

Timber: County has thousands of acres of valuable timber land

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“This is strictly an opportunity for commissioners to hear from their constituents about an issue of great importance to our community,” Lee told the large audience.

Reese, as a representative of the North Coast State Forest Coalition, and others argued that the lawsuit, funded in large part by the timber industry, could have disastrous consequences on forest management, placing public lands firmly into private hands. They fear a successful suit would result in increased harvest, which would further degrade river systems, hurting salmon and other wildlife.

Speaking out

Of the 25 people who spoke publicly, only two people — one of them Sheriff Tom Bergin — asked commissioners to remain involved in the lawsuit.

The forests are sustainable and provide a steady stream of money that helps fund public safety, Bergin said. The county isn't required to put any money forward in the lawsuit and stands to gain a potential \$300 million if the suit is successful, he argued.

“If we don't stay in, I firmly believe we won't have a place at the table,” Bergin said. “I think it's imperative that we do.”

The remaining 23 people, however, urged the commissioners to opt out, saying the only winners would be the private timber industry groups that are backing it. Court documents show the Oregon Forest Industries Council, Hampton Tree Farms, Stimson Lumber Co. and the Sustainable Forest Fund are carrying a huge part of the suit's legal costs.

Warrenton resident Kathleen Zunkel brought a petition she had circulated around the county. In the last four days, she collected more than 200 signatures from county residents who want no part in the lawsuit, she said.

“You cannot put a price on our forests,” she said. “Please do not give in to short-term greed. Opt out of this lawsuit.”

Contract dispute

The Linn County lawsuit



A LS&D Logging worker prepares Douglas fir logs for sorting at a landing in the Clatsop State Forest near Jewell in 2014. Fifteen Oregon counties receive timber revenue generated from state-owned forests.



Tom Bergin



Lianne Thompson

against the Oregon Department of Forestry, from a legal standpoint, is a contract dispute, explained County Counsel Heather Reynolds.

Linn County alleges that while a contract existed between the state and Oregon's timber counties in 1941, allowing the state to manage county forestland on the coun-

ties' behalf, the terms of the contract changed in 1998 without the agreement of all parties. The lawsuit claims the state has not maximized value on timber harvests and owes the counties and more than a hundred associated taxing districts \$1.4 billion in damages.

But the forests are more than the value of their tim-

ber, said Chris Farrar, an Astoria resident and member of the Clatsop County Planning Commission.

He urged the commissioners to “get on the other side of this case.”

He recommended the county file a “friend of the court” brief on behalf of the state. The county would not be a party to the Linn County suit but, by filing the brief, would declare it has a strong interest in the matter and is on the side of the Department of Forestry.

“This thing needs to be put down,” Farrar said about the Linn County suit. “This is a corporate conspiracy, if you like that term, to take away the rights of the people to determine what happens in the county and state ... the people have the say, not the corporations.”

Valuable timber

Clatsop County, with its

thousands of acres of valuable timber land, represents a huge portion of the forestlands under discussion in the lawsuit. If the county refused to participate, it would send a message, people said.

One woman raised concerns about Commissioner Lianne Thompson's involvement. Thompson is married to Ralph Wyatt, Linn County's administrative officer. She asked that Thompson recuse herself from discussions about the Linn County suit.

After the meeting, Thompson called this a personal attack. She and Wyatt married in January, and the lawsuit was not filed until March. It had been discussed by Linn County officials in meetings she was not privy to, she said. She learned about the suit when it was filed.

“I'm not compromised,” she said. “I'm devoted to

representing Clatsop County's interests in the best way possible.”

The commissioners have until Jan. 25 to decide whether or not to opt out. The county and its associated taxing districts are already named in the suit and will remain unless commissioners decide to withdraw.

Other taxing districts in Clatsop County — those not under the county's jurisdiction — will need to make their own decision about whether or not to opt out.

“We're getting a lot of written comments,” County Manager Cameron Moore said.

The county is collecting all the comments and passing them on to commissioners. Written comments will be received through Jan. 6.

“Tonight is not the end of this discussion,” Moore said.

Salmon: NOAA's recovery plan complements Oregon's plan

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cooperation between a variety of partners, from local watershed groups to timber companies.

Habitat loss

Coastal coho are listed as “threatened.” The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's recovery plan will provide guidance for conservation and management decisions affecting coho recovery down the road.

Most of the West Coast's species of salmon and steelhead declared threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act come with recovery plans attached or in the works.

But the timeline on these plans is typically much lon-

ger than the 10 years proposed for coastal coho. The plan for salmon and steelhead on the Snake River, for instance, outlines a 50- to 100-year timeline for recovery.

Unlike many of these salmon species, the coho salmon populations grouped under the heading “Oregon Coast coho” aren't overly affected by snowpack or dams. There is a rain-based ecosystem on the coastal tributaries and estuaries from Seaside to Port Orford.

And other pressures — incursions from hatchery fish and overfishing — have dropped away over the years. The one major remaining issue coho face, say fishery managers, is habitat loss.

“It's fascinating to contemplate that Oregon Coast

coho might be the closest of all of them to recovery,” said Rob Walton, NOAA Fisheries recovery coordinator for western Oregon, in a press conference Wednesday.

Since the coho were first listed, their populations have been doing much better. But the runs are still vulnerable, and the number of returning adults can fluctuate greatly from year to year.

While NOAA can never control the ocean — it is a constantly shifting environment — it can work with other partners to target habitat issues in freshwater, giving young coho the strongest head start possible. Over the years, these tributaries have been impacted heavily over the decades by logging, development and farming.

What it is

The Oregon Coast Coho Recovery Plan pulls together what has been, up until now, a mix of official and unofficial goals and strategies to successfully delist coast coho populations. For the first time, it defines what this success looks like, said NOAA Public Affairs Officer Michael Milstein.

NOAA's recovery plan complements Oregon state's own coho recovery plan and builds on the decades of research and recovery work already done or still in motion.

“This (plan), in my opinion, is elegantly simple,” Walton said. It zeroes in on habitat and what can be done to improve or, in some cases, rebuild what has been lost. The plan addresses climate

change, development, timber harvest, beaver dams, farming practices, water quality, ocean fluctuations among dozens of other topics.

What it does

The recovery plan is not a regulatory document. Every strategy it outlines — from changes to timber and agricultural practices to habitat priorities on different tributaries — is voluntary. Its success rides largely on the willingness of partners from the state to local watershed councils and timber companies to landowners, farmers, fishermen and hunters to work together.

Regulatory protections are a complementary part of the plan, however. The plan calls for partners' help in changing both timber harvest and

agricultural practices, among others.

“The plan recognizes the critical role of local landowners and communities in bringing about recovery,” said Guido Rahr, president and CEO of the Wild Salmon Center based in Portland. His organization is leading the development of another important piece of NOAA's strategy: a business plan that will help guide local recovery measures.

NOAA researchers don't expect every strategy or action item outlined in the plan to be completed. Though, they argue, the more partners can complete the more likely it is that Oregon Coast coho will recover and meet the criteria for delisting.

The recovery plan is, Walton said, “a menu of options.”

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