

## TREES VS. COUNTIES?

While rural communities might be wary of toxic pesticide sprays, they are also dealing with the loss of jobs, not to mention the same county budget cuts affecting city dwellers. Oregon counties have not had certainty in their funding for years. DeFazio says his plan will do just that — give counties an assurance of funding, as well as providing rural jobs.

But, “How far do you go to prop up counties?” Kerr asks. He says the bill “dramatically increases logging levels, dramatically imperils more species, dramatically degrades water quality.”

Kerr adds, “There are better ways.”

Lane County Commissioner Rob Handy agrees that there are better ways to get money out of Oregon’s forests than privatizing public lands, and he says ramping up logging on O&C lands won’t create rural jobs here in Lane County.

Handy says Lane County is losing \$20 million a year through forest tax exemptions on private forestlands, such as a harvest tax relief for owners of more than 5,000 acres. Such tax breaks don’t help little mom and pop operations, he says, only the industrial timberlands.

Spencer Lennard of Big Wildlife down in economically hard-hit Josephine County says it wouldn’t hurt to increase the taxes on smaller plots of private forests either. He says he owns 39 acres of land that is zoned forest commercial. “We pay \$3 a year on 39 acres,” he says.

Lennard says, “Just tax us, please.”

Oregon Wild, the Geos Institute and other groups against the DeFazio plan agree with Lennard. They say counties can get funded without hurting Oregon’s forests and clean water. They propose a “shared responsibility” plan

of tax reform at the county level, along with reforming the excise tax that allows logging corporations to export raw logs to China while paying low taxes, as well as transferring management of the BLM lands to the Forest Service.

Property taxes in Oregon are incredibly low, Kerr says.

DeFazio points out that Oregon’s Measure 5, passed in 1990, limited property tax rates, and he pooh-poohs the shared responsibility plan, which he says is flawed. “Some people seem to lack education in government,” he says.

## SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

The biblical tale of splitting the baby that Pedery alludes to is not so much about mothers and babies as it is about proposing a radical solution that discerns what the true situation is — in order to make the right decision. So what does the threat of splitting the O&C lands baby do?

DeFazio says his plan, or rather the DeFazio-Walden-Schrader plan, is a defensible starting point for resolving the timber wars and the county funding crisis, especially given the current climate in Congress. He says a lawsuit in Washington, D.C. is one of the motivations to get this legislation under way.

The enviros might look askance at the notion that the DeFazio plan could end the timber wars, but OSU forestry professor Norm Johnson, one of the authors of the Northwest Forest Plan, which determines how most logging is done on federal forests, agrees. He is one of the few people taking a middle-ground approach to the forest fight.

Johnson says the plan “triggers a discussion of the long-term future of these lands that we haven’t seen in over a decade.” It has text and maps and it “gives us something real to chew on.”

From his science-oriented perspective, the plan has pluses and minuses. The negatives include the potential for clearcutting, that it allows the potential for broad use of herbicides and the possibility of cutting older trees in younger stands.

But, on the other hand, he says, it has some “tremendous conservation accomplishments” in that it offers protection for trees more than 120 years old, it has a sustained yield requirement that means “you can’t just go in and cut it all down,” and half of the timber trust is on a 120-year rotation.

Johnson says that he and Jerry Franklin, along with their students, are working to strengthen the plan. For example, in conjunction with aquatic specialists they are exploring changes to the riparian buffers so that they’d take up less area than the streamside protections of the NWFP, yet offer more protection for water than the Oregon Forest Practices Act

offers.

It’s exciting that DeFazio’s bill is the first time early seral forests have been mentioned in federal legislation, Johnson says. Early seral forests are a stage after a disturbance like fire, before conifers dominate. While old-growth forests and spotted owls may be the superstars of forest debates, Johnson says that early seral forests are the most biologically diverse and also the most rare.

Johnson says he hopes that as the discussion of the DeFazio plan continues, it will be enriched by information from the pilot projects he and Franklin are working on; these projects look at different ways of managing the moist forests found around the Willamette Valley and the dry forests of southern Oregon and the east side, in order to generate timber and protect ecosystems.

Developing a forest plan is a long, difficult process, Johnson says, but now that the DeFazio plan has been put out there, everyone can “sit down and have a good argument.” ■

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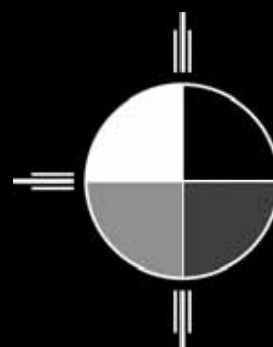
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