

Environment, logging groups sue over timber sale

Naselle schools sign lawsuit

By EVAN BUSH
Seattle Times

Two more lawsuits have been filed against the Washington Department of Natural Resources over its plans for state-managed timberlands, further clouding the future of the state's forests and the timber money that helps support rural communities throughout western Washington.

The newly filed lawsuits are led by a timber trade group and an environmental coalition. A previous lawsuit was filed on Monday by Skagit County over the state's sustainable timber-harvest level. Proceeds from timber sales have historically benefited counties, the public-school system and local taxing agencies in rural areas, such as school, fire, hospital and library districts.

The flurry of lawsuits comes a month after the department approved plans for reduced timber harvest on state lands and a long-term conservation plan for the marbled murrelet, a seabird federally listed under the Endangered Species Act that needs mature trees to raise its young.

The long-awaited plans pleased few stakeholders and the three lawsuits, which attack the department's work from divergent perspectives, reflect a bitter divide in how



Alan Berner/Seattle Times

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the parties think Washington's forests should be operated. The three complaints will push a messy political fight into a tangle of litigation that could take years to sort out.

Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz has said she hoped to avoid a lawsuit and believed the department had balanced protection of the endangered marbled murrelet with what she views as a requirement to produce as much revenue as is sustainable to local communities where state timber is sold for logging. The department projects five decades of declining timber harvests on state-managed lands, something Franz has said is a chief concern.

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Nick Abraham | a spokesman for the Washington Environmental Council

objective was not to end up in court, she failed miserably," said Rod Fleck, the city attorney and planner for the town of Forks.

Forks joined four timber-dependent counties, local school districts, a fire district and the timber trade organization American Forest Resource Council in filing its lawsuit Thursday in Skagit County Superior Court, saying the department's reduc-

tion of planned timber harvest violates the agency's financial obligation as a trustee to maximize proceeds to counties and other beneficiaries from timber sales.

They argue the department's modeling did not prioritize beneficiaries, that the agency used low-quality inventory data and that it did not communicate well enough so that counties and local tax districts could

fully understand the financial impacts of the agency's plans.

The lawsuit also argues that the department did not adequately explore a plan to conserve less acreage for the marbled murrelet, which would have provided more land for cutting, and therefore, more revenue.

"DNR is doing things that won't help the murrelet but will cause impacts to rural communities throughout Washington," said Lawson Fite, general counsel for the American Forest Resource Council.

The plans the department selected will likely cause Naselle-Grays River Valley School District, a plaintiff, to lay off teachers due to reduced timber revenue, the complaint says. Because of uncertain timber funding, the Quillayute Valley School District No. 402 won't be able to replace the district's 1961 athletic stadium which "is at the end of its useful life."

Meanwhile, an environmental coalition, including the Washington Environmental Council, the Olympic Forest Coalition, Conservation Northwest and several individuals, filed a separate lawsuit Thursday in King County Superior Court, saying the department's management of timberlands does not adequately serve local communities or the public schools that benefit from timber sales.

It also argues the state

has broader obligations to all Washington residents beyond maximizing revenue from commercial harvest.

"The fundamental system for how we're supposed to be funding these communities is broken," said Nick Abraham, a spokesman for the Washington Environmental Council.

Healthy forests can benefit water quality, mitigate climate change as sinks for carbon and reduce landslide risk, along with other environmental benefits, Abraham said.

The department's belief that it must focus narrowly on maximizing revenue to counties and other beneficiaries from timber sales is mistaken, the environmental groups' complaint says. Instead, it argues the state should ensure forests are also benefiting the public, broadly. "We shouldn't be using clear cuts to build classrooms," Abraham said, adding that for rural communities, "there needs to be a new way to support them."

Like Washington, the state of Oregon has also been debating the purpose of its state-managed forestlands.

Last fall, 14 counties won a \$1 billion lawsuit against the state, after a jury agreed that their communities had been deprived of revenue for decades as the state limited logging. State officials plan to appeal.

The histories and legal arguments differ, but the stakes are high in both states.

Housing affordability worsened over last decade

State's urban-rural job divide saw increase

By JAKE THOMAS
Oregon Capital Bureau

Despite Oregon's widespread housing shortage, the amount of housing built in the state during the last decade reached a record low.

That was one of the unexpected conclusions state economist Josh Lehner included in a blog post on the last day of 2019.

"On a population growth-adjusted basis, Oregon built fewer new housing units this decade than we have since at least World War II," wrote Lehner. "With data going back nearly 60 years, never have we built fewer new units on a sustained basis than we did in the 2010s."

In a follow-up email, Lehner said that between 2010 and 2019 Oregon permitted 37 new housing units per 100 new residents. Between 1960 and 2009, Oregon permitted 47 per 100. Roughly speaking, he said that's as if the state went from building one new housing unit for every two new people, to building one new unit for every three newcomers.

Lehner wrote that housing affordability has worsened throughout the last decade, making it harder for residents to make ends meet and for young, working-age households to move to Oregon. He said the root of the problem is the low levels of housing construction.

In 2017, the median rent in Oregon rose to \$1,079 in 2017 up from \$816 in 2010, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates. According to a report from the Oregon Center for Public Policy, one in three Oregon households struggle to afford housing.

During the last legislative session, Oregon became the first state to pass statewide rent control. Lawmakers also passed House Bill 2001, landmark legislation that would allow duplex, triplexes and other denser varieties of housing to be built on some land currently zoned single-family in most cities.

In a statement, House

Speaker Tina Kotek also pointed to how the Legislature dedicated 200 million to affordable housing development, \$55 million to affordable housing preservation and \$50 million for state homeless assistance programs.

"More work lies ahead to make up for lost time and the state must continue to be a partner with local communities to develop more housing," she said.

Michael Andersen, a senior researcher with the Seattle-based sustainability think tank Sightline Institute, said in an email that House Bill 2001 isn't a "silver-bullet" solution and expected it to gradually change the state's housing stock, noting pushback on the new law by cities.

Andersen blamed the lack of new construction on high costs. He said that if Oregon wants to slow the rise in home prices, it needs to build enough housing to keep up with its rising populations. Until then, he said high prices would hurt the state's economy and throw the housing market out of wack.

"It's like a game of musical chairs where people keep arriving faster than chairs,"

he said.

While the U.S. economy is currently in an unprecedented 10-year expansion, Lehner's blog post included other unexpectedly glum takes.

"Economically, the 2010s were a disappointment," wrote Lehner.

He wrote that during the last decade the economy was running below its potential as it recovered from the Great Recession of 2008. Although Oregon's median household income has surpassed that of the U.S., growth has been uneven, he wrote.

According to Lehner, just nine of Oregon's 23 rural counties have more jobs currently than they did a decade ago.

"Encouragingly, rural Oregon has very few places in permanent demographic or economic declines relative to patterns seen throughout the country," he wrote. "However, even with decent to solid growth in rural Oregon overall, the state's urban-rural divide increased in the past decade."

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group, Pamplin Media Group and Salem Reporter.

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Josh Lehner | state economist

Mildred Sada Ziak

June 8, 1920 - December 29, 2019

Mildred Sada Ziak was born in Portland Oregon on June 8, 1920, and died December 29, 2019, in Astoria Oregon. She was the third of six children born to William and Ann (Haacke) Hallock: besides Wesley, Jane, Jimmy, Lorna, and Rose. Mildred's early years were spent down the Oregon coast in Delake, Nelscott, Taft, and later around Brush Prairie, Washington. Childhood jobs included delivering newspapers, picking hops, and watching over sheep with a gun-bearing brother.

In the mid-1930s a nurse aunt needed someone to accompany home a fragile patient, then stay with her; somebody who could both tend house, and attend its owner. Hence at age 16 Mildred helped Marie Thompson return to Big Creek Logging Camp, which her husband bossed. Camp kids took a railroad speeder to catch the school bus, and Knappa High was where Mildred met future husband Francis Ziak. After graduating in 1939, she eventually got accepted into nurse training at Astoria's Saint Mary's Hospital. And upon earning her RN in 1943 immediately went to work at Portland's Saint Vincent Hospital. Meanwhile wedding Francis in 1944 during his Navy stint. It was autumn of 1951 when Mildred retired to become an Astoria mother.



In 1958 they moved their three children to Naselle, Washington, where Francis continued logging until the mid-1980s. Mildred was very involved in church and community, giving neighbors allergy shots into the 1970s. And was exceptional at making any visitor feel comfortable in her home. Having a mate who loved foreign travel, Mildred gamely accompanied him. These itineraries ranged from a Caribbean cruise, to roaming South America, Europe, Australia/New Zealand, Mexico, South Africa, and China/Japan.

Mildred's greatest joy in life was her family; devoutly serving as wife, mother, grandmother and aunt. But she touched the lives of everyone who met her warmth. Wheelchair-bound after a broken hip, her final years were spent at Clatsop Care Center.

Mildred was preceded in death by Francis Ziak, her husband of 44 years. Immediate survivors include children Larry Ziak of Astoria Oregon, Rex Ziak (Keiko) of Naselle Washington, and Nancy Cooper (Jim) of Magnolia Texas. Plus grandson Brian Cooper (Lisa) and great-grandson Logan, also in Magnolia. As well as brother-in-law Gary Ziak (Peggy) of Knappa Oregon, numerous nieces and nephews.

No public funeral nor memorial was Mildred's instruction. Just like Francis, her ashes will be cast off the north jetty. Any monetary remembrance should be made to Clatsop Care Center.

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