

Kitzhaber calls for state forest conservation areas

Cassandra Profita | November 3, 2011



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A view through the trees of Tillamook State Forest. Gov. John Kitzhaber told state forest managers today that they need to consider setting aside conservation areas within the state forests that would be separate from areas where logging is allowed.

Gov. John Kitzhaber talked at length to the Oregon Board of Forestry today. Among his many messages was a call for “a more visible, durable conservation strategy” than the state currently has for its forests.

He told state forest managers to consider roping off separate areas for conservation and timber lands. That would be a way to demonstrate environmental protection in the forests as clearly as revenue models demonstrate the economic benefits of timber harvest, he said.

It’s a “land allocation” solution he’s also supporting to settle the long-running dispute over the Bureau of Land Management’s O&C lands in southern Oregon. Ideally, he said, the state forests could lead the way and develop a model for federal forest managers to follow. Here’s the full statement he made to Forestry Board Member Gary Springer, who told Kitzhaber the zoning proposal would be a challenge:

“It just seems to me we should at least look at a land allocation approach. I think this going to be the solution if there is on on the O&C lands for a variety of reasons.

(We should be) stepping back and not prejudging acreages at the beginning but saying, ‘Where are some significant conservation areas where we want to manage for conservation values, and where can we clearly ramp up and have much more of an industrial forest model? And if we have more fiber than we’re harvesting, could we have a strategy and begin to move the cut away from those more sensitive areas?’

I think it’s a different way to look at it, but it merits the conversation. There are conservation measures built into your management plan, but they’re not as clear a metric as a revenue model. If we’re able to have that conversation and have science to support it, and have some traction and find a way to balance these things on the state forests, that’s a good model (for the federal lands).”

Board Chairman John Blackwell said the governor’s message wasn’t a surprise, but it was clearly a set of “marching orders” for the board to follow.

“There was a pretty clear message to us today in his speech: That everyone wants certainty,” he said. “The forest products industry wants certainty there will a log supply into the future, into perpetuity. The conservation community wants certainty that there will be conservation areas. So the governor’s asked us to examine how we manage timber and how we set aside, for permanency, conservation areas.”

Blackwell noted there’s still the risk of both sides – timber and conservation communities – being unhappy with the results. Conservation groups might not get as much land as they want in protected areas across the landscape, he said, and the timber industry could be concerned that once you start zoning conservation areas there will be a “creeping” effect that will gradually rope off more and more of the timber.

Bob Van Dyk, a forest policy manager for the Wild Salmon Center, said he likes the idea of having permanent conservation areas.

“I don’t think there’s any question that on the Tillamook and Clatsop State Forests – it’s a half-million acres between Portland and the coast – that there are some areas that deserve long-range protection,” he said. “I think there are also areas that could be open to active timber harvest for the long haul. Our concern has long been there aren’t areas that are securely conserved – anchor sites for salmon, key habitat for fish and wildlife, key areas where people recreate. There’s just not durable and prominent protection for those areas, and we’d like to see those areas created.”

Kitzhaber also stressed from the outset of his talk that federal forests, which make up 59 percent of the forestland in Oregon, have become “de facto” conservation zones in the state. That puts more pressure on state forests to produce timber, he said. He recommended the Board of Forestry try to work more closely with federal agencies to manage the entire landscape instead of keeping state and federal land in “silos.”

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