

CONSERVATIONISTS SEEK SOLUTIONS TO SALE OF ELLIOTT STATE FOREST LAND

Can small sea birds save a forest? Conservation groups like Cascadia Wildlands hope so. Next month the State Land Board decides whether or not to dispose of three parcels of the Elliott State Forest by selling to private buyers, which include interested parties from the timber industry. In a Nov. 10 letter, Cascadia Wildlands and other conservation groups asked the State Land Board, which includes Gov. John Kitzhaber, Secretary of State Kate Brown and Treasurer Ted Wheeler, to reject the proposal to sell 2,714 acres of Oregon forestland and wildlife habitat in Coos and Douglas counties.

In August, surveyors discovered marbled murrelets, a species of federally and state-protected sea bird that nests in coastal forests, on the largest of the three parcels (see EW's coverage at wkly.ws/1mj). Money from the land sale would go to the Common School Fund, helping to bolster

flagging public schools, but Cascadia Wildlands campaign director Josh Laughlin says that the State Land Board can still fund public education by using long-term revenue from conserving the land instead of logging it.

With the discovery of marbled murrelet activity in the Adams Ridge parcel, the assessed value of the land plummeted. According to timber appraisal reports, the Adams Ridge parcel under private ownership had an estimated timber market value of \$13.4 million, but under the Endangered Species Act, the presence of the murrelets limits habitat destruction through logging, causing the value to fall to \$1.7 million, greatly reducing projected revenue.

A Nov. 19 revision to the report found that the murrelet-occupied site was even greater than originally stated, spanning a continuous 240 acres.

"The state knows there's murrelet activity in this Adams tract, and the state can't pass the buck and knowingly

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- CLARA TAYLOR,
STATE LAND BOARD ASSET ANALYST

sell these lands to private industry because the same liability the state was facing would now be assumed by private industry, which is all the more reason to see these lands conserved for the values they provide to Oregonians," Laughlin says.

State Land Board asset analyst Clara Taylor says that after conservation groups filed a lawsuit that halted timber land sales last year, the state cannot afford to continue managing the land. "We're losing money on the management of the Elliott State Forest to the tune of about \$2 million a year," she says. "We just cannot lose money on land that is supposed to be providing money for the school fund."

The deadline for public comments on the land sale has passed, but Lorna Stafford, secretary for the Land Board, says that the Dec. 10 meeting will include a public comment period. Cascadia Wildlands is also staging a rally at the meeting to show support for conservation efforts.

— Amy Schneider

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