

Timber leaders propose pro-logging ballot measures

By **TED SICKINGER**
The Oregonian

A group of retired foresters backed by the timber industry filed three initiative petitions this week looking to counter what they say are “radical anti-forestry ballot initiatives being pursued by environmental extremists.”

The measures would give Oregon counties and the wood products industry more control over how members on the state Board of Forestry are selected. They would amend the state constitution, requiring the state to fully compensate woodland owners for any new regulations that limited their ability to log, such as expanded stream buffers. And they would require that the forestry board use “non-biased” and “peer reviewed science” to come up with consensus-based policies.

Jim James, a forestry consultant and executive director of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association, is one of the chief petitioners. He said

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Jim James | forestry consultant and executive director of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association

he was not acting on behalf of the association, though it is mentioned in the initiative petitions. The Oregon Forest Industries Council, a timber industry trade group, is serving as treasurer of the campaigns.

“I’m a professional forester and have had a long career in the industry,” James said. “When I became aware of the three anti-forestry ballot measures, I became very passionate about how wrong those were and I reached out to others to push back on these absolutely crazy initiatives they proposed.”

Environmental groups filed three ballot measures earlier this year to tighten aerial herbicide spraying

rules, increase forest stream buffers, prohibit logging in steep, landslide-prone areas and prohibit conflicts of interest for state forestry board appointees.

Secretary of State Bev Clarno rejected all three petitions, saying they violated rules that prohibit measures that address more than a single policy topic. Environmental groups are taking her to court over that decision, but have since filed new versions of the petitions that they claim address Clarno’s concerns.

Now the forestry groups have filed their own countermeasures.

The dueling ballot measures go the heart of the tim-

ber tug of war that has been playing out in Oregon for four decades. Once centered on the shutdown of federal forests over endangered species concerns, the divide over policies also spread to private and state forests. Indeed, that partisan divide could become a deciding factor in how the legislative session plays out next year, with likely battles over climate change policies and wildfire funding.

As it stands, the controversy is currently being spotlighted in a \$1 billion lawsuit in which 14 rural counties are suing the state for breach of contract, saying it has failed to maximize logging on state forests.

Environmental groups

have long contended that Oregon has some of the weakest forest protection rules in the West. They say the rules fail to ensure the protection of endangered species and their habitats, as well as the health and safety of rural residents. They describe the forestry ballot measures as a power grab by the industry that would limit the discretion of the state board, and possibly lock the state in the same constitutional debate over property rights and land use safeguards that came with the 2004 passage of the far-reaching Measure 37. Voters subsequently overturned most of those reforms with the passage of Measure 49 in 2007.

“With this measure, industry wants to change the Oregon constitution to make Oregonians pay them to not pollute rivers and streams with excessive clearcutting on steep slopes, said Ralph Bloemers, senior staff attorney for the Crag Law Center, a nonprofit that represents conservation groups and local

residents throughout Oregon.

“They expect to be paid if Oregonians decide to limit their ability to spray toxic chemicals near drinking water supplies, homes and schools,” he said. “I don’t expect Oregonians will be fooled twice.”

James, meanwhile, insists that there is no scientific evidence that wider stream buffers would help salmon habitat, as environmentalists contend. He says the new regulations proposed in the environmental petitions would prevent active forest management in many areas, cause more wildfires, and result in an uncompensated taking of land from private owners. And while he could not cite a specific example, he said the forestry board’s policy-making has been hobbled by a divide among conservation and industry-oriented members.

“If there was more of a collaborative model,” he said, “things would happen more quickly and they would be more balanced and fair.”

Federal officials to propose ‘threatened’ status for Pacific fisher

By **MONICA SAMAYOA**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing Endangered Species Act protections for the Pacific fisher, a relative of the weasel that persists in small numbers in forests of southwest Oregon and Northern California.

The agency’s Nov. 7 proposal published in the Federal Register comes days after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service entered into agreements with five timber companies and the state of Oregon to protect the Pacific fisher on nearly 2 million acres of forestland in Oregon.

The proposal to extend “threatened” status to Pacific fishers prohibits activities that bring harm, injury or death to the carnivorous mammals. It provides exceptions — essentially allowing the inadvertent killing of these protected animals — if it happens during activities like habitat management or “forestry management activities for the purposes of reducing the risk or severity of wildfires.”

Those exceptions drew criticism from conservationists that have been pushing for the Pacific fisher’s protection from habitat destruction. They decried what they called loopholes to allow ongoing logging in Pacific fisher habitat.

“Fishers deserve actual safeguards under the Endangered Species Act, not this weak proposal that doesn’t fully protect their habitat,”

said Tierra Curry, a senior scientist at the Center for Biological Diversity. “The exemptions to their protection are fuzzier than fishers themselves.”

The first bid to list the Pacific fisher as threatened was made four years ago but was withdrawn after researchers determined the data did not adequately identify wildfire or exposure to rodent poison.

“Since that time, we’ve been working a lot with private landowners and state agencies as well to develop candidate conservation agreements to help further fisher conservations and so we made a lot of headway there,” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Sue Livingston said. “Right now, we got agreements out for almost two million acres that are enrolled in these agreements which we expect to benefit fishers.”

According to the agency’s announcement, the new proposed rule has the best scientific and commercial data available for the species.

The Pacific fisher is about half the size of a cat and has a long tail. It resides in mixed conifer-hardwood forests.

“A lot of times when people see these animals they’re dashing across the road,” Livingston said.

Being hit by vehicles is one of many threats that have put the species on the edge of extinction. Trapping and logging have also been attributed to the fisher’s population drop. Other threats —

wildfire, drought and tree disease — are becoming more severe as a result of climate change caused by the continued emission of greenhouse gasses through the burning of coal, gasoline, and other fossil fuels.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Oregon state supervisor, Paul Henson, said his agency wants to continue to expand Pacific fishers in certain parts of their historic range where they are no longer found.

“We’ve been re-introducing fisher up in Washington state in several areas, most recently in the Cascades of Washington state and also up in the Olympic Peninsula and we’d like to consider



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The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing Endangered Species Act protections for the Pacific fisher.

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