

Trail Advocates

of the Clackamas River Ranger District of the Mount Hood National Forest

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Wyden Proposes Old Growth Protection

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Robert Kosciak : 6/23/2008; 6:17:40 AM

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Wyden proposes forest restoration and old growth protection
6/19/2008, 6:15 p.m. PDT By JEFF BARNARD The Associated Press

GRANTS PASS, Ore. (AP) — Sen. Ron Wyden has drafted a bill designed to stop the long-standing battles over forests in Oregon by prohibiting the logging of old growth, providing a steady stream of timber and restoring the health of stands in danger from wildfire and insects.

The Oregon Democrat hopes to file the bill this year, with the ultimate goal of getting a nationwide discussion of forest policy going that will capture the interest of the new president taking office next year.

"For the sake of our environment, economy and our way of life, we must come together to pursue a concerted, new focus on sustainable forestry management that will create thousands of new jobs and restore the health of our forests," Wyden said in a statement. "The only way to produce this kind of change is put new ideas forward, seek common ground, and break away from the old politics that led us to this dysfunctional and dangerous situation."

The Northwest Forest Plan, adopted in 1994 to manage national forests in Oregon, Washington and Northern California, was supposed to bring peace to the spotted owl wars by protecting old growth, promoting habitat for fish and wildfire, and giving the timber industry a source of logs they could depend on. It has not fulfilled those goals.

It failed because it took a science-based approach without taking into account whether it would be accepted by the public, said Oregon State University forestry Prof. Norm Johnson, who worked on the Northwest Forest Plan and advised Wyden on the bill.

The result was old growth stands in areas designated for timber

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production, which led to court battles that brought gridlock to the system as the Bush administration pressed to increase timber production and loosen environmental protections.

The Wyden bill is intended to turn the focus of the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management from timber production to forest restoration, said Josh Kardon, Wyden's chief of staff.

But even with a focus on restoration, preliminary estimates are that the bill would significantly boost timber production from federal lands, Johnson said.

The bill divides forests into those that are dry, primarily on the east side of the Cascades, and those that are moist, primarily on the west side of the Cascades. In moist forests, stands and individual trees older than 120 years would be off-limits to logging.

In dry forests, trees older than 150 years could not be cut, but younger trees in those stands would be logged to reduce fire danger, improve forest health, and promote fish and wildlife habitat.

The Forest Service and BLM would be encouraged through funding and regulatory changes to undertake large forest restoration projects under the eyes of independent observers from the inspector general's office of the departments of Interior and Agriculture. If the agencies violated the guidelines or allowed loggers to stray from them, the agencies would lose funding for two years.

By taking old growth off the table, the bill eliminates the most contentious issue in forest policy, which has made the public distrust the Forest Service and BLM, said University of Washington forestry Prof. Jerry Franklin, who helped write the Northwest Forest Plan and also advised Wyden on the draft bill.

"This really is about restoration of economically sustainable forests on federal lands and the (ecological) communities related to them," he said.

"The forests are at incredible risk of uncharacteristic disturbances by fire and by insects," he said. "Furthermore, they are not fulfilling their ecological functions in terms of habitat needs. This is only going to get worse with global climate change."

Conservation groups were generally supportive of the legislation.

Steve Pedery of Oregon Wild said it was a good start, but they hoped to see some details changed to increase protections for old growth.

Russell Hoeflich of the Nature Conservancy said 13 million acres of federal forest land in Oregon is at an unnaturally high risk of fire, and he hoped Wyden's bill would serve as a blueprint to overcome the gridlock over forest management.

The region's leading timber industry group was happy Wyden and Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., who is working on a similar bill, were addressing













the problems facing the nation's forests.

But Tom Partin, president of the American Forest Resource Council, said they were unhappy at the limits on logging old trees, particularly the possibility it could complicate BLM's plans to greatly increase logging in old growth forests in Western Oregon.

"We hate to take the mature-type forest off the table totally," he said.

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