

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. 11, 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 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



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

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Linn County Commissioner

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



Scott Lee
Lianne Thompson

potential rise in state taxes as a result of a successful lawsuit, 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 support 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.”

Volunteers lauded at annual fire and rescue awards banquet

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the annual Seaside Fire and Rescue Awards Banquet held Jan. 14. “You’re not just volunteers. You’re volunteer firepersons who have been trained and who are adequate for the challenges that come up.”

In 2016, the department responded to a record 1,329 calls and held drills on a weekly basis. In addition, the Seaside Fire and Rescue Association participated in numerous fundraising and community service activities, including providing support and a meal to public responders who attended the memorial service for fallen Seaside Police Officer Jason Gooding in February; co-sponsoring the Seaside Safety Fair with the city of Seaside; and donating a tree for the 2016 Providence Seaside Festival of Trees that raised about \$1,000.

By mid-January of this year, the department already had responded to 76 calls, compared to 46 at the same point in 2016.

“It’s looking like, if things hold true, we will be having another record year,” Association President Katie Bulleset said.

Lt. Jeramy Houston added that when started volunteering 15 years ago, the department was averaging about 500 calls per year.

“It’s just gone up and up and up since then,” Houston said.

What makes it possible for the department to achieve a high response rate is the



KATHERINE LACAZE/FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL

Seaside Fire Chief Joey Daniels presents service awards during the annual Seaside Fire and Rescue Awards Banquet.

work of volunteers. The organization runs off the effort of men and women who not only donate their time, but get the necessary training to put themselves in risky situations and succeed.

“The fire service in a community is really, I think, the core of who we are,” Barber said. “You do your work without a lot of attention or acclaim, but you do it because you’re committed to the calling to serve the community in a way no other people do in our community.”

While a prevalent spirit of volunteerism is evident in many different areas through various means in Seaside, the firefighters and medical responders provide a unique type of service.

“Most of you are risking your lives, in many cases to preserve the life and property of people you do not even know,” Barber said. “My hat is off to you. I just really want to underscore how much we appreciate what you do.”



KATHERINE LACAZE/FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL

Mayor Jay Barber speaks to attendees at the annual Seaside Fire and Rescue Awards Banquet.

Div. Chief David Rankin presented the EMS Provider of the Year Award. Echoing sentiments expressed by Gordon Houston during his presentation of special recognition awards, Rankin described Roberts, the winner, as “a very enthusiastic and dedicated member of our department.”

Not only did he lead in call response and drill attendance, but he also obtained his EMR certification in 2015, which allowed him to contribute more in 2016.

“He’s put a lot of work and effort into this year, and he has a huge heart,” Rankin said. “I’m glad to see how far he’s come and where’s he going to go.”

In presenting the Fire Officer of the Year award to Div. Chief Chris Dugan, Bulleset relied on statistics, stating he “leads by example.” Out of the department’s 1,329 calls, Dugan responded to 688, or about 51.8 percent. Additionally, 154 of the calls took place between the hours of midnight and 7



KATHERINE LACAZE/FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL

Div. Chief David Rankin (left) presents Doug Roberts with the EMS Provider of the Year award.

a.m., and Dugan responded to 77, or 67 percent.

When she asked the other members to describe Dugan ahead of the event, Bulleset said, she was provided with words such as “safe,” “knowledgeable,” “noncritical,” “encouraging,” “upbeat” and “positive.”

“[Dugan] consistently has a smile and a friendly word everyone, even at 3 a.m. in the morning,” she said. “He is very popular among his fellow firefighters and also within the community.”

Finally, Daniels presented the Firefighter of the Year award to Cesar Alcala.

“It’s hard to choose out of a bunch of good firefighters and the time they can commit,” Daniels said. However, in 2016, Alcala “stood out a little higher than most.” He attended 46 drills and achieved his Firefighter I and Hazmat Operation certifications.

Another notable aspect of 2016 was the establishment of the department’s part-time work program. For several years, a part-time employee worked about 20 hours doing administrative work at the fire station. In July 2016, however, the new program went into effect.

Now, various department members, in shifts of four hours, oversee the office from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily doing administrative tasks, such as data entry, rig checks, scheduling drills, taking calls and more. The program benefits the department, but also gives the members an opportunity to earn a little money while learning the inner-workings of the organization.

“Everybody that’s participating in the program is getting to learn all the behind-the-scenes stuff at the fire station that they didn’t really understand was there before,” Gordon Houston said.

Bonamici reintroduces tsunami bill

EO Media Group

U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici on Tuesday, Jan. 10, reintroduced the Tsunami Warning, Education, and Research Act.

The legislation would strengthen tsunami detection and warning systems, improve response and resiliency and better protect communities vulnerable to a tsunami.

“Many Oregonians, including students from Seaside High School in coastal Oregon, have told me that there won’t be enough time to make it to safety when there’s a tsunami,” Bonamici, D-Oregon, said in a release. “I applaud Seaside residents for passing a bond recently to rebuild schools on higher ground to reduce the dangers of tsunami, and state and local governments are working hard to pre-

“But the federal government can do more to help keep coastal communities safe through improved warning systems. This bill is one part of the solution. Preparing for tsunami is a life-or-death matter for residents of coastal Oregon and other coastal communities.”

In the 2015-16 session, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed a similar version of the bill, which did not pass the Senate.

Bonamici received sponsorship from 11 other representatives, including fellow Oregon Democrats Peter DeFazio and Earl Blumenauer; Republican Jaime Herrera Beutler from Washington state; and Washington state Democrats Denny Heck, Pramila Jayapal and Derek Kilmer.

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Deadline to enter is **Wednesday, January 25th at 5pm**
Entries will be printed in The Daily Astorian on January 31st.

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