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Subject: FFAC: top ten issues
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Hello FFAC, staff, and friends:

Here is the list of "top ten" issues that Oregon Wild suggests the Federal Forest Advisory Committee embrace and explore in more detail.

1. Protecting federal forests enhances Oregonian's quality of life and fosters diverse economic development to the state. Oregon's economy was more vulnerable in the past when we were too dependent upon a narrow timber-based economy. When interest rates rose, housing starts fell, demand for lumber plummeted, and Oregon experienced severe economic recession. Our economy should not stand on a narrow base. We should strive for a more diverse economic base. It makes no sense to stake our economic future on a declining sector like wood products. Both wages and employment have declined. Oregon will always have a timber industry that relies on predictable log supplies from non-federal lands. We should focus economic development efforts on diverse and growing sectors. Our federal forests play a valuable role by providing a high quality of life that attracts highly skilled workers and the companies that want to hire them.
2. Forest Restoration can be a real win-win -- creating jobs, connecting rural communities to the forest, improving forest health, increasing carbon storage, and producing wood products as a by-product. In shifting from resource exploitation to resource conservation we do not need to worry about loss of jobs. There is a lot of work to do in our forests -- fuels work, prescribed fire, weed control, recreation management, road removal, and erosion control. This work can employ thousands of people indefinitely. We just need the political will to make this a reality.
3. There is a huge unmet need to increase diversity in dense young plantations on the westside. Most existing young plantations were established with the objective of timber production which called for high density tree planting and elimination of competing vegetation. The ecological objectives called for in the Northwest Forest Plan and the Eastside Screens require lower tree density, more vegetation diversity, and more dead wood retention. Variable density thinning is needed on hundreds of thousands of acres of former clearcuts in Oregon's federal forests. This is an huge opportunity for restoration, employment, and wood products that most Oregonians agree on.
4. The vegetation structure of dryer forests in southern and eastern Oregon forests is adversely modified by decades of logging, fire suppression, and livestock grazing. There is some opportunity for fuel treatments in these dryer forests, however, we don't need another committee to endorse active management in these forests. There is already too much enthusiasm and "group-think" surrounding fuel reduction. The forest management community needs a reality check.

Logging makes the forest hotter, dryer, and windier, potentially making fire hazard worse instead of better. Fuel reduction needs to be limited, strategic, and focused on the smallest fuels, the lowest impact treatment methods, and only a subset of the total acres affected by fire suppression. The FFAC should seek clarity on how to get the most fuel reduction benefit, while causing the least adverse impact. Prescribed fire is an underutilized tool that holds promise.

5. Roadless areas >1,000 acres are ecologically valuable, under-represented and need to be protected and restored. In the past, due mostly to fire history, most habitat existed in large blocks with little fragmentation. Now, we have logged and roaded our forests into a ragged and fragmented patchwork that does not match the ecological patterns that wildlife evolved with. Forests that are managed for ecological objectives, will require restoration that removes many roads, letting forests grow back into larger patches of habitat, and reintroducing low-intensity fire to mimic natural stand maintenance processes.
6. Old growth habitat is severely depleted both east and west of the Cascades and needs to be protected and restored. Mature trees and forests need to be protected in order to help fill the old growth deficit. Pacific Northwest forests are unique in their long lives and large stature. Long periods without severe fire allowed great diversity of life to evolve and thrive. Past management attempted to convert virtually all of these forests into tree farms, but luckily the public rejected completion of these plans and the Northwest Forest Plan and Eastside Screens finally intervened with science-based plans that stopped the slaughter. The public has zero tolerance for any attempt to go back to the ways of the past.
7. The road system is vastly overbuilt and we need to invest in road closure, removal, and stabilization to protect soil, water, and wildlife habitat. Roads are one of the most ecologically damaging structures in our forests causing soil damage, erosion, sedimentation, peak flows/flooding, landslides, habitat fragmentation, wildlife disturbance, weed vectoring, etc... There is no natural ecological analog for a road, so roads are like weeds, "alien structures" in our forests.
8. Intensively managed non-federal forest lands generally do not provide high quality soil, water, or habitat, so the burden falls to federal lands to meet those needs. Endangered species habitat and soil/water quality should play a dominant role in federal forest policy. The choice of what to do with federal forest lands must account for the adverse impacts of non-federal forest management.
9. The Board of Forestry's "Forestry Program for Oregon" is biased toward logging and should not drive Oregon's policy for federal lands. The Forestry Program for Oregon completely fails to identify the sustainable limits of our forests. The Forestry Program for Oregon assumes that equal helpings of "reserved, mixed use, and production" forests are implicitly sustainable without considering the needs of wildlife, or water quality that meets Clean Water Act standards. Oregon's forests must not be viewed like the flavors in Neopolitan ice cream. We need a thorough scientific assessment of the needs of wildlife and water quality and how forest management affects them before we assent to any mix of uses.
10. Emerging issues must be considered. e.g., (A) Invasive species have been described as a "slow motion explosion" with similarly devastating consequences. (B) Climate change demands that we do two things -- prepare our forests for change by for instance protecting north-south dispersal corridors, and use our forests to store as much carbon as possible while conserving biodiversity. (C) There is a growing recognition of the value of snags and dead trees that has yet to make in into federal forest management standards. Even well-intentioned thinning "captures mortality" that would otherwise play critical ecological functions in a natural forest. We have to learn to share the bounty with the natural world by taking some and leaving some.

If the committee decides to focus on "disturbance management" or "dynamic ecosystems" as the timber industry will surely implore you to do, the committee must give equal consideration to the fact that our forest are equally influenced by the long periods of growth in between disturbance.

We agree that ecosystems are driven and renewed by disturbance, but we must remain mindful of the often long intervals between disturbance events. "Disturbance ecology" must not become a drum beat for abandoning "static management" to allow more logging. *Just as fine classical music is built upon the careful blending of notes and the carefully chosen intervals of silence between the notes, fine forests and aquatic ecosystems develop from both disturbances and the often long intervals of growth and recovery between disturbances.* The chronic effects of industrial logging do not respect the natural rhythm of disturbance and quiet.

Tom Spies emphasizes the lack of disturbance is just as important as the disturbance in making old-growth forests.

Central to all of these [old-growth] perspectives are the changes in forest ecosystems and communities during long periods of time that are free from large, high severity disturbance. The central scientific question is what happens to a forest when it develops (including growth and death) over a long time without complete destruction by disturbances such as fire, logging or wind?

<http://www.fsl.orst.edu/Oldgrowthworkshop/statements/Spies.pdf>

We would not be famous for cathedral old growth forests without some long gaps between severe disturbances. The frequent entries promoted by the timber industry are inconsistent with the quiescent half of the forest development process.

Sincerely,

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