Congressional truce not effective, both camps say

By Jeff Barnard Associated Press

GRANTS PASS (AP) — Environmentalists and representatives of the timber industry expressed doubts that the U.S. Forest Service could turn out the timber called for by Congress in a short-term truce between loggers and the northern spotted owl.

The two sides each said Friday they gave up too much and the solution that came out of political wrangling stretching back to June 24 may be too little too late for timber-dependent towns as well as the spotted owl.

Both sides also agreed that management of the Northwest's forest has now been thrust on a national stage and, for better or worse, will never again be a local issue.

The last ditch deal called for the Forest Service to produce 7.7 billion board feet of timber in Oregon and Washington and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to produce 1.9 billion board feet in Oregon in the next year.

The deal restored some judicial review of timber sales, ordered the Forest Service to reconsider its management plans for the spotted owl in the next year, and implemented a policy of preserving environmentally significant stands of old growth.

The compromise was a far cry from the deal proposed June 24 in Salem by Sen. Mark Hatfield after convening a summit of environmentalists and timber industry representatives to free some of the timber locked up by lawsuits brought to preserve habitat for the spotted owl.

Faced with a growing timber shortage due to lawsuits over the spotted owl. Hatfield had proposed a guaranteed harvest of 8 billion board feet of timber from national forests in Oregon and Washington and 2 billion board feet from BLM lands in Oregon with no chance of judicial review.

"There are improvements in the final version over what was originally proposed," said Vic Sher, attorney for the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, which handled the spotted owl lawsuit against the Forest Service. The organization is separate from the Sierra Club.

Sher said he was happy to see the Forest Service directed to reassess its management plans for the spotted owl, a primary goal of the spotted owl lawsuit.

"There is good direction concerning consideration of fragmentation of ecologically significant old growth forest stands," he said. "The problem is the cut level is so high that you wonder how the Forest Service is going to be able to give meaningful consideration to that directive."

The deal calls for releasing 1.1 billion board feet out of the 1.7 billion under court injunction in the Forest Service lawsuit. Sher said.

"The biologists have been telling us that we may have already passed the point of no return for the owl," he said. "The purported solution here may well be too little Congressional attention too late."

The Forest Service would have no comment until the compromise was signed into law by the president, said Gary Cordova, spokesman for Region 6 in Portland.

Chris West, district forester for the Northwest Forestry Association, also expressed doubts the Forest Service could produce the timber given the constraints won by environmentalists.

"In terms of everything that the environmental community or preservationist community, every problem recognized with the Hatfield-Adams amendment — the volume was too high, there was no judicial review, the old growth definition was too narrow — every single one of those points has been met." West said. "Not one concession was made our way.

"But the bottom line to us is that it appears we got a shortterm solution where prior to this we had nothing." West said. "We are going to see layoffs, because in the Western parts of the two states we've seen very little timber sold.

"Even if the timber is sold in December or January, they will not be able to start harvesting that because they can't build roads until the weather is dry.

"It is unfortunate when we have a united Northwest delegation with a solution for the Northwest that two congressmen from east of the Rockies. Chet Atkins and Sid Yates, can be so powerful affecting timber-dependent communities in the Northwest," West said.

Larry Tuttle, Oregon director of The Wilderness Society, said the best thing to come out of the deal was the nationalization of the old growth issue.

"While there are a lot of things in this package I don't like. I think it established a new beachhead." Tuttle said. "I know there is consideration and a strong possibility of oversite hearings on this in the Seante as early as October of this year."

James Monteith, director of the Oregon Natural Resources Council, said he was staggered by the willingness of lawmakers from outside the region to take on the Northwest delegation on this issue.

"That trend is a very power-

ful trend and one that we have a certain amount of faith in." he said.

Mark Rey of the National Forest Products Association warned that success of the deal depended on the goodwill of environmentalists.

He added that the harvest levels environmentalists are decrying as too high were the same levels the Oregon Natural Resources Council testified last spring were acceptable.

"Whether this works or not is today a matter of speculation to some extent, not because it is not well written, but because it depends very heavily on the good faith of everyone involved." Rey said.

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