



'People first' on forests, says Cole Public Advisory

Committee meets to advise Forestry Board on new rules; hearings set for public input

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Clatsop County Manager Duane Cole told the Oregon Board of Forestry Thursday that people and local communities should come first when it comes to managing state forests.

He advocated for a policy of "social sustainability" in timber management.

His comments came during a meeting of the 14-member Public Advisory Committee, assembled late last year to help the Forestry Board review how the state manages almost 650,000 acres of forestlands, including the Clatsop and Tillamook state forest.

Social sustainability, Cole said, recognizes that reliable, sustainable timber harvesting provides not just money, but a strong social fabric for the people and communities that rely on most heavily on timber-related jobs.

"Maintaining social sustainability means providing certainty that sustainable forest employment will continue into the future so people employed in the forest, or by the forest, can prosper," he said.

Not everyone on the panel shares Cole's vision for state forest management.

The advisory group is made up of industry, conservation, tribal and recreation interests, as well as local governments. The committee has been tasked with revisiting the 10-year-old "Greatest Permanent Value" rule, the mission statement that guides timber harvesting, environmental protection and other management strategies on the forests.

The committee met Thursday for a day-long discussion of the rule, then joined with the Forestry Board for discussion and questions.

The greatest permanent value rule requires managers by law to balance the social, economic and environmental benefits of the state forests. Rewriting the rule could result in changes in timber management, recreational opportunities and habitat protection in the Clatsop and Tillamook state forests.

The current rule calls for "healthy, productive and sustainable forest ecosystems that over time and across the landscape provide a full range of social, economic and environmental benefits."

Counties including Clatsop and Tillamook, which have deeded forestland over to the state and collect a

share of the income from timber sales, have told the Forestry Board that the rule should address the counties' original intent to have the state manage the forests as a revenue source.

Bob Van Dyke, an advisory board member from the Wild Salmon Center worries that rewriting the rule according to the counties' vision would lead to more logging on state forests and more degradation of forest ecosystems and salmon habitat.

Earlier this year the Board turned away an effort by the Oregon Legislature to boost timber harvests by putting the state forests on an industrial logging model. But the Board has also proposed changes to the current management plan that would reduce the percentage of land dedicated to a mixture of older and younger tree stands and modestly increase logging levels.

The Board is due to make a final ruling on that proposal in April. The advisory committee's work and recommendations will help steer that decision.

In addition to jobs for local citizens, state forest timber harvesting provides revenue for local public entities, including Clatsop County, which receives as much as \$4 million a year in timber dollars.

The coastal counties that contain most state forest lands, including Clatsop County, already experience levels of poverty and the problems that go along with it that are above the state average, Cole noted.

He said that tourism and recreation alone are no substitute for the timber industry and presented figures showing the disparity in wages between timber-related trades, which pay an average of more than \$40,000 a year, and the hospitality jobs that pay less than \$15,000.

The Board of Forestry is also taking public input on its proposed forest management changes at two hearings schedule for later this month, one of which is planned for 5:30 p.m. Jan. 28 at Seaside City Hall, 989 Broadway.