

Testimony to the Oregon Board of Forestry of Russell Bassett for the Native Fish Society  
11/06/08

Dear Oregon Board of Forestry,

Thank you for taking time from your busy professional and family lives to oversee forest practices in Oregon. While you have many different user groups clamoring for your attention to push through their own self-interest, I ask today that you be the voice for native fish in Oregon, as they cannot speak for themselves.

If they could speak for themselves, I am sure they would want you to provide them extra protection. They would likely tell you of the many, many obstacles they face on their way to adulthood. They would talk about the staggering amount of habitat they have lost, lack of water quality and they would talk about increased water temperatures. They would ask you to do what you can to help them to not only survive but thrive.

Wild steelhead, salmon and trout in Oregon need your help. You cannot help them gain fish passage at dams and you cannot help them from being overharvested and bi-caught by commercial fishermen, but you can help them deal with the problems associated with increased sedimentation and rising water temperatures. While sedimentation from timber harvest is a major obstacle to salmonid recovery, today I will focus my comments on temperature issues created by timber harvest.

Oregon native salmonid species need cold water to survive and thrive. They will often die at temperatures over 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Many rivers in western Oregon exceed the maximum water-temperature standard set by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. In fact, 14,905 river miles in Oregon do not meet water quality standards, and with increased global warming, significant changes must be made to ensure this trend does not continue.

Lack of riparian vegetation is likely the primary reason for increased water temperatures throughout Oregon, and I am very concerned about the impacts of timber harvest to Oregon rivers. Federal forest practices require a 180-200 foot average riparian buffer, yet Oregon forest practices require only a 20-100 foot riparian buffer depending on stream size and water right allocations. This is nowhere near an adequate buffer to protect our regional icons from rising water temperatures.

But please don't just take my word for it: The following are quotes from a December 14, 2005 letter from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to ODFW:

*"... there is a substantial body of science demonstrating that Oregon's existing forest practice rules and best management practices do not consistently meet water quality standards or fully provide riparian functions important to water quality, public water supplies and fish. Expert reviews and research have identified the need for increased protection of riparian management areas and landslide prone slopes in Oregon for both fish and non-fish streams to provide functions important for fish and water quality. ... additional revisions to the rules are needed to ensure water quality standards will be met and that beneficial uses such as salmonid spawning and rearing will be fully protected."*

The measures outlined today will have little to no effect to reverse increasing water temperatures if timber practices continue to encroach on the water. I encourage you to do everything in your power to greatly increase the required riparian buffers.

Dead fish don't spawn!

Sincerely



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