

Deal sets course for overhaul of private forest management

By BRADLEY W. PARKS
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Timber and environmental groups have reached an agreement that sets Oregon on a course to overhaul management of 10 million acres of private forestlands.

The deal, announced Saturday, Oct. 30, by Gov. Kate Brown's office, concludes more than a year of negotiations between often at-odds sides to develop a plan to boost protections for vulnerable fish and wildlife while shielding the timber industry's ability to log.

The deadline for both sides to either reach consensus, abandon the process or move the deadline was Oct. 29. Negotiators worked through the day and wrapped up business shortly after 1 a.m. Oct.

30. Brown and her staff helped push the negotiations to completion.

"Today's historic agreement is a perfect example of the Oregon Way — coming together at the table to find common ground, to the mutual benefit of us all," Brown said in a press release. "Together, this agreement will help to ensure that Oregon continues to have healthy forests, fish, and wildlife, as well as economic growth for our forest industry and rural communities, for generations to come. I would like to thank everyone involved for their role in making this agreement a reality today."

Jim James with the Oregon Small Woodlands Association similarly praised the compromise.

"We were able to put down the contentious situations that we've had in the past and we had

a continuous agreement to move forward," James said. "I think that's an extreme positive for the state of Oregon."

In 2020, the sides each planned a series of competing ballot measures that could have turned into a costly political fight. Environmental groups sought, among other priorities, strict limits on spraying of aerial pesticides and improved protection for forest waters. Meanwhile, the timber industry sought compensation for private landowners when state regulations limited their ability to log.

Brown instead pushed for the two sides to negotiate, and their agreement to do so was hailed as historic even then, though it was just a beginning.

Representatives from the timber industry and environ-

mental groups were charged with setting terms to pursue a statewide habitat conservation plan to safeguard fish, wildlife and water quality. A habitat conservation plan, or HCP, is a tool that allows practices like logging or irrigation to continue while minimizing damage to wildlife habitat.

The deal sets in motion what could be a lengthy, possibly years-long process to craft, approve and adopt an HCP into law and begin implementation.

"There's no doubt that there's gonna be challenges ahead," said Sean Stevens, executive director of the conservation group Oregon Wild. "But I do think that this agreement provides a different sort of foundation than we've ever had before for tackling those challenges ahead."

The next step will be to introduce a bill in the Oregon Legislature to make significant changes to the Forest Practices Act to protect riverbanks and streambanks, improve forest roads and allow for adaptive management of private forests. The state will then pursue an HCP, which will require a rule making process overseen by the Oregon Board of Forestry (which just approved a new state forester). After that, state leaders can pitch the plan to federal regulators.

Speaking on behalf of the timber coalition, Adrian Miller with the Florida-based forest products company Rayonier said the agreement gives timber operators a sense of security going forward.

"I think we're all really proud to be part of a new era of forestry in Oregon," Miller said.

STATE BRIEFS

Oregon school board under probe

JOHN DAY — The Oregon Government Ethics Commission is opening an investigation into whether the Grant County School Board broke the law during an executive session Aug. 19. The state ethics panel made the decision Oct. 22.

At issue is whether the five school board members who participated may have violated the state law that allows public bodies to go into executive session — where the public is barred and reporters are instructed not to report on the proceedings — only in certain narrowly defined circumstances.

The commission's ruling came in response to a complaint filed by the Blue Mountain Eagle newspaper. The Eagle is part of the EO Media Group, which includes the East Oregonian and the Bulletin in Bend.

Bend man arrested after allegedly luring a minor

BEND — A 35-year-old Bend man was arrested for allegedly luring a minor after attempting to solicit sex online, according to Bend police.

A Bend police officer posed as a juvenile on social media and began communicating with Shane M. Sexson, according to police. Sexson contacted the officer, believing the officer was a juvenile, and sent messages about performing sexual acts with the juvenile, according to police.

At 1:20 p.m. Friday, Oct. 29, Sexson agreed to meet the fictitious juvenile to engage in sexual acts. The officer, posing as the juvenile, sent a location where they could meet.

Several Bend police officers responded to the location and contacted Sexson when he arrived. Sexson was arrested and booked in Deschutes County jail on charges of first-degree online sexual corruption of a child and luring a minor.

New filings provide possible causes of Labor Day fires

SALEM — A new filing in a negligence lawsuit against PacifiCorp over last year's Labor Day fires cites "confidential" internal emails from utility employees saying its equipment was involved or may have been involved in five of the Labor Day 2020 conflagrations that ravaged communities around the state amid a severe windstorm and extreme fire conditions.

Emails obtained in the lawsuit's ongoing discovery process also show in the days before the fire, the utility's contract meteorologist was issuing dire warnings to the company about conditions likely to play out over Labor Day.

Asked by the company if he was erring on the side of caution, the meteorologist responded: "If anything, it's conservative. I just went through every event over the last 2 years and couldn't find anything like this one."

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