IT’S TIME

Over-dependence on the wood products industry and the collapse of the housing bubble have dealt our local economy a double blow. With far more production capacity than our anemic domestic markets can absorb, mill owners are desperate for cheap logs in a race to undersell each other and survive the recession.

At the same time, thousands of jobs are leaving our shore on China-bound freighters in the form of unprocessed logs from local forests. Asian buyers are paying more than local mills can afford, so logs from Oregon’s private forests go to the highest bidder.

There’s an economic disconnect here: Asia is building, and Oregonians grow timber on highly productive lands and process it into custom finished lumber in state-of-the-art mills. Yet we sit in unemployment lines watching a river of horizontal trees flow to the docks.

It’s time to connect the dots, come together, and stop behaving like a third-world country. It’s time to reinvent the way we balance our economy and our environment.

A Tangled History

The history of our public forests is a convoluted one. During the 1860s, a young nation that was land rich but cash poor granted ownership of about 4 million acres of western Oregon to the Oregon and California Railroad to complete a rail line from Portland to the California border. The land was granted in a checkerboard of square mile blocks on either side of the tracks as they proceeded south. The sale of the land to “actual settlers” was supposed to pay for the project, but fraud, greed and official corruption violated the public trust, and in 1916, the government put 2.8 million back into public ownership.

This land along with Coos Bay Wagon Road lands are currently managed by the Bureau of Land Management under the 1937 O&C Act, which mandates that the land is to be managed to “provide a permanent source of timber supply” cut on a “sustained yield” basis while “protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, and providing recreational facilities”.

Although we are often told that the Act mandates logging, the last clauses cited above make it clear that the O&C forests must also be managed for multiple uses.

An often overlooked clause in the O&C Act also states that “the annual sustained yield capacity... shall be sold annually, or so much thereof as can be sold at reasonable prices on a normal market” (my emphasis). We would argue that this is a highly distorted log market and that the BLM is under no mandate to sell the people’s timber in a depressed market.

After a series of environmental disasters on private land in the East (including the Johnstown Flood that killed over 2200 people in 1889), the lands that were not already in O&C or private ownership were consolidated into Forest Reserves to protect the land and water of the West. These lands are now managed under the U.S. Forest Service.

Today, nearly half of the ~3 million acres of the Umpqua are managed by the Forest Service and the BLM. A significant portion of the receipts from the sale of public timber were historically earmarked for payments to the County, and during the boom years of the ‘70s and ‘80s, millions of timber dollars flowed into County coffers. This created little incentive to keep property taxes in line with County services – as a result Douglas County has the 4th lowest property tax rate of the 18 O&C counties.

As overcutting, collapsing salmon runs and endangered species slowed logging on federal lands in the 1990s, timber dependent communities began to feel the pinch. Realizing that counties had put all of their eggs in the timber basket, the Oregon delegation successfully lobbied Congress for a series of payments to replace declining timber receipts, culminating in the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000.

These payments, based on the years during which the largest timber receipts were generated by unsustainable cutting levels, are set to expire next year. The clock is ticking.

Exporting Our Future

Logging on private lands continues at a brisk pace, driven by the high demand for American logs overseas. In the first half of 2011 alone, Oregon exported over half a billion board feet of raw logs while only shipping an embarrassing 45.9 million feet of domestically milled lumber – only about 8% of total exports. Using the job multiplier that Oregon Congressman Peter DeFazio uses, those exported logs resulted in the loss of over 6,000 jobs.

According to a recent government report, the major reasons for the dramatic increase in west coast exports to China are:

1. Increasing Russian timber export tariffs (from 6.5 percent in 2006 to 20 percent in 2007; 25 percent in 2008 and 80 percent since 2009), which caused China to shift business to the U.S.
2. Tightening timber export policy of the neighboring countries
3. Decreasing U.S. domestic demand which leads to higher exporting supply
4. Increased demand for timber resources in China owing to urbanization and domestic infrastructure

Many have suggested that the U.S. should also place a tariff on raw log exports in order to level the playing field between Asian
buyers and Oregon lumber mills. According to forest products industry consultant Jerry Crane, “China had been importing logs from Russia and Canada until those countries put high export tariffs or other restrictions on raw log exports—Russia and Canada are now exporting nearly 15 times more finished lumber to China than they were 10 years ago, two or three times more than just two years ago. In 2001 China was importing about 250,000 cubic meters of lumber from Russia and similar amounts from Canada and the U.S. In 2010 China imported about 3,800,000 cubic meters of lumber from Russia, 3,500,000 from Canada but just 250,000 from the U.S.” (my italics)

Unfortunately, there is a little known clause in the U.S. Constitution: “Article I, Section 9, Clause 5 of the U.S. Constitution states “No Tax or Duty shall be laid on Articles exported from any State.” Therefore, with no Federal remedy available, we remain impotent to keep our logs home to sustain local jobs.

Shadowboxing with the “Plan”

While private timber is flowing to China, public logs may not be exported without a saw touching them again—they have to at least be squared up by local workers before they can be loaded onto a ship. While we fully supported Rep. DeFazio when he introduced this law early in his career, we remain disappointed in his unwillingness to look for more creative solutions to the private log export crisis (see below).

The fact that federal logs are off-limits to foreign buyers means that their prices are not subject to the same demand as private logs. Therefore, prices are currently $100-150 per thousand lower than private logs on the domestic market. Mill owners are therefore clamoring for an increase in logging on federal lands to increase the supply of cheap federal logs while industrial timberland owners drive truckloads of logs past their mills to the docks.

However, in an attempt to prop up the wood products industry with more of the public’s logs, a plan was proposed about a year and a half ago by Douglas County Commissioner Doug Robertson (R) and backed by the Association of O&C Counties. It recommended selling half of the Bureau of Land Management lands to private industry and conserving the rest. Industrial lands would be managed under the weakest set of logging rules on the west coast: the Oregon Forest Practices Act. Oregon Congressman Peter DeFazio declared that the plan was “doomed” because these rules would allow “intense” logging, and stated that there would be “no protection against clear-cuts under the Oregon Forest Practices Act. That makes it a nonstarter”, according to Rep. DeFazio.

Bowling to political pressure from mill owners and county commissioners, Reps. DeFazio (D) Springfield, Greg Walden, (R) Hood River, and Kurt Schrader, (D) Salem, soon began floating a very similar plan. It includes the idea of setting up some sort of real estate investment trust to lease half the BLM land to “patient money”—investors who were willing to speculate on the leases and make something like 4% profit on their investment over 20 years. The other half of the land would remain in public ownership.

The Roseburg News Review just reported that this plan is now working its way through the House Natural Resources Committee, chaired by Rep. Doc Hastings, (R) Wash. The proposal will be “wrapped in more-comprehensive legislation meant to spur logging in national forests”.

Rep. DeFazio “would not go into details about the plan”, but told the News Review that we shouldn’t worry because timber sales would still have “environmental protections”—then he cited the very same Oregon Forest Practices Act that he had said would allow clear-cutting and doom Commissioner Robertson’s original plan!

Given the small chances that ANY legislation will make it through a pathologically divided congress during an election campaign, and the Obama administration’s preference for science-driven resource management over election year grandstanding, this plan, too, is likely doomed.

DeFazio, Walden and Schrader’s plan has still not been introduced to Congress, but in mid-January CEOs of two of Oregon’s largest corporations hailed this nebulous proposal as “a bipartisan plan to put Oregonians back to work in our own forests, in a sustainable way”, and urged “other business, civic, natural resource and elected leaders to join [them] in moving this plan forward quickly to gain approval.” Although the text has not been released, they make the claim that the plan will provide “what rural Oregonians – and local governments – need most right now: certainty.”

But with Oregon being buffeted by economic gales originating in China, Wall St. and Greece, the only things that are certain are death and tax breaks for the wealthy.

Flooding the domestic market with cheap public logs makes little economic sense when there are few buyers for the finished lumber. Rural Oregonians need to create a nimble and creative economy that is not so addicted to timber, and to not rely on misguided federal legislation promoting resource liquidation or government bail-outs.

A Historic Opportunity

Our community has been in knots over these problems since the 1970s. But we think we are seeing the alignment of social and political forces that will enable solutions to percolate directly up from local communities.

A common thread runs through proposals from County Commissioners, Congressional Representatives, Agency leaders and local Conservationists: the desire for a strong leadership role for Governor John Kitzhaber. We see the Governor in the right position to recreate a major accomplishment of his first two terms in the 1990s: the establishment of the watershed council system in Oregon.

With a federal listing of the Coho salmon imminent, Gov. Kitzhaber championed the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds that established a network of locally organized, voluntary watershed councils to protect and restore local watersheds—arguably the most successful statewide natural resources collaborative in Oregon since aboriginal times. Major improvements to salmon habitat have been made by local citizens across the state, and the Partnership for Umpqua Rivers is a model of successful local collaboration.
For most of those councils unfortunately, all cooperation stops at the edge of the riparian zone – the forest itself are off limits for discussion. With Gov. Kitzhaber’s leadership, we could complete the vision with a similar network of forest councils.

Like our local watershed council, these new councils should have strong scientific advisory committees, have broad community representation, and make decisions by consensus. Working at a landscape scale, community groups would be responsible for determining the resource potential of their watersheds and work with private owners and public agencies to design management programs that meet the needs of both ecology and economy.

We are also fortunate that two recently retired leaders from the agencies are still active in the community and are encouraging collaboration. Jim (Cap) Caplan, former Supervisor of the Umpqua National Forest is still deeply involved in environmental dispute resolution and has written a series of insightful articles in the News Review. Jay Carlson, District Manager at the Roseburg BLM has just retired and plans to stay active and encourage collaborative efforts in the community. Retired UNF forester Alan Baumann has also written passionately of the need for community based forest management, and is working with other stakeholders to achieve that vision.

These able professionals are joined by many other earnest citizens with timber, government, conservation and business backgrounds who are tired of waiting for white knights to ride in, and are working now on local solutions.

We are also encouraged to see the Cow Creek Tribe’s small business incubator coming together downtown, a “buy local” campaign gaining strength throughout the county, and a time bank beginning to foster a parallel economy based on human capital.

**Paying Our Own Way**

Rather than liquidating our natural heritage while we wring our hands and beg for resumption of county payments from the federal government, we need to join with our neighbors and develop locally-driven solutions for funding our transition to a less volatile and more sustainable economy.

While we are constitutionally prohibited from levying federal taxes on exports, we can adjust Oregon’s timber and property taxing systems to fund forest councils, make payments to counties, and to create incentives to divert logs from the docks to local mills. The Oregon Forest Products Harvest Tax and the Forestland Special Assessment Program formulas are way out of date and extremely inequitable at the moment. Let’s start there.

Although data for the last quarter of 2011 are not yet available, Oregon forests will have exported over a billion board feet of raw logs – the equivalent of over 12,000 jobs. At ~$3.75 per thousand board feet, harvest taxes on that billion feet of exported logs generated less than 4 million dollars – far less than the tax receipts that would have been generated by those lost jobs.

Oregonians could choose to increase the harvest tax on timber from large industrial timber tracts, but refund those taxes upon delivery to a mill within the borders of our state.

Currently, the price of logs at Coos Bay is $100-150 per thousand higher than local mills are able to pay. An increase of, say, $100 (or more) per thousand in the harvest tax on just the logs that left our state last year would have generated well over $100 million in revenues. The Governor could appoint a diverse council of experts to determine the fairest rate, and we could choose to have a rolling 2 year sunset clause to reevaluate and/or adjust the amount every biennium depending on current economic conditions.

The revenues from a substantial harvest tax increase on exported logs could be used to fund programs closely tied to natural resources – the new forest councils, sustainable workforce training, innovative forest products business incubation, community log sort yards, and restoration of public and private lands – thus creating the engines of a new economy.

Increasing the harvest tax on logs exported from industrial timberland would have two positive impacts on the local economy. If export prices continue to rise, then industrial timber sellers will simply build the harvest tax into their cost of doing business, and more revenue will become available to fund county services, forest restoration and community transition. The rising cost of raw logs would also make our finished lumber more attractive to overseas buyers, allowing us to add value to our forest products on this side of the Pacific.

If export prices drop, then there will be a greater incentive to deliver logs to local mills to avoid the increased harvest tax. Increasing the volume of private logs to the mills will make raw material less expensive and increase the competitiveness of our finished products on both domestic and overseas markets.

Initially, a portion of the harvest tax can go to county payments until a more realistic tax base can be established. That might include an overhaul of the Forestland Special Assessment Program, a special tax exemption for owners of timber tracts over 5000 acres. In Western Oregon, land under that program was taxed at an average of only $3.10 per acre in 2010! Receipts from that program are allocated to general county funds (35%), the state school fund (60.5%), and community colleges (4.5%).

An increase from $3.10 an acre and $3.75 per thousand doesn’t seem unreasonable to ask of those making windfall profits at the expense of local jobs and vital community services. Levying the same severance tax on large industrial timberland owners that the Mom and Pop small woodland owners currently pay would be a great start.

Modernizing timber taxing worked for Russia and Canada – it’s time for us to do the same.

**It’s Time**

All of the ingredients for effective community collaboration are in place. We have a Governor who is committed to a new, collaborative approach to forest management and has a track record of success in bringing stakeholders to the table. We have a cadre of committed professionals and seasoned volunteers who know what collaboration is NOT, but have been brainstorming in various working groups for the last decade or two. With enlightened leadership and a locally grown system of participation, we can hit the ground running. Fairness in natural resource taxing can deliver funding for the transition to a new sustainable economy while it provides incentives for conservation and local prosperity.

We’ve said many times to all who will listen, Umpqua Watersheds is ready and willing to sit at a level table with clear rules and objectives alongside other committed citizens to work shoulder to shoulder rather than nose to nose to rebuild our economy and our forests’ future. It’s time.

Ken Carloni Ph.D, President of the UW Board of Directors
Outreach Corner (Uno)

Just what exactly does the Outreach Committee do? According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, the word "outreach" as a noun means:

1. the act of reaching out
2. the extent or limits of reach
3. the extending of services or assistance beyond current or usual limits.

Those all seem to make sense and #1 and #3 most definitely seem applicable, but #2 has its role in defining what we do as well.

Working with our Conservation, Education, and Restoration Committees, along with the Executive Committee and the UW Staff, Outreach plays a role in the organization that puts us in an enviable position; we get to see, do, and be a part of it all!

As mentioned in the last edition of the newsletter, two of our goals are to increase membership at both the individual/family levels, but also the business levels. These goals are important in helping our organization grow, but we need your help. If you have family and friends, or know of a business that you feel would benefit from membership in Umpqua Watersheds, ask them to come onboard. It’s not brag, just fact; we have some very cool people involved in this organization!

It is well documented that the ability to network among friends, co-workers, and business associates and acquaintances, has become the way of the world. Please help us build our network, while you build your own: Help us extend beyond our current and usual limits!

Outreach Corner (Dos)

At this year’s 16th Annual Banquet and Silent Auction on February 25th, we are very proud and feel very fortunate to have Dr. Cassandra Moseley, Director of the Ecosystem Workforce Program at the University of Oregon speaking and sharing her experience and insights. The Ecosystem Workforce Program works closely with forest communities and workers to advocate for change that will create ecological health, economic well-being, and democratic processes in the management of our nation’s forests and watersheds. This is something UW has wanted to see happen for a long time! Check them out on the web: http://ewp.uoregon.edu/

Make attending the annual banquet your opportunity to hear how Dr. Moseley’s work is being put into action! Tickets cost $25 each, and are available from any board member, at the Watersheds’ office, New Day Market, and While Away Books in Roseburg; the Harvest Store in Winston; or the Promise Natural Foods and Bakery in Canyonville. They will cost $30 at the door. Hurry though, seating is limited! Join us at UCC for an evening of great food (presented by the UCC Culinary Department), along with Erik Fernandez from Oregon Wild, and Sarah Higgenbothum from Environment Oregon, speaking on the Crater Lake Wilderness proposal. This is something that the WOW Committee has taken to heart and is working along with those other organizations, to make a difference.

There is a strong possibility that there will be two events for UW to participate in, on the same day. The Salmon Dance, at the Glide Community Center, and the annual Earth Day Energy Fair, at the Fairgrounds. Not sure about that just yet, but they both could be held on April 21st. Everyone’s participation and support are greatly appreciated. The Salmon Dance is a direct fundraiser for the WOW Committee and will feature music and great food! We all know it’s hard to be two places at once…but these will be worth the effort!

Third will be the 26th Annual River Appreciation Day, this year on July 21st. As always, this event is a lot of work, but great fun and just about the best way imaginable to honor our rivers. Camping, great food, a river float, a disc golf tournament, booths featuring local vendors and other non-profit organizations are all part of what has made this a great time. Mark your calendar now!

Outreach Corner (Tres)

Can’t believe it is February already! With the annual banquet on the immediate event horizon, it’s only fair to warn everyone, we have only just begun! The day after that is over, we will be starting to focus on other events. Truth be told, we have started already! It’s what Outreach is, it’s who we are.

First up will be the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference at the University of Oregon, on March 1-4. PIELC, or the E-Law Conference as it is commonly known. This free and open to the public event brings together some of the finest environmental legal minds in the world! Check their website for details on who the keynote speakers are going to be: http://www.pielc.org/ UW will have a table at this event, and anyone can volunteer to be part of it! Of special interest to UW will be Saturday and feature our ED, Randy Rasmussen, along with Erik Fernandez from Oregon Wild, and Sarah Higgenbothum from Environment Oregon, speaking on the Crater Lake Wilderness proposal. This is something that the WOW Committee has taken to heart and is working along with those other organizations, to make a difference.

Second will be the 11th annual Earth Day & Energy Fair 2012, happening April 21, 2012 at D.C. Fairgrounds from 10 am to 4 pm. The fair is a FREE family friendly event offering a wide variety of entertainment as well as information & educational activities. Through generous community support and an active community Earth Day/Energy Fair committee as well as a donation of $1600.00 from D.C. Public Works Dept. this family friendly event remains FREE and fun for all ages. See you April 21, 2012 at the D.C. Fairgrounds. Come visit us at the Umpqua Watersheds Booth.

Your Membership Matters

Thank you for your membership to Umpqua Watersheds – your contributions are vital for our work to protect the watershed we all love. We hope that you will continue to support Umpqua Watersheds’ work by renewing your membership on our secure Web site, Umpqua-Watersheds.org
Conservation

At the end of January, 2012, Umpqua Watersheds, through its Conservation Committee, filed a protest to parts of the Coos Bay Wagon Road (CBWR) Pilot Proposal. Specifically, UW takes exception to the insistence, by the Coquille Tribe’s resource managers and the Coos Bay District of the BLM, on thinning in a riparian zone. After removing trees, which are essential for future snag recruitment, these “managers” want to construct a fire trail along this riparian’s year round creek, then broadcast burn the lush native ground cover currently protecting the soils adjacent to the stream. Such actions are inconsistent with environmental regulations, especially when the tribe and BLM’s stated purpose in so doing is to establish a culturally significant plant species: bear grass.

One of the original “pilot” project goals, as stated by Drs. Norm Johnson of OSU and Jerry Franklin of WSU, was to allow an early seral growth period to occur following limited regeneration harvests. Manzanita, alder and other native shrubs, trees, etc. would be encouraged instead of replanting with the usual 400 conifers per acre. Both of these esteemed forestry professors cite the lack of this naturally occurring primary stage that grows following significant disturbance, such as wild fire, wind throw or clear cut logging. On nearly all of the private industrial timberlands in the Coast Range ownership checkerboard, conifer seedlings are replanted within a few years of harvest. Herbicides are sprayed from aircraft to eliminate competition from early seral growth, sometimes two or three times. Often, chemical fertilizers must be applied as well so as to ensure rapid growth of Douglas Fir and other more commercially desirable evergreen species in depleted soils. Unfortunately, Drs. Franklin and Johnson have modified their original prescription and have agreed to the replanting of 200 conifers per acre.

UW’s Conservation Committee feels, instead, that a portion of the open, drier ground left by pilot regeneration harvests would be a more suitable habitat for bear grass than the moist riparian zone. The Committee further feels such a counter intuitive action sets a poor precedent for further, unnecessary riparian entry, something the Coquille Tribe’s timber managers have shown a worrisome inclination for in the past. If the pilot project is scaled up to the nearly 60,000 acres in which the tribe has expressed an interest, such a precedent could be very damaging to streams and the creatures dependent on their continued wholesomeness and, indeed, on their restoration.

Another action proposed by the tribe and BLM for the pilot project is the clear cut harvest of a mature stand of red alder, adjacent to a protected Marbled Murrelet Reserve. The ostensible purpose for clear cutting these healthy hard woods is to eliminate a current “edge effect” that leaves the Murrelets, which use the reserve for rearing their young, vulnerable to predation by ravens, hawks, owls, etc. How eliminating the alders and replacing them with replanted conifers can possibly mitigate any edge effect before many decades, even centuries have passed is puzzling, indeed.

The three pilot sales, one each on the Roseburg, Medford and Coos Bay Districts of the BLM will play out against more than one proposal for increasing timber extraction on Federal Lands in our badly degraded Coast Range watersheds. A plan developed by the Association of O & C Counties and another proposed by some of Oregon’s Congressional Delegation would “cut the baby in two” yet again, with half of the precious forest currently held in trust by the BLM for all of the people of the United States given over to intensive management under the aegis of the Oregon Forest Practices Act. At the same time, more creative proposals for the O & C lands, from the conservation community, are currently seeing the light of day.

Stay tuned if you care about what happens to your timber lands; pay attention, speak up, write letters and don’t forget to support Umpqua Watersheds, your local voice for conservation, restoration and respect for our natural landscapes and the many voiceless creatures who depend upon them.

Patrick Quinn, UW Conservation Committee Chair
Upcoming Umpqua Watersheds Events

February 19th - Snowshoe Hike

Come and experience the beauty of the Umpqua with long-time hike leader Patrick Starnes as he takes the group through scenic Silent Creek. Patrick will discuss high elevation forests and the web of life for rare carnivores.

Who: Welcoming all community members young and old, seasoned snow-shoers and first timers.

Where: Silent Creek, Umpqua National Forest near Diamond Lake and Mount Bailey

Cost: $10 person for snowshoe & ski pole rental if needed.

Meet: Carpool will meet behind Douglas County Library - Fowler St. Parking Lot - 8:00 A.M.

Reserve by Friday, February 17:

Deliver registration to: 539 SE Main St. Roseburg Oregon, 97470
Email Michael Rooney at mike@umpqua-watersheds.org or Call Michael Rooney 541.672.7065

February 25th - Banquet & Silent Auction

Tickets Online: www.umpqua-watersheds.org

Locally at: While Away Books, New Day Grocery, Harvest Store in Winston, Promise in Canyonville OR at the Umpqua Watersheds office 539 SE Main St, Downtown Roseburg 541.672.7065

March 1st-4th - Public Interest Environmental Law Conference

PIELC is organized and hosted by the students involved in the environmental law society “Land Air Water” at University of Oregon Law School.

This years theme - New Frontier: The Political Crossroads of Our Environmental Future. For more information, check out their website http://www.pielc.org

Umpqua Watersheds and Wild on Wilderness will have a booth so come say hello and show your support for the Umpqua!

March 17th - Lookingglass Rock Hike

Discover the botanical and geological wonders of the Lookingglass ROCK (1700 feet elevation) with great views of Tenmile Valley and Lookingglass Valley along with the wildflowers of spring.

Carpools will meet behind the Douglas County Library off Fowler St. at 9am. Be prepared for a short yet steep hike. Please bring plenty of water, lunch, appropriate hiking gear, and expect to share fuel expenses. Hikers can also meet at the Lookingglass Store at 9:30am.

April 21st - Earth Day & Energy Fair

The 11th annual Earth Day & Energy Fair 2012 is happening April 21, 2012 at D. C. Fairgrounds from 10 am to 4 pm. The fair is a FREE family friendly event offering a wide variety of entertainment as well as information & educational activities. Through generous community support and an active community Earth Day/Energy Fair committee as well as a donation of $1600.00 from D.C. Public Works Dept. this family friendly event remains FREE and fun for all ages. See you April 21, 2012 at the D.C. Fairgrounds. Come visit us at the Umpqua Watersheds Booth.

April 22nd - Earth Day Hike

Mark your calendar, hike location still to be determined.
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Umpqua Watersheds sends a Big THANK YOU to all our Business Endorsers

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