

Oregon Eastside Forests Restoration, Old Growth Protection and Jobs Act of 2011

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Background

Oregon's eastside forests have been altered drastically by more than a century of mismanagement and abuse. A legacy of fire suppression, road building and industrial logging, compounded by global warming, has left eastside landscapes in desperate need of restoration, and of conservation of the remaining old-growth and the fish and wildlife that depend upon it.

At the same time, the timber industry in eastern Oregon is struggling to survive after decades of over-harvest, conflict with environmental groups, and now, an economic downturn.

In this context, representatives of both the timber industry and conservation groups sat down to try to find agreement on how eastside forests could be managed to both conserve and restore forests and watersheds, and maintain the timber economy of rural Oregon.

This legislation was introduced by Senator Wyden in December 2009 after months of negotiations between conservationists, timber industry leaders, and Senator Wyden's staff. Hearings were held on the "Oregon Eastside Forest Restoration, Old Growth Protection and Jobs Act" in the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests in March and in Bend, Oregon in June 2010.

The bill was revised to address various concerns, and reintroduced in January 2011 in the early days of the 112th Congress. The fundamental goals of the bill remain the same, however there were some key changes – including limiting the authority of the legislation to 15 years and changing the goals for treated acres. At this time, given the substantial changes to the bill and in the make-up of Congress, Oregon Wild is evaluating its position on the new bill and our strategies for pursuing both protections for and restoration of Oregon's eastside forests.

Protections for old-growth and streams

Conservationists have long sought to protect the last remaining old-growth forests in Oregon. This legislation expands upon existing protections for trees larger than 21 inches in diameter and aquatic resources, and directs the Forest Service to work to improve forest and watershed health as its primary goal.

Conservation and restoration for eastside forests and watersheds would be guided by the best available science. Science-based forest management on the eastside will seek to restore old-growth characteristics to the forest while protecting and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat and reducing the risk of uncharacteristic fire. Restoration will also address the numerous problems the Forest Service faces with its crumbling logging road infrastructure, barring the agency from building new roads and requiring a net reduction in roads over time.

A new era of collaboration

Beginning with the Siuslaw National Forest more than a decade ago, conservation, industry, and community interests have begun to come together to seek common ground on managing our public lands. This eastside legislation acknowledges the importance of a more collaborative approach to forest management, which allows ecological restoration projects to move forward so that fish and wildlife, water quality, forest health, and local economies all benefit.

Benefits to eastern Oregon's businesses and communities

In addition to the forest and watershed health benefits this legislation this should produce, the rural economies of eastern Oregon will also benefit. Increased agreement on forest management on a large scale will ensure a secure supply of wood products for loggers and mills.