



Federal Forest Management – Broken Fire and Smoke Policies

Comment by Rex Storm, Associated Oregon Loggers, Inc.
before the Oregon Board of Forestry – September 6, 2017

Chair Imeson and Board members, my name is Rex Storm, Certified Forester and Forest Policy Manager for Associated Oregon Loggers (AOL). I make these comments on behalf of the 1,000+ AOL member companies, representing Oregon logging and allied forest management businesses— those family businesses who grow, harvest, protect, and own forestlands statewide.

We urge your engagement in reforming the current broken federal forest management policies, concerning federally-borne wildfire impacts of: a) smoke pollution; and b) fire hazards in the federal-private interface.

Something is very wrong with federal forest policy in Oregon! National forest wildfires in recent years are burning at an extraordinary scale— impacting all Oregonians and especially non-federal neighbors.

Most every summer recently, the number of national forest acres burned in Oregon are approximately ten times greater (or more) on those federal forests, as compared to Oregon-Department of Forestry-protected forests (lands owned by private, state & local government, and BLM). Contrasted with fires on ODF-protected lands, these federal fires burn hotter, spread more rapidly, produce more smoke pollution, damage more natural resources, impact more private assets, are more costly to firefight, and impact more Oregonians.

Over the past five weeks, four million Oregonians for many days suffered the smoky air primarily from these federally-borne forest fires—air quality reported to be hazardous to human health.

Through the past two months, neighboring non-federal forest and rangeland owners lost valuable resources and spent millions of dollars firefighting primarily these federally-borne forest fires— resource losses and firefighting expenses unreimbursed by the US Forest Service on the non-federal ODF-protected lands.

You may have heard many arguments that dispel our concern that federally-borne fires are greater than ODF-protected land forest fires. The basis for most such dispelling arguments is without sound merit, and warrants your further consideration. For example:

Argument

- Forest fires caused by climate change
- National forests larger
- Forest Service under-funded
- Forest Service budget borrowing
- Forest Service under-staffed

Merit of argument unsound

- Climate does not differ on ODF-protected lands
- Roughly equal NF acres and ODF-protected acres
- ODF-protected fire funded/spends below USFS
- ODF-protected fire budget far smaller than USFS
- ODF-protected fire program less staff than USFS

National forest management policies today wrongly lean to the preeminence of ecological values—at the expense of equally-important social and economic values. The Forest Service today focuses myopically on impacts of cutting a tree, closing a road, removing anthropogenic effects. When did it become incorrect for a Forest Service manager to consider the benefits of growing and harvesting a tree, opening a road, or utilizing science-proven management technology? All the later are professional actions that could minimize impacts of wildfires.

Current national forest management wrongly mandates strategies that exacerbate forest wildfires. National forests are today extraordinarily combustible and prone to unnaturally-damaging wildfire. National forests are generally overcrowded, dead & dying, poorly accessed by roads, employ compromised firefighting policy, and are encumbered by stifling forest plans, agency policies, obstructive public processes, and conflicting outdated laws.

In summary, we urge your future consideration of the impacts of harmful federal forest policies—as those outdated policies increasingly impact all Oregonians and impair the sustainable practice of forestry on non-federal lands. In particular, the largely federal forest-borne smoke pollution demonstrates how federal forest policies transcend well beyond their federal boundaries and impact two assets valuable to Oregonians:

- Social quality of life and human experience (clean air and fire safe); and
- Federal-private forestland interface (non-federal forest neighbors).

I make these recommendations in respect for the Board's decades-long commitment to effective Oregon forest polices, which make Oregon are good place to grow and harvest trees.

Thank you for considering our suggestion regarding your engagement in reforming the current broken federal forest management policies, concerning federally-borne wildfire impacts.