

Ralph Bloemers
Staff Attorney
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March 5, 2008

Re: Federal Forestland Advisory Committee Update

917 SW Oak St.
Suite 417
Portland, OR
97205

Dear Board of Forestry:

I work for a non-profit law center that provides legal service to dozens of conservation groups, recreation clubs, citizen and residents groups and family farm and forestland owners and Native American tribes in Oregon, Washington and Alaska. For example, I have worked on protecting the forest flanks at Cooper Spur by expanding the Mt. Hood Wilderness. I have pursued this work for the Mazamas, the Oregon Nordic Club, the Hood River Valley Residents Committee, Oregon Wild, the Sierra Club and others. I have successfully challenged old growth and roadless logging by working with scientists to ensure scientific integrity.

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Through my work, I have seen first hand why conservation groups and local citizens challenge agency actions and I have successfully brought those challenges. I have also come to know the work of top scientists in the Pacific Northwest and have been fortunate enough to develop relationships with a good number of them and learned about the urgent needs in Oregon's federal forestlands.

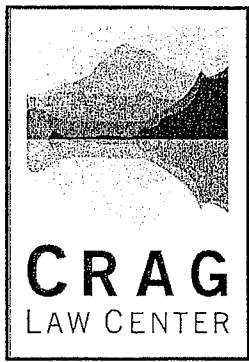


In the fall of 2006, I was asked to join the Federal Forestland Advisory Committee to bring this knowledge to bear for the greater good. Working on the committee has been and continues to be one of the most interesting and educational exercises of public service that I have ever participated in. I thank you and others for inviting me to do so.

What do I bring to the table? Through my work, I have gained extensive legal and scientific knowledge of federal lands management. I have become very familiar with the issues driving the conservation community to challenge public lands management. I am not participating on behalf of any particular group, what I have tried to offer is my candid perspective on the situation at hand.

At the federal level, there has been a lack of continuity over the years in Forest Law and Policy with each new administration trying to overhaul the law through executive branch rulemaking. Agencies have lost great people through fluctuating politically driven budgets and stable investments in our public lands to restore forest health have proven to be elusive.

The committee is interested in coming up with bold action items, not a report that just sits on a shelf and gather dust. In 1999, Governor Kitzhaber's Eastside Forest Health Advisory Group published a set of best practices---or sideboards if you will---



that, in my view provided, helpful policy direction to move Oregon forward at the time. These policy statements were the result of collaborative meetings in the field and careful study of the current condition. The core of the recommendations included protecting uplands, riparian areas, roadless areas and limiting scientifically controversial practices like post-fire logging. Recently, collaborative groups in Montana and Arizona have reached written agreement on what they think is the recipe for success to achieve forest restoration. Members of our delegation are also considering what they might be able to do to shape federal policy to foster collaborative conservation and restoration on our public lands.

We in the Federal Forest Land Advisory Committee have not struggled to put our fingers on the problems, rather the hard work is coming up with objective action-oriented recommendations that can be implemented on the ground to deal with the most pressing problems.

The committee has taken a stab at identifying the most pressing problems – disruption of natural processes, lack of infrastructure to do the needed restoration and forest health work, lack of agreement on sideboards for older forest protection and watershed restoration.

To that, we have taken input from a bevy of experts to produce a concise set of recommendations. While many of us have floated ideas that could transform forest management, we all seem to recognize that the real gains will come by rebuilding trust with the agencies so that we can proceed with efforts that restore natural processes.

For some time now, the scientific community has told us what we need to do in Eastern Oregon to restore landscape resiliency. The assessment from leading scientific experts contained in the Eastside Science Panel Report on the condition of the landscape remains very real and relevant today. The political context has changed. Today, the public and our leaders have finally become that global climate change is an increasingly important reason to shore up and restore these ecosystems. There is a desire to focus the efforts in the face of climate change, and in that light there is a great deal that we already know on what needs to be done to restore the ecosystem. The

big question becomes what we can do to store additional carbon in our land and capture the value in Oregon of doing so. The plant life and the soils in particular might provide places to capture more carbon in a manner that improves ecosystem resiliency.





Now, let me turn to a preview of our work. While the committee as a whole will make consensus recommendations, today, I offer my perspective:

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On the infrastructure piece, the timber industry, particularly in the east side forests, has an opportunity to refocus and energize its work to become a key driver in a strong and diverse local economy. Industry is recognizing that it must reshape itself as a foundational piece of a broader ecosystems services industry. For example, timber industry players that are able to shift their focus to smaller diameter material and enhance their facilities to provide co-generation will lead. Those that find ways to invest back in the needed restoration and stewardship work in ways that decreases the overall effects from road and range utilization have an opportunity to get longer-term certainty in return.

On the natural process piece, scientists know a lot more about what managers can do to restore the hydrologic regime than what managers can do to affect fire behavior. Yet the stakeholders are closer than you might think on what is needed to restore forest health. The scientific community is telling us that we must act to improve the resiliency of the overall ecosystem in order for the forests to continue to provide a broad range of ecosystem services – from timber outputs to clean water and from pristine recreation opportunities for hunting, fishing and camping to carbon sequestration.



On the older forest piece, the committee has been using the term older forests to include late-successional and old growth forests. We recently took input from Dr. Tom Spies on this important subject and are now studying our options to bring greater definition and certainty on this issue.

To accomplish our work, the committee is drawing upon existing plans and programs like Oregon Solutions and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, while also looking for ways to innovate and take bold action on the problem at hand. We are in the most difficult time in our process – we are trying to synthesize and implement our charge. Our goal is to have a set of meaningful recommendations to you in the near future and then get your support to jointly move them forward. Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,

Ralph O. Bloemers