

Timber interests welcome Trump win; environmentalists worry

By Dylan Darling
The Register-Guard

EUGENE (AP) — When he visited Eugene last spring, Donald Trump promised to revive Oregon's timber industry, which for decades has been hamstrung by severe curbs against logging in federal forests west of the Cascades summit.

"Timber jobs (in Oregon) have been cut in half since 1990," he said during his May 6 stump speech to a revved-up crowd at the Lane Events Center. "We are going to bring them up, folks, we are going to do it really right, we are going to bring them up, OK?"

Trump didn't offer specifics as to how — or how much — he would revive logging and milling, but he alluded to loosening federal restrictions.

Now, Trump supporters and critics in Oregon will see if he can live up to his promise.

Trump's election as president brings optimism to the state timber industry and acute uneasiness to environmental groups that have fought for decades to ensure that logging on federal lands complies with federal environmental law.

Both sides now wonder if and how Trump's administration and Republican lawmakers might seek to weaken long-standing key environmental laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, reports *The Register-Guard*. Enforcement of that law and the National Environmental Policy Act were key in the late 1980s and early 1990s to halting the intensive, widespread logging that had prevailed for decades on federal forests in Western Oregon, Western Washington and

Northern California.

The Northwest Forest Plan, implemented by the Clinton administration in 1994, has severely restricted logging on federal lands in the region ever since.

But undoing the Northwest Forest Plan and rolling back environmental laws are not necessarily easy tasks — even with a Republican in the White House and a GOP-controlled House and Senate.

Timber industry "cautiously optimistic"

Timber interests in Oregon welcome Trump as president.

"We're cautiously optimistic it's going to present some opportunities for us to put people back to work in rural communities and certainly to improve the health of our forest," said Jim Geisinger, executive vice president of the Associated Oregon Loggers. "For the last two decades, we've just seen too many catastrophic wildfires, too many mills close, too many rural communities fall apart socially and economically, and I think this will be an opportunity to restore some of that."

The Salem-based trade association represents 1,000 logging companies in Oregon.

For 40 years, Geisinger has been a voice for logging in the state, traveling to Washington, D.C., to speak about how federal policies affect the industry.

Cause for concern for environmentalists

The worry among environmental groups contrasts the optimism of timber interests in regards to how Trump and the officials he appoints will manage public forests.

Possibilities for agriculture secretary, who oversees the U.S. Forest Service, include Texas Agriculture Secretary

Sid Miller, and possibilities for interior secretary, who oversees the Bureau of Land Management, include former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin and Lucas Oil co-founder Forrest Lucas, according to news reports. All of them lean toward resource extraction rather than preservation.

Federal forests in Western Oregon are split between the Forest Service and the BLM.

"We don't think Trump has a mandate to weaken environmental protections or return to old-growth clearcutting on public lands," Arran Robertson, spokesman for Oregon Wild, wrote in an email Friday. The Portland-based nonprofit group advocates for old-growth protection.

"Clearly, those were not major issues in the presidential campaign," he wrote. "However, there are certainly folks in the logging industry who feel the time is ripe to repeal the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, etc. ... and prioritize their interests in public lands over other values (like tourism and recreation, clean drinking water and wildlife)."

For decades, environmental groups brought and won lawsuits based on the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and other environmental laws.

"Everything appears to be on the table at this point," said Josh Laughlin, executive director of environmental group Cascadia Wildlands in Eugene. "I would like to think that the decades of progress that have been made, in terms of safeguarding the values that these unique landscapes in the Northwest and that the laws provide, will be upheld

through the power of the people."

Oregon's delegation

Both senators and four out of five Oregon congressmen are Democrats. U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, is the lone Republican representing Oregon.

Some in the past have carefully calibrated their positions, calling for more logging on federal lands, but also increased environmental protections — two seemingly contradictory goals.

"Sen. (Ron) Wyden will continue to stand up for clean air and clean water, will keep working to find real solutions to bring jobs back to rural areas and continue fighting to protect Oregon's and the nation's treasured public lands," Keith Chu, a spokesman for the Oregon Democrat, wrote in an email.

Resistance in Congress could be enough to stop changes to environmental laws, Travis Joseph, president of the American Forest Resource Council, wrote in an email.

The Portland-based association advocates for sustained-yield timber harvests in public forests.

"Even under Republican control, it's difficult to imagine Congress will make

major revisions or changes to (the) ESA or the Clean Water Act," he wrote. "Those changes would take 60 votes in the Senate, and those votes aren't there. However, federal timber harvests can be meaningfully increased in a manner that is entirely consistent with the ESA and Clean Water Act."

The GOP held onto its slim majority in the Senate in Tuesday's election. Republicans have 51 out of the 100 seats and may win one more in a December runoff in Louisiana. Democrats have 46 seats, and independents hold two.

Trump talks timber

During his May visit, Trump read to the audience at the Lane Events Center facts his statisticians compiled for him about Oregon. Timber topped the list.

"Timber is a crucial industry but it has been hammered by — oh, why are we surprised? — by federal regulations, right?" Trump said. "Oregon lost three-fourths of its timber mills since 1980. Is that possible? Three-fourths? That is a lot of timber mills, right?"

Since then, Trump has provided no specifics about how he would change regulations.



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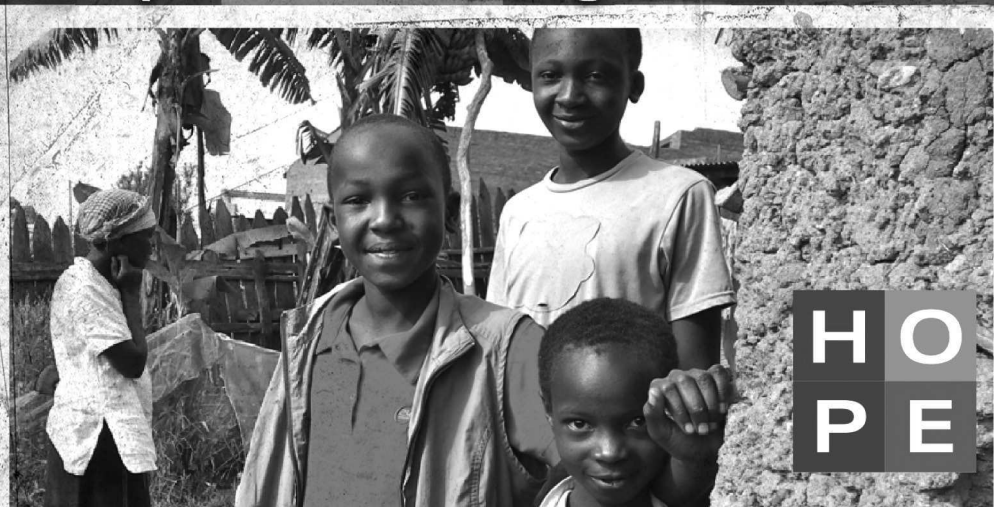
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