

Scientific report reignites spotted owl debate

WASHINGTON (AP) — Several hundred U.S. Forest Service employees are among those who hope a scientific report to be released Wednesday will recommend radical changes in timber cutting plans to protect the northern spotted owl.

The interagency report will be reviewed during a special joint hearing of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Forests, Family Farms and Energy, and the Interior and Insular Affairs Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands.

Environmentalists want the owl listed as an endangered species, but critics of the effort say it could cripple the Pacific Northwest's economy by halving the amount of timber logged in the region's national forests.

The Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics asked Congress in a recent letter to enact a

moratorium on logging and development in any remaining old-growth forests.

Jeff DeBonis, president of the Eugene-based group and former Forest Service worker at Willamette National Forest, said the Forest Service is "failing in its mission to protect and manage" public lands.

"Right now, our national forests are not being managed in an ecologically sustainable manner, and will continue to be degraded in a non-sustainable manner even under most of the new forest plans," he said.

About 1,300 of the 3,000 members in the ethics group formed last year are past, present or retired Forest Service employees, DeBonis said. About 1,000 currently work for the agency, he said.

"I knew there were a lot of people who were dissatisfied with the way the forests are being managed," DeBonis said in a telephone interview.

He said the organization has received much support among fellow Forest Service workers and surprisingly little criticism from agency administrators.

"They (administrators) have been quite neutral, which I think is tacit support. I expected it to be a lot more negative," he said.

About 22 percent of the group's membership is in Oregon, 18 percent in California, 11 percent in Washington, 10 percent in Montana and 7 percent in Idaho, DeBonis said. Nearly every state is represented, he said.

The congressional hearing scheduled Wednesday will offer the first public glimpse of the scientific panel's report on the status of the northern spotted owl.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which will decide in June whether to list the owl as threatened or endangered, extended its comment period this month just so it could receive the panel's recommendation.

The committee, led by Forest Service biologist Jack Thomas, met in Portland last month with Forest Service chief F. Dale Robertson, Bureau of Land Management director Cy Jamison, John Turner of the Fish and Wildlife Service and Jim Ridenour of the National Park Service.

Robertson said following that meeting he expects the panel will recommend the Forest Service ban logging in more old-growth forests to protect the owl. He told Congress in recent weeks if the owl is declared endangered it could reduce cuts in national forests by 30 percent to 50 percent.

Industry officials said listing of the owl would have an immediate impact on the economies of Oregon and Washington, especially smaller communities that are heavily dependent on the timber harvest.

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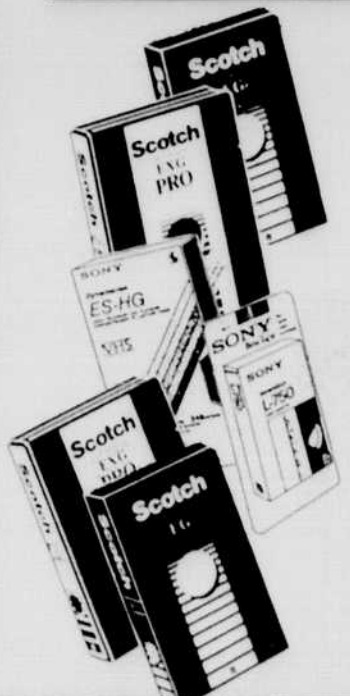
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Democrats disgusted with timber position

ROSEBURG (AP) — Democratic officeholders from timber-producing areas are blasting away at an Oregon Democratic Party platform plank that urges a ban on logging in old growth forests.

The resolution was adopted Sunday by state Democrats at a platform convention in Seaside.

Senate President John Kitzhaber, D-Roseburg, is among the Democratic leaders criticizing his party's stance.

"It's one of a number of rather irresponsible positions that convention came up with," he said. "I'm just not sure the positions taken by the convention reflect the positions of rank-and-file Democrats across the state."

Democrats should be looking for middle ground on the timber issue, Kitzhaber said.

"I don't think we should go out and lay waste to every stick of old growth in our forests," he said. "But shutting down the industry is not the answer."

"I was very disappointed by it," said Rep. Norm Gershon, D-Roseburg. "I love my party, but there's times I disagree with it, and this is certainly one of those times."

He said the resolution reflects an extremist position.

But foes of the convention action also say they doubt if it will cost them votes in the November general election.

Portions of previous party platforms have not reflected po-

sitions held by many Democrats, Gershon said.

Sen. Peg Jolin, D-Cottage Grove, said the platform will not hurt her re-election bid because voters know her views on timber issues.

Republicans will try to pin the old growth logging ban on all Democrats, not just those who support the party's position, Jolin said. "Frankly, it just doesn't work," she said. "Folks know better."


An angry Rep. Jim Whitty, D-Coos Bay, said: "That just goes to show you what we're faced with, those of us who are from places like my district and east of the mountains, if that's the kind of proposal the Democrats would support."

"There's no way anything like that would pass the House of Representatives," Whitty said.

A group billing itself as an association of grass-roots activists called the Democratic platform action "a slap in the face to the working people of Oregon."

"We've never made this a partisan issue, but the Democrats now give us no choice but to pull our votes and campaign contributions," said Oregon Lands Coalition spokeswoman Debbie Miley of Mill City.

She said coalition members are calling on Democrats to let party leaders know they won't support candidates who endorse the "no-jobs, no-logging position."



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