

# Struggling county spends federal safety net cash on pro-timber video

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PORTLAND, Ore. - The six-minute video opens to ominous music and burning trees. After the flames are out, a narrator says, forests suffer from devastating neglect, turning into a "vast sea of dead, charred trees" that aren't reforested because of a maze of confusing, contradictory environmental regulations.

The music brightens as the answer appears: Salvage logging. The video concludes by urging viewers to call their elected officials "and tell them these federal lands... are too valuable to simply walk away."

The clip credits a tiny nonprofit called Communities for Healthy Forests and went online in early September, a day before Oregon Republican Rep. Greg Walden introduced a bill to harvest trees burned this summer in the Columbia River Gorge. Timber companies support the plan.

It's become routine for cryptically named interest groups to push changes in federal policy that industry wants. The surprising twist this time: Federal money paid for it.

Douglas County, a local government so broke it closed all its public libraries earlier this year, funded Communities for Healthy Forests to create the video. And it did so with federal safety net money meant to ease rural Oregon's dependence on timber revenue.

Commissioners have awarded Communities for Healthy Forests a total of \$490,000 in federal money over the last two years, \$250,000 of it to make videos. Only one has been released.

The Douglas County commission's spending raises questions about a federal program called Secure Rural Schools, which has suffered from a lack of oversight since it was co-authored in 2000 by Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat.

The program gives counties part of what they once earned from logging on

federal land before endangered species listings curtailed the harvest. Oregon has received \$3 billion, more than any other state.

Most of the federal money goes to roads and schools. But counties have wider leeway over a portion known as Title III, which was funded at \$14.3 million nationally in 2015.

Chris Boice, chairman of the Douglas County commission, said the pro-salvage logging video counted as "education related to forestry." That's a use that Congress authorized for money received before 2008. Boice said the county had pre-2008 dollars on hand to pay Communities for Healthy Forests in 2015 and 2016.

But even back when education was an allowed purpose, the law said money could only be spent on after-school programs.

The cash the county awarded Communities for Healthy Forests instead could have been used to boost the county's wildfire preparedness or pay fire-fighting costs, purposes allowed by Title III since it was created.

Internal and external audits have repeatedly found Title III money misspent over the last decade and urged reform. But all the recommended changes haven't been adopted.

Wyden, who wants Congress to reauthorize the program, said counties should be using the economic lifeline wisely to meet rural Oregonians' essential needs. In a statement, he said what The Oregonian/OregonLive found in Douglas County would spur him to ensure counties are held accountable for their spending if the program is renewed.

"A single dollar of Title III payments should not be wasted rehashing decades-old debates and siphoning taxpayer money away from its prescribed purpose of protecting our communities from wildfires," Wyden said.

Douglas County, the heart of Oregon timber country, has been one of the big-



Damage from the Eagle Creek Fire in the Columbia River Gorge. Douglas County utilized federal safety net money to fund a video advocating salvage logging. PHOTOS COURTESY OF ODOT

gest beneficiaries under Title III, receiving \$4.3 million between 2010 and 2015.

The county gave Title III money to Communities for Healthy Forests to develop videos criticizing federal forest policy, revamp its hacked website, educate school kids and send the nonprofit's workers to conferences. A former county commissioner, Doug Robertson, worked for the group in 2015, records show.

Javier Goirigolzarri, executive director of Communities for Healthy Forests, said he was "totally unaware" that Walden's salvage logging bill would land a day after the salvage logging video was released. A Walden spokesman declined comment.

A Portland nonprofit called Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities helped the video get seen with postings on its website and Facebook page. That nonprofit shares a mailing address with the American Forest Resource Council, a major timber industry lobbying group.

Since then, the film has been viewed 94,000 times on Facebook and sent to federal elected officials by Tom Partin, the council's former president and now lobbyist, according to an email obtained by The Oregonian/OregonLive. Partin didn't respond to a request for comment.

Goirigolzarri said other video topics will include the health impacts from wildfire air pollution and how increasing logging and thinning in federal forests can minimize fires. Eight other Oregon counties have funded the nonprofit, Goirigolzarri said: Deschutes, Klamath, Lake, Josephine, Grant, Curry, Jackson and Harney.

"Given our fuel conditions in these federal lands — we have a blanket of fuel — it's difficult to trust that wildfire will give us desired effects," Goirigolzarri said. "Whereas if we take some action on the ground, we can allow wildfire to improve conditions."

The county has spent discretionary safety net money for other purposes that are hard to reconcile with what's allowed under the federal Title III program.

It gave \$71,000 to Wildlife Services, a federal animal trapping agency, for work that included killing bears and porcupines on public and private timber land. The animals eat the inner bark of Douglas fir, damaging timber crops.

Boice, the county chairman, said the grant to Wildlife Services was for educational purposes, just like the salvage logging video, in addition to supporting le-

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# Supreme Court to hear public union case again

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The U.S. Supreme Court is taking another look at the constitutionality of mandatory union fees during its upcoming term, and experts say a ruling striking down such fees could significantly damage public unions' influence in Oregon.

But local union leaders say this case is just another attempt at undermining unions and that such a ruling would not spell the end of public unions in Oregon.

"Not only is it not the nail, we're nowhere near the coffin," said Brian Rudiger, executive director of SEIU 503, which represents some Oregon public employees.

A 40-year legal precedent allows unions in states nationwide to gather mandatory fees to pay for negotiations. This helps ensure there aren't any "free loaders" — employees who benefit from contracts negotiated by the union without having to pay for the effort.

In the current case, petitioner Mark Janus, a state child support specialist in Illinois, claims the AFSCME Council 31 fee requirement violates his First Amendment right to free speech.

Prognosticators expect the Supreme Court, with its new conservative justice Neil Gorsuch, to side against the union.

If so, it could be a "serious blow" to the financial well-being of Oregon's public unions, said Keith Cunningham-Parmeter, law professor at Willamette University.

"Unions are going to be seriously hampered in their ability to operate as they do today," he said.

Part of the life blood of public unions is this mandatory fee and without it unions could lose significant political sway, which, he said, is part of the point — it is impossible to separate the legal and political aspects of this case.

Unions have long been a target for conservatives and pro-business interest groups because of their often adversarial positions.

Oregon unions regularly contribute large sums of money to political campaigns, endorse candidates and lobby for and against state policies. Mostly they throw support behind Democratic candidates who are considered more union-friendly.

"The writing is on the wall for public sector unions and it doesn't look good," Cunningham-Parmeter said.

Union representation has been falling in the United States for decades. In Oregon, 13.5 percent of employed workers were members of a union in 2016, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data. This is higher than the rate for the Unit-

ed States as a whole, but down from the state's peak of 21.6 percent in 1989.

Among the culprits for the national decline are so-called "right to work" laws. Currently, 28 states have passed legislation that outlaws labor unions from compelling membership, which could expand to all states if the Janus case goes against labor unions.

Unions feared a negative result last year when a similar case out of California was heard, but the court deadlocked at 4-4 after the death of Justice Antonin Scalia a month earlier. The conservative Scalia was expected to align against unions as he had in previous cases.

As with the last case on this issue, Portland lawyer Jill Gibson filed an amicus curiae brief on behalf of an Oregon client with a similar complaint as Janus.

She said she can understand the union's position against allowing non-paying members to benefit from union negotiations, but protecting First Amendment rights is more important.

"Those desires are so far outweighed by the constitutional rights of freedom of expression and freedom of association," Gibson said.

Gibson added that she hopes a ruling against unions would "return Oregon to a two party state," limiting what she sees as overwhelming financial support of Democratic candidates by unions, some-

times against the political views of their members.

University of Oregon political science professor Gordon Lafer said that such a ruling could create a snowball effect where the real consequences aren't realized for years as union membership, revenue and influence decline.

"Times are tight, and one of your bills was just declared optional," Lafer said.

Oregon Education Association officials don't believe many people will leave the organization even if the ruling goes against it. John Larson, OEA president, said they have made a concerted effort over the past few years to connect with members to ensure the union is going in the right direction.

He said they aren't focused solely on this case, which the Supreme Court will hear this winter, but have prepared several budget and program scenarios depending on how membership changes.

"As long as we continue to focus on issues our members care about, we believe they will continue to be members," Larson said. "We will continue to weather the storm."

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## Football

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the game. It's all these guys busting their butts and I have a ton of assistants helping me, and Mannion set the (foundation). I'm just trying to stay within it and do what I can to make it mine, but also continue the success."

Craig has strong ties to Silverton. That's why the job appealed to him, and those ties made him an attractive candidate to replace Mannion despite a relative lack of coaching experience.

As a seventh-grader at Silver Crest Elementary School in Silverton, Craig played at McGinnis Field, home of the Foxes.

He played his high school football at Silverton — Craig was a receiver and defensive back — and is a 2009 graduate.

Craig was a volunteer assistant coach under then-Silverton coach Scott Gragg in 2010, and returned to the program in 2014 after graduating from Oregon State. This is his fourth year as an English teacher at the high school.

It has been a smooth transition to Craig from Mannion.

"He knew all our basic formations and things like that. He already had training," junior running back/linebacker Hunter Meissner said. "The culture's the same which is nice because we love our culture here — work hard and play hard."

What Craig lacks in experience he makes up for with a strong work ethic, enthusiasm and a motor that is always running at "100 miles an hour."

Craig acknowledges that he was surprised to be named head coach in May primarily because of his age and that he still has much to learn. Three of Silverton's four current varsity assistants —



Silverton football head coach Josh Craig leads a practice on Tuesday, Sept. 26. ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Mike Fessler, John Howard and Craig Rankin — coached him when he was a high school player.

"Shoot, there's times when I come across something and I've gotta ask my assistants, 'OK, what do we do here?'" Craig said. "And they're great."

Rankin said Craig was ready to handle the responsibilities of a head coach.

"His energy is just infectious with the players," Rankin said. "I've seen Josh succeed in so many things over his lifetime. The age for me, and I know for the other coaches on our staff, was not an issue at all."

Craig may not look much older than some of his players, but they don't view him as a peer. Nor does Craig want to be in their shoes.

His players refer to him as Coach or

Coach Craig, and "never Josh."

"I don't want to be a teenager and I don't want them to think I'm cool, because I'm not," Craig said. "I have a Facebook (page), barely. They know things about other teams that I don't know because of social media."

Craig will turn 27 in December, a few weeks after the state playoffs conclude. What a birthday present it would be if Silverton wins its first state championship in football since 1991.

But for now, Craig is focused on day-to-day goals, both in the classroom and on the football field.

"I've got a great deal here," he said. "Not to use a cliché, but it's kind of a dream come true."

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## OSAA

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North Salem has been approved to play down to Class 5A and is in the Mid-Willamette Conference with Central, Dallas and Silverton.

Woodburn, which is choosing to play down, is moved to the six-team 4A Oregon West Conference along with Stayton.

The final proposal also creates a small, but powerful West Valley League in 3A. Current league schools Amity and Dayton would be joined by Blanchet Catholic, Salem Academy and Scio along with current 4A Yamhill-Carlton.

Willamina would move into a league with Clatskanie, Rainier, Taft and Warrenton, and Santiam Christian would go south with Creswell, Harrisburg, La Pine and Pleasant Hill.

Meanwhile, the new 2A Central Valley League would take in Chemaqua, Colton, Culver, Delphian, Gervais, Kennedy, Santiam, Sheridan and Western Mennonite.

The Tri River would add Jefferson, Lowell, Monroe, Oakland and Oakridge along with Regis.

St. Paul moves back down to 1A in the final proposal and moves back into a virtually unchanged Casco League.

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