



Chapter 5.

Conclusions

Overall, the Science Panel found that Oregon has made great strides in resolving critical problems of the past. Oregon's land use laws have limited the loss of forest and farm land. Coastal zone management has helped to reverse the loss of estuarine habitats. Forest practices rules have contributed to protection of forest streams. Recent changes in federal land management emphasize protection of biodiversity on federal forests and range lands. Yet, the panel also found that Oregonians now face a new set of environmental challenges that existing policies and programs may not be sufficient to address.

Many of Oregon's key environmental problems are concentrated in the lowlands where most Oregonians live and work. Aquatic ecosystems, which integrate many kinds of activities, are most impacted and most at risk. Water quality in many lowland areas is poor throughout much of the year, and the structure and function of many riparian areas have been significantly altered from historical conditions. With few exceptions, these and other problems are most critical in the lowlands of major river basins—the wetlands, woodlands, and grasslands—that Oregonians have intensively developed for homes, cities, and farms. These lands are mostly privately owned, and the actions involved come from people and industries going about the ordinary business of life.

The greatest opportunity for improving Oregon's environment in this generation, therefore, occurs on lands that Oregonians control: on state, county, and private lands. Much of what potentially can be achieved on federal lands is already reflected in new policies for managing forests and rangelands. The current challenge on federal lands is to take action based on these plans.

This evaluation of the state of Oregon's environment reveals a system that is complex and interwoven. Because of this interconnectivity, managing natural resources may require trade-offs when deciding among competing demands. Intensive agriculture and forestry as well as industrialization and urbanization are highly valued economically, but they can result in significant threats to the environment.

Some environmental threats make headlines, such as toxic materials washed from an industrial site. Other threats stem from small, everyday incidents, such as

applying pesticides carelessly or clearing trees and brush along a river. And yet, even these small actions add up across the landscape to create significant cumulative threats.

Managing Oregon's environment involves decisions that range from the actions of large industry to the weekend maintenance of one's own backyard. It involves activities high in a watershed and their consequences to river conditions farther downstream. It involves finding common ground among those who wish to preserve natural systems and those who wish to maximize economic productivity. For decisions, large or small, that Oregonians face every day, it is essential to understand the status and trends of the environment.

The purpose of the *State of the Environment Report* has been to describe the health of Oregon's natural systems. That has been the work of the Science Panel. The next step is to establish goals, to envision the state of the environment we want to have in 25 years, and to compare that vision to trends outlined in this Report. That is the work of the citizens.

Science Panel and Contributors

The State of the Environment Report was developed and written by a group of dedicated scientists and technicians, all of whom worked as volunteers.

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Individual copies of the *Oregon State of the Environment Report 2000–Statewide Summary* are available to Oregonians free of charge. Copies of the full-length *State of the Environment Report* and bulk orders of the *Statewide Summary* are available at cost.

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The Oregon Progress Board is an independent state strategic planning agency. Created by the Oregon Legislature in 1989 to keep Oregonians focused on the future, the Board is responsible for maintaining the state's 20 year strategic plan, *Oregon Shines*. The ten-member board, chaired by the governor, consists of citizen leaders and reflects the state's social, ethnic and political diversity.

The Progress Board is best known for its Oregon Benchmarks, ninety indicators of economic, social and environmental health. Recommendations from the *Oregon State of the Environment Report* will be used by the Board to strengthen the benchmarks relating to environmental issues.

The members of the Progress Board are: Governor John Kitzhaber, Chair; Brett Wilcox, Vice-Chair; Lindsay Berryman, Ron Daniels, Bobbie Dore Foster; Dave Frohnmayer; Beverly Stein; and Ed Whitelaw.

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