

2009 Legislative Concepts – Preliminary Staff Planning

WORKING FORESTS, FORESTLAND BASE

Forestland acquisition: In the past the Department has proposed new bonding authority to acquire lands for long-term management as working forests, averting conversion of the lands to other uses, and potentially generating revenue to help support Oregon's higher education system. Such proposals have not moved forward in the past two legislative sessions. As an alternative approach, the Department will investigate whether existing authorities are adequate to support such acquisitions.

Incentives to retain working forestlands: Various approaches have been proposed to make continued forest use economically more competitive with conversion to other uses. These include tax credits for keeping forests in forest use, conservation easements, payments for the environmental contributions of forest land, changes in inheritance tax law, and "hold harmless" provisions in trespass law. The Family Forestlands Symposium, held last spring, generated multiple ideas along these lines for potential legislative concepts.

Carbon surcharge: Such a surcharge, levied when development permanently eliminates forest canopy, could generate funds used by the Department for forest health, reforestation or other activities.

PROTECTION FROM FIRE

Forestland classification: The Forestland Classification Committee, which is examining Oregon's system for determining which lands should be assessed for wildland fire protection, is on schedule to issue its final report by the end of 2007. The committee's work is expected to generate concepts for legislation.

Fire protection funding: Legislation will be necessary to continue the current system, supported by the 2005 and 2007 legislatures, for sharing of emergency firefighting costs among landowners and the general fund, and for providing for severity funding. As part of this system, legislative action is necessary each session to maintain the landowner share of responsibility at \$15 million; the amount otherwise reverts to \$10 million. Additional concepts may emerge from a Department group examining the current wildland firefighting system.

EMERGING ISSUES

Services in developed and developing areas: In keeping with Board interest in strengthening connections with urban and suburban Oregonians, staff continues to work with stakeholders to explore ways to increase service delivery and collaboration in these areas. Discussions are continuing about possible methods of funding these services.

Pesticides: Bills that would have placed additional restrictions on pesticide use did not pass during the 2007 session, but interest in the issue is expected to remain high, and was demonstrated during the Board's 2007 issue scan. The Governor has directed state agencies to work together to address the issue, and this work may produce concepts for legislation in 2009.

Invasive species: This also emerged as a key issue during the 2007 issue scan, and is receiving increasing attention from agencies, landowners and others. State agencies may collaborate on proposed 2009 legislation.

ADMINISTRATION

Forest Products Harvest Tax Rate: Legislation is introduced each session to set harvest tax rates for Forest Practices Act implementation and for support of the Oregon State University Forest Research Lab. This legislation continues the historical approach of sharing funding responsibility for these programs through a combination of harvest tax and general fund dollars.

"Housekeeping" items: Pending further discussion internally and among other agencies and stakeholders, several items may be incorporated into a single bill to make minor changes to statutes.