

Testimony to the Oregon Board of Forestry
Russell Bassett, River Steward Coordinator, Native Fish Society
RE: State Forests Management Plan

6/03/09

Dear Oregon Board of Forestry members,

Thank you for taking time from your busy professional and family lives to oversee forest practices for the state of Oregon. I am here today to encourage you not to increase timber operations in state forests, to decrease clear-cutting to 1990s levels, to make Salmon Anchor Habitats permanent, and to establish permanent conservation areas.

Many times I have heard proponents of increasing timber harvest paint this issue in human terms: that increased timber production provides much needed economic benefits to Oregon residents. I have also heard many opponents of increased harvest paint this issue in wildlife terms: that timber harvest damages the habitats in which wildlife live.

I am ardently opposed to increasing timber harvest in state forests, and as a fish conservationists, I could list many, many reasons why healthy forests are important to Oregon's native fish species. However, today my testimony will be focused on humans, and the importance of intact forests to Oregonians.

Many Oregonians' rely on healthy forests for their livelihood. I'm not talking about the timber industry here, nor am I referring to the money that goes to counties from timber sales. I'm referring to the retailers that sell outdoor equipment, the guides that take people on hunting and fishing trips, and the restaurants and hotels that receive business from people visiting state forests.

Forests benefit people and their pocketbooks by direct income from recreational use, as a quality-of-life benefit to lure new businesses and residents, and as ecosystem services such as air and water purification.

Outdoor recreation contributes significantly to Oregon's economy. In fact, outdoor recreation contributes \$5.8 billion annually to the state's economy, supports 73,000 jobs, generates \$310 million in annual tax revenue, and produces \$4.6 billion annually in retail sales and services, according to a Fall 2006 study entitled "The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy: a \$730 Billion Annual Contribution to the U.S. Economy."

I understand that timber harvest also creates an economic benefit; however, with the current price of timber, it makes no sense, none what so ever, to increase harvest now. In an article printed in the Daily Astorian on Feb. 25, 2009, one of your own employees, unit forester Ty Williams said, "Right now I doubt you could get a price from anybody because very few mills are taking logs at this time. The markets are flooded. All the wholesalers, their warehouses are full. Mill yards are at capacity. They can't take any more logs in their yards. They're starting to stack up in the woods. It's real bleak."

Some people will benefit from increased timber harvest, but many more will suffer, such as people working in industries that depend on healthy forests like tourism and fishing. Furthermore timber harvest creates a negative economic impact in the form of landslides that damage homes, highways and railroads. The tab of which is often picked up by the tax payer.

I'd like to end my testimony by paraphrasing a March 2005 article in Outdoor Magazine titled "As a Matter of Fact Money Really Does Grow on Trees: Set against the West's new economic reality, the aggressive drive to cut without factoring in long-term effects on the value of public wild land isn't just environmentally unfriendly; it's economically unsound. What is needed is a long-term shift away from extractive industries and toward recreation, tourism, the service sector, and information technology. Converting the natural wealth contained in the states' pristine forests into corporate profit or a tax break is a swindle of the first order, one that should outrage anyone, Republican or Democrat, who favors combining sound business practices with smart environmental stewardship.

Please don't for one moment think you're doing right by Oregonians and the Oregon economy by increasing timber harvest in state forests. If you really want to help people, don't increase timber operations in state forests, decrease clear-cutting to 1990s levels, make Salmon Anchor Habitats permanent and establish permanent conservation areas.

Thank you.

