

FOREST PLANS AND COUNTY FUNDING UPDATE

The timber trust plan that Congressman Peter DeFazio has been talking about has been causing consternation among those in town more prone to hugging trees than cutting them down.

DeFazio has said, “The bottom line is: How can we get counties adequate funding for essential public services?” But Chandra LeGue of Oregon Wild says, “There’s other things that can be done rather than recoupling timber harvests and county payments.”

O&C lands are BLM lands, which amount to about 2.4 million acres in Oregon, that came from a land grant given to build the Oregon & California Railroad, and later taken back. The 1937 O&C Lands Act tied logging on these lands to county revenues, but as logging has decreased, so has the money. The gap has been filled in with funding from the Secure Rural Schools Act, but that money has come to an end, leaving Lane and other counties with a large amount of federal land hurting for money for essential services.

LeGue says, “No one likes to talk about taxes in these economic times.” But she points out rather than just focusing on increasing logging, an export tax on raw logs could generate over \$200 million every year, a lot of which would come to O&C counties.

DeFazio says his plan would be to split the lands between conservation and logging and have each of the two sections managed by a board of trustees creating a conservation trust and a timber trust. The congressman’s office has been waiting on a land inventory of the area in question before coming up with legislation. The lands inventory is reportedly being done by The Nature Conservancy.

LeGue says she thinks about one million acres could be given over to logging under the DeFazio plan. “What I think those maps will show is when you look at all the

values for this land in context, there’s no way you can find a million acres that can be sacrificed,” she says.

“Some of it will be political because we are talking about funding counties, and county funding trumps science,” she adds.

LeGue says there have been rumors that the DeFazio trust plan will be added into a separate House proposal called the National Forest County Revenue, Schools and Jobs Act of 2011, which seeks to increase commercial timber harvests on national forests as a way of replacing the expired federal county payments.

That proposal didn’t address the O&C lands, though a press release for the legislation says it “provides for future inclusion of proposals to address other federal forest lands affected by declining timber production,” and references those lands.

According to Headwaters Economics, a nonpartisan research group, among other issues, “the cost of implementing the County Revenue Act would require significant new federal spending — from \$1.8 billion to as much as \$5.9 billion annually above current Secure Rural Schools appropriations — based on the current cost of preparing and administering timber sales.”

— Camilla Mortensen

Oregon Wild and Cascadia Wildlands will host an event called “Will Rep. DeFazio Sell Out Public Lands in Western Oregon” at 6pm Nov. 29 at the downtown library.

COUNCIL LIKES BIKE/PED PLANS

A plan to increase the city’s wealth, health and livability while saving the environment by doubling walking and biking got a warm reception from the Eugene City Council this week.

Eugene Councilor Pat Farr commended staff for the draft Eugene Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan. “It really gives me a lot of enthusiasm for the future of Eugene,” he said.

“Good work,” said Councilor Mike Clark, “It’s very important.”

“This is a great plan,” said Councilor Alan Zelenka.

The plan proposes hundreds of miles of new sidewalks and bike facilities to double walking and cycling rates over the next two decades. “It’s something we think is very achievable,” city bike/ped planner Reed Dunbar said of the goal.

Eugene’s current bike commute rate of about 11 percent is higher than any other city of its size or larger in the nation, according to the U.S. Census. Eugene’s walk commute rate is 7 percent. The city plans to respond to comments and finalize the draft plan in February.

Cycletracks physically separated from menacing car traffic will be a key part of the effort to increase biking in Eugene, according to Dunbar.

Dunbar pointed to Portland survey research indicating that about 1 percent of people will bike no matter how dangerous it is. About 7 percent are confident enough to bike next to traffic with bike lanes. But about 60 percent are interested in biking but are concerned that they’ll be hit by cars.

Safe cycletracks physically separated from menacing cars are needed to boost biking above existing levels, according to Dunbar. “This is going to be necessary if we’re attracting families and the 60 percent interested,” he said. Cycletracks are “important and something we need to embrace.”

Mayor Kitty Piercy agreed. “It seems to be the next place we really need to go to get everyone” from the committed to the interested, she said. “That’s where we are headed.”

Councilor Betty Taylor also backed the cycletrack focus. “We do need more bike paths that are separated from the road completely.”

But the new plan proposes only one major new cycletrack connecting the Amazon bike path to downtown and the riverfront trail system via High Street.

Dunbar said the city also may consider retrofitting a new two-way buffered bike lane on Alder Street near the UO with flexible bollards to convert it into a physically separated cycletrack. Without the bollards currently, some cars have been driving or parking in the lane and “ignoring all of our paint,” he said.

But the biggest deficit with the new plan may be how to pay for the roughly \$50 million in new sidewalks and \$40 million in new bike facilities proposed over the next two decades. Zelenka pointed out that at existing funding levels it could take the city roughly 75 years to build all the projects in the city plan.

Other councilors also cautioned that the current controversial system of charging neighboring houses for new sidewalks wouldn’t work. If the city is depending on such improvement district charges, “we’re dooming this to failure,” Clark said.

EUGENE-BASED OTA IS NOW BEYOND TOXICS

“Our vision is a world beyond toxics,” says Lisa Arkin, executive director of the organization formerly known as Oregon Toxics Alliance. She says OTA’s new name, Beyond Toxics, reflects the environmental and social justice nonprofit’s “aspirational goals” to move the world to a new paradigm in which pesticides aren’t sprayed on roadsides where children wait for buses or in parks where they play, and toxic chemicals aren’t found in the umbilical cord blood of newborn babies. Beyond Toxics will celebrate its name change at a “Holiday Cheer and Open House” from 4 to 6:30 pm Thursday, Dec. 1, at 1192 Lawrence St.

Arkin says the name change and new tag line — “Leadership for a clean and just Oregon” — more accurately reflects the group’s grassroots work with both urban and rural Oregonians and social justice work, and moves away from a mistaken impression that it represents the chemical industry. “Beyond Toxics reflects our enthusiasm for a healthy planet,” she says “not a goal of aligning toxics in the state of Oregon.”

Beyond Toxics will continue the campaigns that it worked on as OTA, including pesticide reform, safe public places, healthy air issues and social justice.

Arkin says the group’s work aligns with the Occupy movement in some ways. “It’s not right that corporations say what’s safe for us and what exposures we can get,” she says. Arkin points out that many studies that claim exposures to chemicals are “safe” are done by the chemical industry itself.

The group has gotten grants for its work with Centro Latinoamericano in the polluted west Eugene industrial corridor — affected by industries such as the Seneca biomass burning plant — to both study how toxics affect the populations there and to do outreach among affected neighbors. The goal is to improve living and health conditions in the area. Arkin says that while EPA, Meyer Memorial Trust and other grants help Beyond Toxics in its capacity building and environmental studies, it’s the donations from individual donors that allow it do “edgy pesticide work.”

Beyond Toxics will also be rolling out a new website, as well as a new logo, which Arkin says shows the nonprofit’s work in the Willamette Valley, as well as its focus on air quality, a focus that along with its social justice work has made Beyond Toxics unique in Oregon.

— Camilla Mortensen

