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NW State Forest Management Plan Testimony

Chair Imeson, State Forester Decker, members of the Board, My name is Seth Barnes and I am with the Oregon Forest Industries Council. I thank you for this opportunity to give comment regarding the State Forests Management Planning effort that is ongoing.

I am new to the Oregon Forest Industries Council, so for those whom I have not yet met please allow me to briefly introduce myself. I am a product of Oregon, born in Astoria. At the time my father was working on these very landscapes as an ODF forester in Clatsop County in the mid-1970's. I was raised in the coast range forests of Oregon. Educated in Forestry at Oregon State University, I have spent the past 12 years plying my trade with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. I worked for the DNR for both the State Forests and Forest Practices programs. I am keenly aware and sensitive to the difficulties of striving to strike balances between competing interests. That being said, I also have a certain understanding of the duties and obligations regarding the management of forests for county beneficiaries.

Two weeks ago I sat in the audience and listened to the direction given by members of the subcommittee of this board to ODF Staff. Portions of that direction gave me great pause, and I wish to address those portions in my comments today.

First, the question about what to include as elements of conservation: I start with a simple question; what acre of land within the Oregon Coast Range has no ecological value to add towards conservation? How can a single acre of forestland in NW Oregon be condemned for not providing ecological value? Ecologically speaking, every acre counts; operable or inoperable, steep or flat, hardwood or conifer, each acre contributes conservation values and must count towards the conservation percentages in this land allocation approach. If there is one thing that a forester can tell you, it's that each acre has value.

On a related front, I understand the subcommittee is debating about whether or not to include stream buffers as contributing toward conservation acres. If riparian areas are not left for protection and conservation, then what is the purpose of buffer rules under the Forest Practices Act? These riparian management areas must be credited as conservation, for they are by definition conservation lands. They are vital for protecting one of the most sensitive resources in the forest, our water. Landowners actively work to protect these areas. In the big picture there is no doubt that streamside buffers are indeed conservation areas, and must count as such in the Board's management plan.

Every aspect of the Forest Practices Act is done for the purpose of protecting public resource values, "to ensure the continuous benefits of those resources for future generations of Oregonians" ORS 527.630 Please do not disregard the contributions of the Forest Practices Act, the very act that

gives this board authority. Policy makers and landowners have worked hard to shape the conservation measures imbedded within it.

While speaking about the Forest Practices Act, I cannot miss an opportunity to urge you to direct the department clearly to produce a baseline model across the landscape that uses only the FPA restrictions to produce a harvest volume estimate. This is the only way that this board or the Trust Land Counties can truly know the extent of the conservation measures being implemented across the landscape. Without an FPA baseline for comparison, you have no reference and no foundational metric against which to compare different management policy choices and tradeoffs.

Now I want to switch gears and talk about forest roads for a moment. When you picture a forest road I hope you picture one with clean gravel, crowned and shaped, clear ditches with relief culverts in the right places, fish passable sound bridges and culverts, properly daylighted, and properly maintained. This sort of road is the ideal that we are striving for across our state. Roads are our biggest investment in these landscapes. They allow clean transport; from campers to log trucks. However if not properly maintained they can also be one of our greatest ecological challenges. State forests should lead the way as an example of the state standards. Under the 70/30 compromise plan, Oregon can lead the way. Too often roads, our largest public investment on these landscapes, are left lacking, without resources for assessment and maintenance.

By not counting roads, there is a real danger ODF will fall into the same predicament as the USFS; too much thought towards conservation of land, and not enough resource and thought towards conservation or maintenance of roads. The USFS has suffered the consequence, or rather, our state has suffered the consequence in unmaintained and difficult roads, lack of fish passage, and lack of good access for recreation in many areas. I have seen too many examples myself. The blame doesn't lie with USFS foresters, but rather with the policy decisions that included a lack of understanding and regard for one of the landscape's largest, costliest and environmentally impactful responsibilities. This board has an opportunity to do better. OFIC urges you to include the impacts of this obligation throughout your deliberations about conservation areas and conservation funds. For here you will find some of the greatest opportunities to meld conservation, production, and social value. These ideas come together on soundly constructed, and well-maintained forest roads.

Lastly, as I said earlier, I have grown up recreating in the forests of the Oregon coast range. I've hiked the hills around Forest Grove and fished in secret lakes around Timber. I have camped on old landings, and hunted in fresh harvest units. Recreation and timber harvest are not mutually exclusive concepts. Social goals can coincide with production forestry, they do all the time. At the heart of forestry is the basic notion of this balance. I believe the 70/30 compromise has the potential to strike the balance nicely, and I urge this board to support these concepts: measure to the FPA, count all lands in your allocation, count FPA measures (especially RMAs) towards conservation, and don't lose sight of the forest roads as your largest investment and opportunity for conservation measures.

Thank you