



# MADISON'S TIMBER PREVIEW

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The US west coast's tumultuous timber harvesting policies are once again making the news this week, following a recent change in US Forest Service (USFS) philosophy in regard to utilizing timber assets on federal forests in Oregon and Washington State.

The USFS estimates it has a backlog of 1.5 million acres (607,000 hectares) in Oregon's Blue Mountains in need of tree thinning, prescribed burns, and other work to maintain a healthy ecosystem. At its current pace, the department reaches about 50,000 acres (20,200 hectares) per year. That means local foresters have at least 30 years of work ahead just to catch up, said *The Columbian* April 5.

The Eastside Restoration Strategy – a plan to accelerate thinning and forest restoration projects on the Wallowa-Whitman, Malheur, Umatilla, and Ochoco national forests proposed by Bill Aney, newly appointed east-side restoration coordinator for the Pacific Northwest – can be boiled down to four points:

- Collaborative process to involve multiple stakeholders at early stages of planning;
- Looking toward larger projects, both in scale and type;
- Dedicated planning; and,
- Using new science and scientists as integral components of planning.

"Accelerated restoration" would identify and plan projects on a much larger scale -- looking at blocks up to 300,000 acres (121,400 hectares) at a time, instead of 30,000 acres (12,140 hectares) -- while working with groups interested in environmental and economic impacts on the forests.

Now that the USFS is pressing ahead with more than doubling the harvest, Oregon's Malheur National Forest will put 70-80 per cent of the annual harvest volume into its new 10-year stewardship timber contract, due to be awarded in August, said Forest Supervisor Teresa Raaf Monday.

"This amount will guarantee the awardee of the contract a consistent, sustainable amount of volume, which will also offer benefits to local communities by providing a stable economic environment that would support local businesses in Grant and Harney counties," said Raaf.

The Malheur is expected to offer 55 million board feet this year and ramp up to 75 million board feet a year by 2015. The harvest has been just 26 million to 30 million board feet a year over the past couple of years. The projects will include a mix of saw timber harvest, restoration work, and other improvements on a large landscape scale.

Wallowa County Commissioner Mike Hayward told the *Wallowa County Chieftain* Thursday it is positive that suddenly there's a significant interest in better approaching the problem of forest health on USFS lands. Hayward says the Malheur, and possibly Ochoco National Forest as well, are considered to be "dry forests," the Umatilla National Forest a "wet forest," and the Wallowa-Whitman a mix between the two. The general plan of harvesting a "dry forest" draws little dissent and several projects on the Malheur National Forest in the vicinity of 30,000 to 40,000 acres (12,140 to 16,187 hectares) in size are underway today.

Aney said one of his goals is to generate bigger projects for the Eastside Restoration Strategy, projects comparable in size to one 190,000 acre (76,890 hectare) Wallowa County Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC) project that's 40 per cent completed and a second 176,000 acre (71,224 hectare) NRAC project that within the next month or two will be forwarded for Forest Service approval. Called the Upper Joseph Creek Watershed Assessment and Lower Joseph Creek Watershed Assessment, respectively, those assessments were made by a large number of organized volunteers who pooled their talents to form a collaborative on the Wallowa County level.

Bruce Dunn, NRAC Chair, says on-the-ground work on that 176,000-acre project would not begin until 2016 at the standard NEPA pace, yet could begin earlier if Aney and the new Wallowa-Whitman collaborative have their way.

Meanwhile, a proposal for changing the way Oregon's O&C Lands are managed reached Congress this week. Oregon's House Natural Resources Committee held a hearing before the House Committee on Natural Resources in Washington, DC, Thursday on a forest management plan Representative Greg Walden created with Oregon Democratic Representatives Peter DeFazio and Kurt Schrader.

The O&C lands were reclaimed by the government from the defunct Oregon & California Railroad. In 1937, the O&C Lands Act mandated that 50 per cent of revenue from timber harvests on the lands be distributed to the counties, to replace property taxes on the formerly private forests. Please see the October 12, 2012 issue of your *Madison's Timber Preview* for details on the O&C Lands discussions.

Under discussion at the hearing Thursday was legislation proposed by the bipartisan trio of Oregon congressmen.

Basically, the proposal would place the 2.7 million acres (1.1 million hectares) of O&C land into two trusts, with roughly half of it managed for conservation while the remainder would focus on a sustainable timber production to help fund county coffers. There are no projections on how much timber would be produced from the 1.47 million acre (595,000 hectares) O&C Trust, which would consist of previously managed timberlands.

The plan would transfer management of older forest stands to the USFS for preservation and dispersing timber production on the lands to meet the needs of mills throughout western Oregon.

It would also add 58,100 acres (23,500 hectares) to the Rogue Wilderness Area in the lower Rogue River drainage. The proposal designates 93 miles (150 km) of 35 tributaries to the Rogue as either "wild," "scenic" or "recreational" under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. In addition, it would withdraw 19 tributaries on the Rogue from mining, as well as 11 miles on the Chetco River.

Walden said the proposed O&C Trust, Conservation, and Jobs Act builds on common ground and would create more than 3,100 jobs for Oregon counties struggling because of the lack of timber production in national forests. The Act would divide current federal timber lands in 18 Oregon counties into two categories: areas intended for managed harvest; and older forests intended for conservation.

The younger timber — approximately 1.5 million acres (607,000 hectares) younger than 125 years — would be placed under the control of a federal trust managing them for harvest on behalf of the counties.

Approximately 800,000 acres (324,000 hectares) older than 125 years would be transferred to the US Forest Service for management under the Northwest Forest Plan.

Walden described the proposal as a way to make federal forest policy work for rural counties. But the plan faces opposition from some environmental groups, including the Pacific Rivers Council, which said the legislation would bring unacceptable harm to fish and endangered species.

DeFazio said reduced harvests and lost revenue had hurt many of his constituents. In Jackson and Josephine counties, he said, one-third of the population receives food stamps.

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