

# Clatsop County opts out of timber suit

## Commissioners heard 'overwhelming message' from public

By Jack Heffernan  
EO Media Group

A \$1.4 billion lawsuit pitting Oregon timber counties against the state will no longer include Clatsop County.

The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners voted 3-2 Wednesday, Jan. 18, to opt out of the class-action suit that included 15 counties throughout Oregon. The suit claims the state Department of Forestry has not maximized revenue from timber harvests on land the counties turned over to the state to manage.

Hundreds of people, both in person and in writing, have offered opinions to the county since it was included in the suit filed by Linn County last year. Out of the 19 people who spoke during the comment session Wednesday night, 11 voiced their support for opting out.

"The overwhelming message from public testimony



EO MEDIA GROUP/FILE PHOTO

Clatsop County has opted out of a \$1.4 billion timber lawsuit against the state.

has been in favor of balanced forest management and against the Linn County lawsuit," Scott Lee, the board's chairman, said.

Commissioners Sarah Nebeker and Kathleen Sullivan joined Lee in voting to opt out of the lawsuit. One of the most common issues both commissioners and opponents of the suit raised was that, should the state lose in court, county residents could be affected by higher state taxes.

The fear of higher taxes stems from how the state could

pay the counties back for the lost timber revenue.

"There is no free money here, as far as I can see," said Nebeker, who also expressed concerns about the future ramifications on state forestry policies. "I do not think this is a good or wise way to change such far-reaching rules and practices."

### Linn County

Linn County, with financial aid from a number of private timber industry groups, filed the lawsuit against the

state in March, claiming it had failed to meet an agreement to maximize timber profits. In October, a Linn County Circuit judge's ruling gave the lawsuit class action status, meaning 14 other counties — including Clatsop — and 130 taxing entities could participate.

Commissioner Lisa Clement, who voted against opting out along with Commissioner Lianne Thompson, said while she was concerned with the potential rise in state taxes as a result of a successful law-

suit, she saw the timber issue as a legal, not political, issue.

Clatsop County's roughly 147,000 acres of forestland represented 23 percent of all land included in the suit. Sheriff Tom Bergin, Warrenton Fiber's Martin Nygaard and people who work in the local timber industry were among those who urged commissioners to remain in the suit.

Both Nebeker and Sullivan said the lawsuit favors Linn County's interests more than those of Clatsop County.

"(The lawsuit) assumes that Linn County and Clatsop County agree with the greatest permanent value rule," said Sullivan, who earlier in the meeting was sworn in for her first term as a commissioner. "While not perfect, the forest management plan is working."

Thompson said that while she "hated" the lawsuit itself, she wanted Clatsop County to have a say in how its forests are managed.

"What I'm interested in is how best to control the outcomes," she said.

Lee disagreed.

"Why would we join a lawsuit that demands maximum timber harvest over all other interests if we don't sup-

port that position?" he said.

Should the counties win the lawsuit, Clatsop County might have received \$262 million. The county budget, by comparison, is roughly \$57.6 million.

Other taxing districts, such as Clatsop Community College, would receive some of the money should they decide to remain in the lawsuit.

County Manager Cameron Moore said it was unlikely the county would consider filing a separate lawsuit against the state.

Moore said it's not entirely certain what the board's decision will mean for the county or the lawsuit. "I don't think anyone will know what the exact impact of Clatsop County's decision will be for at least a year," he said.

Linn County Commissioner Roger Nyquist said the decision Wednesday night is between the board of commissioners and its constituents and it will not hamper the lawsuit going forward.

"Clatsop County must be in a much better financial situation than the rest of us, which is a good thing," Nyquist said. "I don't know how they go to the voters now and ask for more money."

# Haystack lecture speaker speaks on China's shrinking coastal wetlands

By Nancy McCarthy  
For Cannon Beach Gazette

It's not easy to fill in a wetland or a coastal tideland in the United States. Federal laws aimed at protecting wetlands make sure of that.

But in China, very few regulations exist, according to Roy W. Lowe, a volunteer working with the World Wildlife who was the featured speaker for January's Haystack Lecture Series.

"Anyone can fill a wetland anywhere at any time" in China, Lowe said.

As a result of the lack of regulation in China, massive construction of new cities, ports and industrial areas on former wetlands bordered by the Yellow Sea is destroying the habitat that millions of migrating birds depend on, Lowe said.

"They are all declining very precipitously," Lowe said. "There's a huge decline."

Birds such as the bar-tailed godwit, which flies nonstop from New Zealand to the Yellow Sea — a distance of 6,800 miles — in nine days are being threatened. When they reach China, they depend on the wetlands for food to replenish the fat they lost in the first leg of their journey so they can continue their migration to Alaska, another 4,500 miles away.

A medium-sized shorebird, called the "red knot," feeds only on small crabs in the wetlands when it lands in Bohai Bay on the Yellow Sea from



NANCY MCCARTHY/FOR CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Roy Lowe, a World Wildlife volunteer, was the featured speaker for January's Haystack Lecture Series

Russia, on its way to Australia, Lowe said.

The gobbling up of feeding grounds is becoming so serious, he added, that the spoon-billed sandpiper could be extinct by 2020.

In all, 36 distinct species of shorebirds use the Australasian Flyway, which includes 22 countries and encircles more population than all of the rest of the world. An estimated 50 million birds use the flyway and depend on the nutrient-rich mudflats and wetlands in China for food, Lowe said. Yet two-thirds of the coastline has disappeared since 1950, converted to expansion of coastal cities.

A former U.S. Fish and Wildlife project leader with the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Lowe made several trips to China during his career to recruit exchange students to come to the

United States. In 2014, he was invited to speak at an international workshop in China that focused on the loss of wetlands there.

After retiring in 2015, Lowe began volunteering with the Paulson Institute, a Chicago-based think tank, which works with the Chinese government and businesses to improve economic growth and environmental protection in both countries. The institute's Global Parks project partners with the World Wildlife Fund to find ways to sustain the environment.

Lowe continues to travel to China to conduct small workshops with wildlife managers. The workshops focus on developing strategies to protect wetlands, a new experience for many of the participants, Lowe said.

In a recent visit to the affected area, Lowe counted

72 construction cranes along the coast. The leaders of local provinces compete for income-producing developments.

"It's all about money and funding projects," he said. "We're trying to get the environment into that discussion."

Every month, at least 270 acres are filled in to make way for factories, cities and high rise apartments that stretch way beyond the former coastline. At least 1.25 million people are moved every month from the countryside into cities, Lowe said.

"I wonder what will happen in an earthquake," he said. "It's scary to think about what the future holds for them."

The reclamation of wetlands also is bound to affect China's seafood industry, he added. In 2011, about 28 million tons of seafood, with a value of \$200 billion US, was produced in the area. The shrinking coastline, oil drilling and pollution threaten that production.

"We're afraid the people in China are going to learn this lesson later," Lowe said.

Lowe's talk was part of the Haystack Lecture Series, sponsored by the Friends of Haystack Rock. The next lecture will be "How to Help Protect Over 50,000 Acres of Forest in Clatsop County" with Bob Van Dyk, policy director for the Oregon & California Wild Salmon Center in Portland. The lecture will begin at 7 p.m. Feb. 8 in the Cannon Beach Library.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Salmon River estuary system.

## Protecting our waterways, salmon

Join Lower Nehalem Watershed Council for a presentation by author and scientist Dan Bottom examining the science behind estuary wetlands restoration and the recovery of salmon populations, Thursday, Feb. 9, at the Pine Grove Community House 1225 Laneda Ave., in Manzanita.

Although estuaries have long been recognized as biologically productive places, their value as nursery habitat for juvenile salmon has not been fully appreciated until recently. The first comprehensive study of juvenile salmon in an Oregon tidal marsh began less than 20 years ago in the Salmon River estuary. Millions of dollars are spent each year to restore estuarine wetlands to support salmon recovery efforts on the coast and in the Columbia River. Researchers



Dan Bottom

at Salmon River have now quantified the direct contributions of estuary restoration to Chinook and Coho salmon populations.

Bottom served as a fishery research biologist and project leader in state and federal government for 38 years, including 22 years with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Research Section in Corvallis and 16 years with NOAA's Northwest Fisheries Science Center in Newport. He serves as a member of the expert regional technical group for the Columbia River estuary and as courtesy faculty at Oregon State University.

Doors open at 6:30 p.m. for refreshments. The presentation begins following an update from Lower Nehalem Watershed Council at 7 p.m.

This event is part of the Lower Nehalem Watershed Council's regular speaker series.

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