



Few things seem more controversial in Oregon than the management of Oregon's forests. Chris Cadwell, a staff representative of the Association of O&C Counties (AOCC) took Springfield City Club on a tour of one aspect of that forest land – the forest managed by the Bureau of Land Management known as the O&C forest, on December 19. Mr Cadwell is a forester and senior natural resource analyst that worked for 33+ years for the BLM. For the last 6 years he has been a staff consultant to AOCC focused on the BLM management of the O&C timber lands.

There are five basic elements to forest lands in Oregon. Private ownership covers about 34 percent of Oregon forest land. Two percent is tribal forest land. Just under four percent is owned by State, county and local governments. The balance, 60 percent, is federally owned and managed and comprises two segments: land managed by the United State Forest Service and land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Mr. Cadwell focused his attention on this last segment.

The O&C forest is a checkerboard patchwork of land that derives from land grants in the middle of the 19th century designed to induce the railroads to construct a railroad and to encourage settlement of the Northwest. Somewhat over 4 million acres was dedicated to the land grant system, of which slightly more than 2 million remain unclaimed at the end of the process. Although the railroads wanted to keep this land for their own use, the federal government resisted and retained the land in federal ownership.

In 1937, Congress passed the O&C Act to govern management of this land. The Act provides that the land must be managed for “permanent production,” that the Annual Productive Capacity of the land must be determined, that when sold or cut it must be done “in conformity with the principle of sustained yield,” that the minimum annual harvest must be 500 million board feet, and that the revenues from sales should be shared with the 18 counties in which the lands are located. Although the Congress passed further legislation in 1976 (the Federal Land Policy and Management Act), that latter enactment provided that the O&C Act would take precedence with respect to O&C lands.

Since the 1990s, harvests from the O&C lands have been substantially below the 500 million board feet minimum, Mr. Cadwell reported. He said BLM current management plans allocated only 20% of the forest to sustained yield and preclude sustained yield management on 80% of the forest. He added that the current Annual Productive Capacity of the O&C lands, which he said is defined as the amount which matches expected growth of the forest, is 1.2 billion board feet. The sustained yield under the current plans is 205 million board

feet, about 18 percent of the productive capacity and far less than the 500 million board feet minimum.

AOCC sued the federal government for failing to comply with the provisions of the O&C Act. He noted that this litigation is completely different from the State litigation filed by counties challenging the State's management of forest lands that acquired from counties. Recently, the court ruled in favor of AOCC and the counties and directed all parties to propose new forest management plans by January 15.



AOCC will propose a plan which can utilize a wide range of forest management practices including extended rotations, tree retention, enhance and maintain riparian condition, develop complex forest, and maintain healthy and fire-resistant forests. Given the O&C Act calls for a minimum harvest level which is only 40% of the annual volume capacity of the forest a wide variety of forest management techniques can be used. AOCC believes it is possible to meet the 500 million board feet minimum and simultaneously provide multiple forest values such as clean water, wildlife habitats, recreation, older complex forest, increasing carbon storage, healthy resilient forests, and support rural economic objectives.

Cadwell said he expects that environmental groups will oppose the proposal. Although he was clear that he could not represent the likely opposition, it is probable that some will argue that provisions of the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act may be restrictions that limit the concept of sustained outlined in the O&C Act. He asserted, however, that many of these objections could be overcome, noting that the BLM does not support clear cutting, does not use aerial spraying of herbicides, and that federal logs cannot be exported.



In response to a question, Cadwell said that BLM can successfully avoid using aerial spraying because it substantially overplants when restoring a cut, on the theory that it is more effective and economical to thin forest than try to plant additional trees, if some replanting is unsuccessful

He said that if the proposal for management was accepted, it would be possible to significantly increase the amount of revenue received by the 18 O&C counties. That revenue has declined precipitously since the 1990s and was decoupled

from timber harvest revenues under the Secure Rural Schools Act.