a lower funding level or for a short period of time. These serious developments are occurring at a time when local federal forests have an increasing amount of standing timber that could benefit from active management to promote forest health, diverse habitats, and reduced wildfire hazards.

Background (See Selected References #3 and #4)

Congress enacted in 1908 and subsequently amended a law (35 Stat. 251, 260) that requires 25 percent of the revenues derived from National Forest System lands be paid to local counties in which the lands are situated, for the benefit of public schools and roads. Similarly, in 1937, Congress enacted and subsequently amended a law (O&C Act) that requires that 75 percent of the revenues from O&C lands in western Oregon managed by the BLM and USFS be distributed to the counties based on the (counties) proportionate assessed land value in 1915. These funds were not considered a “gift” but rather reflected

the recognition by Congress that extensive federal lands deprived local counties of property taxes and other revenues they would otherwise receive if the lands were in private ownership.

For over half a century, Coos and other counties received significant revenue from the sale of timber from the lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. These funds thus were an established and important part of the budget foundation for county services to its citizens. Beginning in the 1990's, however, legal decisions and appeals involving the Endangered Species Act and other policies dramatically reduced federal timber harvest in the region. In the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, Congress recognized this trend and ameliorated its adverse effects with an alternative annual "safety net" payment to 72 counties in Oregon, Washington, and northern California where Federal timber sales had been restricted or prohibited by administrative and judicial decisions.

Also in the 1990's, the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) was developed under five key guiding principles: "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". After 10 years of application, however, there remains a high degree of dissatisfaction with this plan. Some have disagreed with efforts to modify or reduce management restrictions under the NWFP while others have been concerned that the continued lawsuits, appeals and rigid requirements have led to only about one-third of the planned timber harvest volume of 1 billion board feet per year. Clearly, the Northwest Forest Plan has not produced the balanced integration of social, economic and environmental values that was its original goal. The fiscal crisis that many counties are now experiencing is an obvious reflection of this failure.

The 1993 Act (above) that provided payments to counties was scheduled to expire in 2000, Congress then passed PL 106-393 - The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. This legislation directed \$1.3 billion over a 6 year period to be paid to Oregon counties for education, roads and county services, but it was allowed to expire in 2006 and with no replacement legislation these payments to the counties have ended.

## **Conclusion**

The expiration of PL 106-393 precipitated the current funding crisis for Coos county, but the root cause of this situation has been the dramatic reduction in federal timber harvests from the 1980's to the present in Oregon (i.e., from an average of 4 billion board feet to less than 400 million board feet). Complicating the renewal or replacement of PL 106-393 is the very large budget deficit our country is now experiencing, which is a critical and much broader issue. In the near term, the Coos SAF chapter supports new legislation

similar to PL 106-393 to alleviate the immediate crisis. Over the long term, however, new federal legislation is needed to establish timber harvest levels that balance social, economic and environmental values in a much more effective and sustainable manner.

### **Selected References**

1. Oregon SAF. 2007. Commercial timber harvest on public lands in Oregon – A position of the Oregon Society of American Foresters. Adopted February 1, 2007. 2 p.
2. Oregon SAF. 2003. Active management to achieve and maintain healthy forests – A position of the Oregon Society of American Foresters. Adopted September 19, 2003. 2 p.
3. Public Law 106 - 393, 106<sup>th</sup> Congress. October 30, 2000. Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000. Section 2 - Findings And Purposes.
4. Regional Ecosystem Office Website. 2006. Northwest Forest Plan Overview.

*Adopted by the Executive Committee of the Coos Chapter, OSAF. August 7, 2007*

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