



For America's Heritage

Public Lands Foundation

P.O. Box 7226 Arlington, Virginia 22207

February 3, 2014

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Chairman, Committee on
Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member, Committee on
Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Murkowski:

This letter presents the Public Lands Foundation's (PLF) recent position statement (see attachment) on the management of the O&C Lands in Western Oregon. These lands are managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The PLF is a national non-profit membership organization that advocates and works for the retention of America's National System of Public Lands in public hands, professionally and sustainably managed for responsible use and enjoyment by American citizens. PLF endorses and embraces the multiple use mission of the BLM. Our members are predominantly retired employees of the BLM from across the United States and as such have spent their careers dedicated to the sound management of these valuable lands and resources. Many of our members spent their careers managing the O&C lands. They have personal knowledge of these lands and unparalleled expertise in their management.

Federal forestlands in the Pacific Northwest have been a source of considerable controversy for decades. The O&C lands are unique in their purpose, history, and geospatial orientation (checkerboard) and will require a unique solution. These lands were originally granted to a railroad company, but later reverted back to the Government. The lands, however, were not returned to the public domain, but set aside for special management. The O&C Act of 1937 mandated that the O&C lands be managed for permanent forest production based on the management principle of sustained yield and that a permanent stream of revenue sharing be established for 18 O&C Counties in western Oregon from the sustainable harvesting of timber. Several attempts to resolve controversies over the years have not been successful in achieving the objective of implementable plans that withstand legal challenges and provide the goods and services the public expects from these forests. Recently, Senator Wyden and Representatives DeFazio, Schrader, and Walden have "stepped up to the plate" to take on this very contentious issue. The PLF commends the Oregon delegation for their work to find a solution to this divisive issue and to advance the conversation at the Congressional level.

Representatives DeFazio, Schrader, and Walden introduced the *O&C Trust, Conservation, and Jobs Act* as Title 3 to the *Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act* (H.R. 1526). As you know, this bill has been passed in the House of Representatives and sent to the Senate. Senator Wyden introduced the *O&C Act of 2013* (S. 1784) in December.

The PLF feels that neither of these bills will result in a workable solution for the O&C lands. H.R. 1526, as passed by the House would further fragment these lands into thousands of very small units that will cause confusion to the public and managers. It will lead to increased management expense and inefficiency by dividing the lands between two management entities. By eliminating BLM's management responsibility, the current BLM knowledge and expertise in managing these unique lands would be lost.

The draft *O&C Act of 2013* lacks a thorough analysis of the long-term implications and we believe it will not result in the long-term sustained harvest level proposed in the Bill for more than a few decades; at such time as the thinning acres are completed, the sustainable harvest level will drop considerably. Further, the bill does not address the relationships of the underlying regulatory acts, i.e. National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act, etc. Unless the relationships between these laws are clarified or adjusted so that they work together, litigation and other challenges will hamper implementation and not result in the certainty needed by the BLM, counties, and other stakeholders.

BLM has begun to revise the Resource Management Plans for the O&C Lands. The PLF does not feel that additional BLM planning without Congressional action to address inconsistency in the laws that have been passed over the years will result in sustainable decisions by the BLM. However, BLM could use their planning models to assess the impacts of these bills thus providing information to help frame a final proposal.

While the PLF does not feel that either of these bills is workable in their current form, we believe Congressional action is needed and commend the delegation for their work to date. We are encouraged that a workable solution can be found. The attached PLF position statement on the future of the O&C forests provides several recommendations for consideration. In addition, the PLF has several members that have decades of experience managing these lands and would be happy to provide any assistance we can as the bills work through Congress.

If you would like further information, or have questions we can address, please contact me by phone at (623) 587-7883 or by e-mail at bcmclure@cox.net.

Sincerely,



Beau McClure
Vice President for Operations

Attachment

The Future of O&C Forests, PLF 2013-01, November 11, 2013

Identical letters sent to Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member DeFazio, U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Natural Resources

cc: Neil Kornze, Principal Deputy Director, BLM
Jerry Perez, State Director, OR/WA BLM