



WILL LANE LEAVE THE LOGGING LOBBY?

Environmental groups urge Lane County to withdraw from AOCC

Local environmental groups want Lane County to withdraw from the Association of O&C Counties, an association that advocates for more logging. A lawsuit driven by the AOCC, seeking to shrink the size of the Cascade Siskiyou National Monument, led Multnomah County to withdraw recently.

Lane County now also faces a decision on whether to pull out of the AOCC. Newly elected Lane County commissioners are being brought up to speed on county issues, and some environmental advocates hope a new board makeup might change the commission's stance on the AOCC.

Lane County is the third largest county in the AOCC, with O&C lands totaling 374,849 acres. In fiscal year 2017-18, Lane County paid \$76,995 in dues to AOCC and \$29,263 to AOCC's litigation fund, according to Devon Ashbridge, Lane County's public information officer.

The logging-oriented AOCC is made up of 16 counties with "O&C lands" — lands once dedicated to the never-built Oregon and California Railroad, established through a land grant in 1866. O&C lands make up more than 2.4 million acres of forestland scattered throughout 18 counties. An act in 1937 reclassified the lands as timberlands, with the purpose of offering a sustained source of timber, according to the Bureau of Land Management. That timber would provide money to the counties.

Logging on O&C lands was reduced in the '90s and the federal government began providing money to replace timber tax payments lost by these counties. Once called Safety Net payments, Secure Rural School payments (SRS) are provided to these counties to supplement lower levels of logging.

Doug Heiken of Oregon Wild says the AOCC is "basically wanting to go back to the 'the good old days' of logging," even though the logging of these old-growth forestlands destroys wildlife and causes pollution.

"Old-growth clearcutting pushed salmon and other wildlife toward extinction, polluted our rivers and streams, and spoiled the quality of life that is the foundation for economic development," he says. Heiken believes Lane County remains a member "because of tradition" and the rhetoric around the "good old days."

Environmental groups such as Oregon Wild and Cascadia Wildlands fear continued logging will greatly alter forest management. These groups are calling for a work session in which they can urge county commissioners to withdraw from the AOCC.

Josh Laughlin of Cascadia Wildlands believes the AOCC "is essentially an arm of the timber industry advocating for clearcutting of our public lands. It's our hope the new commission recognizes that," he says. Cascadia Wildlands is urging Lane County to "follow the lead of Benton and Multnomah counties and remove its membership from this anti-environmental group."

Heiken says the AOCC seeks to make "Lane County commissioners a cheerleader for the destruction of public lands."

Heather Buch, Lane County Commissioner for East Lane District 5, believes "the best policy decisions are made when everyone's been able to bring information to the table."

A work session in which that can take place is not scheduled, however, and, according to Ashbridge, there have been no discussions of one taking place.

Buch says she is "in information-gathering mode" trying to digest both sides of this "contentious issue."

County Commissioner Jay Bozievich declined comment on the issue.

Pete Sorenson, commissioner for South Eugene, says "the AOCC has strayed significantly from its original mission." He doesn't think "Lane County property taxes should be used to fund the AOCC" and is in favor of withdrawing. ■



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