

# American Lands Alliance \* Conservation Northwest \* Oregon Wild

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 13, 2007

## **Wyden Senate Hearing Highlights Need For Restoration on Public Forestlands**

Experts Say Old Growth Needs Protection; Conservation Based Thinning Is The Way  
Forward

**Washington, D.C.**-Signaling a potential shift in direction on federal forest management, the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests held hearings today on conservation-based thinning programs on federal forestlands. Subcommittee Chair Ron Wyden (D-OR) convened the hearing to explore successful restoration thinning projects. Conservation groups are calling for federal legislation that promotes forest restoration that includes tools such as prescribed fire and conservation-based thinning while linking them to protection for mature and old-growth forests.

"Across the region, we have seen the success of conservation-based thinning projects that focus on restoring our forests while protecting clean water, salmon, old-growth, and other important values," said Steve Pedery, Conservation Director with Oregon Wild. "Today's hearings underscore the fact that these projects, unlike reckless clear cutting and old-growth logging sales, are non-controversial, win-win solutions."

Witnesses testified about current thinning projects in Oregon and Washington, as well as proposals to shift more of the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management's operations into conservation-based thinning programs. By avoiding clear-cutting and logging in mature and old-growth forests, such projects generate jobs for rural communities without major conflicts and controversy. The hearing provided Senators with valuable information that could serve as the basis for federal legislation aimed at promoting such projects.

"If we promote conservation-based thinning projects while protecting our mature and old-growth forests we can produce jobs for rural communities while avoiding conflict and lawsuits," said Mitch Friedman, Executive Director of Conservation Northwest. "The Bush administration is trying to drag us backwards, and we need Northwest Senators and Representatives to step up and move forest policy in the right direction."

Conservationists believe that two National Forests in Oregon and Washington could serve as a model for the region. Forest managers in the Siuslaw and Gifford Pinchot have adopted practices that avoid logging in mature and old-growth forests and focus instead on thinning projects in younger stands. These two forests are consistently among the largest timber producers in the Northwest, and the Siuslaw has not had a timber sale appealed since the late 1990s.

The cooperative planning process in the Siuslaw and Gifford Pinchot stands in stark contrast to the Bush Administration's attempt to expand old-growth logging on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) forests in Western Oregon, and on other federal lands throughout the region. The current BLM plan calls for expanding clear-cutting by 700%.

Conservationists note that any new thinning legislation should be linked to the protection of mature and old-growth forests, roadless areas, and other important environmental values. Polling of Oregon and Washington residents has shown that 70% want to see permanent protection for trees over 100 years old. There is also wide spread scientific consensus that controlled burning is a valuable tool in forest restoration.

"Conservation based thinning is one tool that can help restore forests, while prescribed fire is needed to restore balance to many dry forests," observed, Caitlin Hills, Director of Forest Programs of the American Lands Alliance. "Projects that promote prescribed fire and thinning are successful because they avoid the controversy of targeting mature and old growth forests, roadless and sensitive habitat. It simply doesn't make sense to separate the two concepts."

In the 1970's and 80's, Northwest forests were severely damaged by widespread clear-cutting and old-growth logging. Today it is estimated that only 10% of the Northwest's old-growth forests remain standing. These last ancient forests represent an important part of America's natural heritage, and provide communities with clean drinking water, habitat for fish and wildlife, and economically valuable opportunities for outdoor recreation.

While past logging practices have decimated much of the Northwest's old-growth forests, they have also left an opportunity. Hundreds of thousands of acres of federal public land in Western Oregon and Washington are currently covered in densely packed tree plantations. Conservation-based thinning programs in these stands can produce wood for local mills while improving conditions for fish and wildlife. Thinning projects that protect old growth in fire-suppressed stands in dry, Eastern Oregon and Washington forests can also help generate jobs for rural communities while protecting important environmental values.

For more information on conservation-based thinning and old-growth protection, visit:

[http://www.oregonwild.org/oregon\\_forests/Restoration%20Thinning%20in%20Western%20Oregon.pdf](http://www.oregonwild.org/oregon_forests/Restoration%20Thinning%20in%20Western%20Oregon.pdf)

<http://www.saveouoldgrowth.org/solution/PNW%20OG.pdf>