

Testimony
of **Doug Robertson**, Douglas County (Oregon) Commissioner
before the
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
April 11, 2013

Mr. Chairperson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for asking me here today to testify on the O&C Trust Conservation and Jobs Act (OCTCJA) sponsored by Congressmen DeFazio, Schrader and Walden.

The O&C Trust, Conservation and Jobs Act (“OCTCJA”) is an attempt to solve a 20+ year, jobs, forest health and county funding quagmire. The Oregon and California (“O&C”) Railroad Grant Lands have a unique history and play a critical role in the fabric of Western Oregon Communities. The O&C Lands only exist in Oregon and were, at one point, in private ownership. This land base grows approximately 1.5 billion board feet of timber every year and used to have a harvest level of roughly 1.1 billion board feet. Half of the revenue generated from the sale of this timber goes to the O&C Counties to fund county general funds (unlike Forest Service receipts which are shared at 25% and are dedicated to schools and roads). Unlike the laws governing other federal forestlands, the 1937 O&C Act is a dominant use statute which places management jurisdiction of the lands under the United States Department of the Interior, and directs that the timberlands “shall” be managed:

. . . for permanent forest production, and the timber thereon shall be sold, cut, and removed in conformity with the principal of sustained yield for the purpose of providing a permanent source of timber supply, protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, and providing recreational facilities . . .(43 U.S.C. §1181a)

Due to the listing of the spotted owl and the adoption of the Northwest Forest Plan, which has failed to produce even its modest targets, timber harvests from these lands have been reduced by more than 80%. Today the BLM is incapable of coming up with a workable management plan or path forward. Much like other projects on Federal lands, O&C timber sales are continuously protested, appealed and litigated. This uncertainty is crushing rural Oregon counties, communities and economies.

The OCTCJA places the surface estate of roughly 1.4 million acres of the O&C lands into a trust to be managed by a board of trustees under State and Federal laws that currently apply to private, local and state lands in Oregon. This trust concept works very well in the Chairman's own State of Washington where the Washington Department of Natural Resources produces roughly 125+ million dollars, annually, for the benefit of their communities. This is all accomplished while protecting fish, wildlife and water resources...as would be the case under the OCTCJA.

This bipartisan proposal is a unique approach to solve the management issues on a very unique landscape. Once again, these lands only exist in the State of Oregon, and yet the catalyst that initiated this discussion was the requirement to find balance, and to provide something of substance for all interested parties while continuing to observe the principles contained in the 1937 O&C Act. We recognize that this is no longer 1937, and we do not expect to return to harvest levels of 1.1 billion board feet per year. But we also recognize the Act's sustained-yield management principles are as relevant today as they were then. Our goal has been to blend those principles with the changing attitudes of today into a management regime that provides the balance the public is seeking. This balance includes designating areas for active timber management and other areas for conservation purposes.

Finally Mr. Chairman, let me just say this; I have been an elected Commissioner in Douglas County, Oregon for 32 years. Many of those years have been spent working on this issue. But I have never seen the discussion of Federal forest management with as many suggested solutions and concern on this level. Clearly jobs, fire, insect infestation, disease, the declining health of our Federal forests, and the long-term funding of our local, county governments after the loss of secure rural schools payments, have struck a note with you and many of your colleagues. Having said that, it is absolutely imperative that Federal forest management legislation be passed by the House of Representatives and move to the Senate, for if it does not, the discussion of improving management on our federal lands will end here and we cannot and must not allow that to happen.

Someone much wiser than I once said...we can no longer afford to sacrifice the good in pursuit of the perfect. There is no perfect solution to this issue, but there are good solutions, and this is one of them. Thank you for your time and attention.

Commissioner Doug Robertson