

Timber, environmental groups pitch Private Forest Accord

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Felled trees are moved in preparation for being cut into log lengths and loaded onto a truck.

SALEM — Environmental advocates presented a united front with the timber industry while recently pitching new forestry regulations to Oregon lawmakers.

The state Legislature is considering whether to enshrine a compromise deal on logging rules — the Private Forest Accord — into law, expanding no-harvest buffers and making other management changes.

For the timber industry, the passage of Senate Bill 1501 would ensure decades of regulatory predictability for forestland owners and sawmills, said Diane Meyers, the vice president and assistant general counsel at the Weyerhaeuser timber company.

“The stability makes Oregon an attractive place for the forest product industry’s continued investment,” Meyers said Tuesday before the Senate Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery Committee.

Aside from expanding logging buffers, the Private Forest Accord would strengthen rules for roads to ensure they don’t obstruct fish passage and don’t increase sediment in streams, she said.

“Frankly these conversations have been difficult on both sides,” Meyers said.

Small streams that lack no-harvest buffers would receive protections under the deal, which is significant because they affect the tem-

peratures of larger waterways, said Bob Van Dyk, Oregon and California policy director for the Wild Salmon Center nonprofit.

The agreement calls for a habitat conservation plan for protected species in private forests within five years, which could prove challenging due to Endangered Species Act processes, he said.

“That’s a federal decision, and given federal timelines, that may be ambitious,” Van Dyk said.

The Private Forest Accord would track the removal of beavers from forestland and prioritize nonlethal approaches to resolving conflicts between the species and timber operators, said Sean Stevens, executive

director of the Oregon Wild nonprofit.

The Oregon Department of Forestry’s enforcement abilities would be enhanced and civil penalties for repeat violators would be increased tenfold, from \$5,000 to \$50,000, he said.

“We don’t want to see those people breaking the law with impunity,” Stevens said.

Small forestland owners typically harvest a third less timber from their properties than commercial operators, which is recognized with more flexible rules in the agreement, said Jim James, the executive director of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association.

However, small land-

owners who meet the more rigorous standards would be rewarded with a tax credit that compensates them for the unharvested timber, James said. Those tax provisions would be enacted under a companion bill, SB 1502.

The deal is aimed at preventing small forestland owners from being pressured to convert their properties to other uses, which would be environmentally detrimental, he said.

“I hope it finds its way across the finish line,” James said of the deal.

Apart from the Private Forest Accord, lawmakers will be considering other landmark timber legislation this year: A new management regime from the Elliott State Forest.

The state forest has long been controversial because the logging revenues it generates are obligated to provide funding for schools and because it was considered for privatization.

Under Senate Bill 1546, the forest would remain in state ownership and its revenues would be decoupled from the Common School Fund after generating \$121 million for it.

The vast majority of future logging would occur on tree plantations younger than 65 years and more than a third of the 90,000-acre property would be set aside in a reserve for older forests.

The forest would be dedicated to public use and research, with Oregon State University taking a key role in its management.

Crisis: ‘There’s only so much we can do to force anybody into anything’

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The police chief cautioned, “There’s only so much we can do to force anybody into anything.”

Co-response

Astoria police and Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare are also in the initial stages of developing a program that would embed clinical staffers in the police department.

The program would resemble the co-response model, which generally involves law enforcement and clinicians responding to crisis calls together.

Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, Clatsop County’s mental health and substance abuse treatment provider, is beginning with Astoria, but hopes to eventually expand the program countywide.

One clinician has been hired. The agency plans to hire another with funding support from the county and state.

Neal Burton, a mental health counselor at Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, said the agency’s hope is to provide more immediate assistance and even prevent a crisis before it unfolds.

“We have some concepts we’re working with about what that’s going to look like on the ground,” Burton said. “We don’t know exactly how it’s going to grow, but we want to be more available and do more proactive work in closer proximity with law enforcement countywide.”

Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare has a mobile crisis team available to help law enforcement when called, but inadequate funding and staffing has made it a less effective tool for police.

Burton said both models serve a purpose and can work together.

Shyra Merila, the clinical operations officer at Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, said the co-response model will allow clinicians to respond to calls when appropriate.

“Law enforcement often gets called for things that are not necessarily related to criminal behavior because people don’t know who else to call,” Merila said.

“When the need is really about getting access to mental health services, getting access to substance use services or getting connected with resources in the community that can help people address their basic needs, then

the responder should be a social service provider,” she said. “A behavioral health (provider) should be able to respond to behavioral health needs.”

Merila is encouraged by the opportunity, but acknowledged it will not fix everything.

“In the absence of actual resources in Clatsop County to connect people to ... these people will continue to cycle through the law enforcement system and the behavioral health system,” she said. “Without housing we can’t address the homeless issue, which is part of why we’re pursuing the Heritage Square project.”

The Astoria City Council is considering a workforce housing project at Heritage Square that would include low-cost housing for Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare’s clients.

The mental health component of the project has drawn broad support among the City Council, the county Board of Commissioners and social services agencies, but it has also provoked some strong reaction by people opposed to having more social services downtown.

Exclusion zone

Astoria’s homeless population has become more visible downtown, along

with people passing through the region who are temporarily living on the streets. The city has received frequent complaints about uncomfortable interactions, trash

and human waste left in public places and people harassing passersby.

Over the past few years, the city has discussed adopting an exclusion zone ordinance as a way of addressing repeated bad behavior.

Under the ordinance, the city could move to exclude people from neighborhoods if they repeatedly commit violations like theft, drinking in public or harassment. If expelled by the court, people would be subject to trespass if they return.

Similar ordinances have been passed in cities such as Ashland and Lincoln City.

Spalding said he has been asked to give a presentation about exclusion zones during a City Council work session later this month.

“At that point, the council will decide if this is something they’re interested in enough for me to bring them an ordinance,” he said.

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Vehicles: A push to bolster response and rescue

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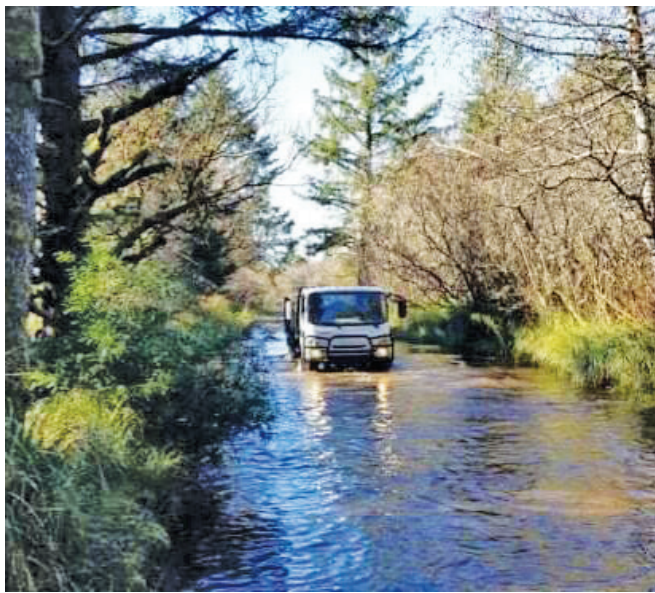
The vehicles are capable of accessing flooded areas, performing water rescues and fighting fires. Benches in the flatbed allow firefighters to relocate a large number of people in an emergency.

Both fire departments applied for the grants several years ago, but recent flooding and wildfire conditions made the vehicles all the more needed.

“It has been a long time coming,” Cannon Beach Fire Chief Marc Reckmann said.

Cannon Beach’s fire district plans to utilize the new vehicle for multiple purposes, but it will primarily serve as a brush rig running out of the Arch Cape Fire Station. Since firefighters have easier beach access in Cannon Beach, Reckmann thought it would be of better use in Arch Cape.

The fire district plans to install a removable tank and pump system, as well as a water filtration system to pull from streams in the event of a water system failure.



Warrenton and Cannon Beach have received all-terrain vehicles from the state.

Warrenton will also add a tank and pump system to its vehicle, Warrenton Fire Chief Brian Alsbury said, once the city is able to fit it into the budget. The vehicle will also be used for navigating sand dunes. The fire department has relied on mutual aid and Camp Rilea for help in the past.

“That’s really our biggest, troubling spot is being able to get into the dunes

and into the shore pines and really thick stuff where big problems can happen if we don’t get on it right away,” Alsbury said.

While the vehicles, constructed by a company in Bend, will be under management by the fire districts, the state has the option to request them elsewhere if an emergency occurs.

The addition of the all-terrain vehicle, Alsbury

said, is a part of his push to bolster the city’s wildland response and rescue capabilities.

“You’ve seen in the last few years, how these big fires are happening in Oregon and we’re drying out,” he said. “The last two summers have been pretty dry ... Unfortunately, our future is getting warmer and things are drying out quicker and staying dryer longer, and that basically is building a perfect storm in a way.”

“I want to be ready for it. I want to stop it before it gets here. I’m trying to do as much as I can to protect the community.”

To test the rig’s effectiveness, Alsbury took it to a spot the fire department has always had problems with — the road that divides Fort Stevens State Park from Camp Rilea and turns into Strawberry Knoll. The area is filled with deep holes. Alsbury was impressed with its performance.

“We powered right through that stuff,” he said. “It’s a remarkable vehicle. I think we were pretty fortunate to get it.”

Incumbents: County overhauls comprehensive plan

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Kujala and Thompson said the lack of child care options in the county remains a problem they would like to address. Kujala sits on a county task force looking at the issue.

The county also suffers from a housing scarcity that impacts all income levels.

Wev is the commission’s representative on the board of the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority, which manages properties for people with low- and moderate-incomes in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties. Wev supported the establishment of a housing project, consisting of more than 40 apartments, being developed in Warrenton’s Chelsea Gardens neighborhood.

In addition, the com-

mission is overhauling the county’s comprehensive plan, a document that will help shape the future of the county’s unincorporated areas and how the county grows.

The three commissioners’ experience on the board predates the coronavirus pandemic, a crisis that at times has displaced other priorities.

Kujala said that, “as a commission, I think, we work well together.” He said the board, under his leadership, has worked with municipalities, nonprofits and other organizations in the county in a collaborative fashion.

“That was one of my goals,” he said, “and I think that’s happened.”

Thompson pointed to the working relationships she has fostered over her nearly

eight years as a commissioner — with state agencies, judges, community activists and county staff, as well as with her fellow county commissioners in Clatsop and statewide. She works with the Association of Oregon Counties and is vice chairwoman of the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District.

Her message to voters: “Thank you for honoring me with your trust. I’ve worked hard for you, and I hope I’ve worked well. Let’s carry on and do more good together.”

In a release announcing her run, Wev’s campaign said, “These are uniquely difficult times for Clatsop County. With (Wev’s) reelection, we will benefit from her vast experience and leadership to help navigate us through these troubled waters.”



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