

Coalition pressures counties to exit \$1.4 billion forest lawsuit

Class action seeks compensation for change in forest policy

By **Mateusz Perkowski**
Capital Bureau

Fifteen Oregon counties must soon decide whether to opt out of a class action lawsuit seeking \$1.4 billion for allegedly insufficient logging in state forests.

As the Jan. 25 deadline approaches, a coalition of environmental and fishing groups is urging counties and the taxing entities within them — including school and fire districts — to exit the litigation.

The North Coast State Forest Coalition, which represents the seven organization, hopes to send a message that counties and taxing districts see state forests as more than just “piggy banks,” said Chris Smith, the coalition’s coordinator.

Linn County is the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit but its boundaries contain far fewer acres of state forestland than Tillamook, Clatsop and Washington counties, he said.

“If some of the bigger counties opt out, the merits of the case are then suspect,” said Smith.

John DiLorenzo, the attorney representing Linn County, said the groups within the coalition have nothing to lose with their request, but counties and tax districts will suffer remorse if they opt out.

“It’s a half-baked strategy,” DiLorenzo said.

The lawsuit simply aims to recoup revenues lost by the counties when the State of Oregon changed forest policies in 1998 to focus on the environment and recreation instead of maximizing logging, he said.

By making that decision, Oregon’s government breached its contract with

counties, which turned over their forestlands in the early 20th Century in return for a portion of timber revenues, DiLorenzo said.

Counties and tax district that exclude themselves from the lawsuit won’t impact forest policy because the case is purely about financial damages, he said.

“Opting out is a useless gesture that amounts to turning down money,” DiLorenzo said. “They will have a lot of explaining to do the next time they ask voters for more money.”

Entities that exit the litigation also won’t have any influence if Oregon does decide to enter settlement negotiations, he said. “You have to be at the table to have a judge listen to you.”

Smith, of the North Coast State Forest Coalition, countered that counties and other entities that opt out of the case will reduce the state’s possible liability and thus the pressure to settle.

“They haven’t won the case yet and I’m not at all sure they will,” he said.

Opting out also reinforces Oregon’s argument that state forests are valuable for multiple purposes, including water quality and recreation, Smith said.

While Tillamook County has decided not to exit the litigation, the coalition still hopes to sway other entities, he said. “We’re trying to make the case and our supporters are talking to their (county) commissioners.”

Linn County filed the lawsuit earlier this year on behalf of itself and 14 other counties that donated roughly 650,000 acres to the State of Oregon.

Since then, its complaint has survived the state gov-



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Fifteen counties and roughly 130 tax districts are being pressured by environmental and fishing groups to opt out of a \$1.4 billion lawsuit that accuses Oregon’s government of insufficiently logging state forests.

ernment’s motion to dismiss and has been certified by Linn County Circuit Judge Daniel Murphy as a class action, which means other counties and tax districts are included in the litigation unless they object.

The lawsuit claims Oregon breached its contract with counties in 1998 when it emphasized environmental and recreational goals as the “greatest permanent values” of state forests, rather than maximizing revenues.

Up to 150 local taxing districts that receive timber sales receipts from harvests from the Oregon Forest Trust Lands contract could be eligible join the suit. That includes schools, libraries, public safety agencies and other districts.

The other counties that benefit from the trust are Benton, Clackamas, Clatsop, Columbia, Coos, Douglas, Josephine, Klamath, Lane, Lincoln, Marion, Polk, Tillamook, and Washington.

Enterprise DMV closed for repairs

East Oregonian

and restoration.

ENTERPRISE — A burst water pipe has forced the closure of the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles field office in Enterprise.

Workers discovered the damage Monday, and will determine an exact reopening date after assessing the repairs

The Enterprise office, located at 200 W. North St., is typically open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday. The nearest DMV offices are located in La Grande and Baker City.

For DMV services, residents can also visit www.oregondmv.com.

EAGLES

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Fulfer had praise for player Trey Wandschneider who scored two points.

“He plays a Dennis Rodman type of role for us, he really plays tough defense,” Fulfer said.

The wins left the boys with a 3-1 league record and 9-3 overall.

The road was a bit more rocky for the girls, who took a 55-41 loss at the hands of Echo.

Coach Lance Homan attributed the loss to a lack of energy on his team’s part.

“Echo came out more aggressive and with more energy and we didn’t match them

in those departments,” Homan said.

The Saturday game at Wallowa saw the girls back to form, cruising to a 52-37 victory. Homan was pleased with the turnaround.

“I was proud of how our girls responded the next night against Wallowa,” he said. “We came out very aggressive and we made some shots early. Wallowa plays with a lot of heart and energy. Annette Moeller does a great job with them. We were able to eventually pull away, but it was a pretty tight game most of the way.”

The week left the lady Eagles with a 2-2 league record and 8-3 overall. Both teams next play Pine Eagle at home on Friday, Jan. 13.

INVITE

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On the Outlaw side, Shane Lund at 113 lbs. and Cole Farwell at 126 lbs. thoroughly dominated their opponents with Farwell winning his championship match by fall in short order. Dylan Staigle just missed the championship round but still won a decisive victory for the third place slot at 132 lbs.

Enterprise coach Troy Farwell praised his team’s effort.

“Cole (Farwell) came out real aggressive and won his bracket, Shane (Lund) had a great match. My whole team

wrestled well all weekend,” he said. Farwell added the tournament afforded the opportunity to see all the other teams and wrestlers in their district.

Joseph coach Tim Kiesecker also praised his team’s performance.

“With seven wrestlers we ended up in pretty good team shape,” he said. “They put forth a pretty good effort. Also the turnout with the roads the way they were was great.”

Kiesecker also had high praise for the meet volunteers.

“I want to thank all the folks who make this happen,” he said. “There’s so many volunteers that most people don’t see.”

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