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Bipartisan Oregon House Delegation Releases O&C Forest Management and County Funding Trust Legislation

Portland, OR – Today, Oregon U.S. Representatives Peter DeFazio, Greg Walden and Kurt Schrader released a [discussion draft](#) of bipartisan legislation aimed at resolving the forest management and county revenue crisis facing much of western Oregon. The legislative proposal comes after months of effort by the offices to consider the needs of the forests, communities and local governments in 18 western Oregon counties that include the Oregon & California Grant Lands (O&C Lands).

The proposal would establish a trust to manage younger forest stands for timber production and revenues for county governments while transferring older forest stands to the Forest Service to be managed to provide conservation values and wildlife habitat. All of the lands would remain under federal ownership. It also includes several new Wilderness areas and Wild & Scenic River designations.

“We commend Representatives DeFazio, Walden and Schrader for their bipartisan efforts to craft a thoughtful proposal for addressing the gridlock affecting the management of nearly 2.5 million acres of O&C lands in western Oregon,” said Tom Partin, President of the American Forest Resource Council (AFRC). “While aspects of this proposal are difficult for many in our industry to embrace, it is clearly a serious bipartisan attempt to end the forest wars that have crippled rural Oregon for nearly two decades.”

The O&C lands are unique to western Oregon and were established by the Federal government to provide timber and revenue to local communities, industry and county governments. Unfortunately, timber harvest levels have withered to less than one-quarter of the 1.1 billion board feet of annual forest growth of these lands. Ever since the early 1990’s the management of these forests has been subjected to a constant barrage of lawsuits, appeals and controversy.

“For nearly two decades county governments have relied on uncertain handouts from the federal government while their residents have watched their communities suffer,” said Partin. “It is vital to all the citizens of Oregon, and most particularly our rural counties where [unemployment remains in double digits](#), that these unique lands be sustainably managed to provide economic opportunities and long-term stability for our rural communities.”

“While this proposal gives environmental groups over 100,000 acres of new Wilderness and excludes all the older forests from timber harvest, it also appears to give rural Oregon far more

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certainty than it has had in decades by ensuring that sustainable forest management will again contribute to the economic and social fabric of these forested communities,” continued Partin. “With the continuation of reduced Secure Rural Schools payments in serious jeopardy -- and short-lived at best -- it is high time for all of Oregon’s elected officials to begin confronting the real challenges facing rural Oregon, particularly the need for these forests to begin contributing to the economic vitality of these communities.”

We are encouraged that Representatives DeFazio, Walden and Schrader have also indicated that they plan to continue working with their Congressional colleagues, including House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (R-WA), to move their proposal forward as part of a broader effort to resolve the crisis facing rural communities dominated by federal forestland.

The American Forest Resource Council represents forest product manufacturers and landowners throughout the west and is based in Portland, Oregon. www.amforest.org