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Drinking Water for Over 1.5 Million Oregonians At-Risk If Logging Increased on Bureau of Land Management Holdings

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Ashland, OR – the Geos Institute, a science-based conservation organization, released new findings today that document irreplaceable public values at risk from congressional and other proposals aimed at increasing clear-cut logging on over two million acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) holdings in western Oregon. The report ([click here](#)) documents the importance of BLM lands upstream from the intake of drinking water supplies of over 1.5 million residents from Medford to Molalla, Oregon.

In western Oregon, BLM administers 2.6 million acres of public lands, approximately 2.1 million acres of which encompasses the most at-risk lands known as the O&C and Coos Bay Wagon Road (CBWR) holdings. These particular lands were part of federal land grants in the 1800's that were reconveyed to the federal government in 1916. They are managed under several federal statutes and BLM resource management plans linked to the Northwest Forest Plan. The O&C Lands Act of 1937 directs management of these lands for timber production and equally for watershed, local economic stability, and recreational purposes.

The O&C and CBWR holdings have been the subject of recent controversy and proposals by Reps. Peter DeFazio, Curt Schrader, and Greg Walden to transfer 1.5 million acres to a “timber trust” that would eliminate public values by maximizing clear-cut logging in older forests to generate revenues to the 18 O&C counties¹. On Tuesday June 25, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chair Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) held a hearing to explore how to increase logging levels.

Geos Institute used computer mapping to identify 1.2 million acres of O&C and CBWR lands located within watersheds that provide drinking water for communities in Oregon (surface water source areas). In sum, “fifty-seven percent of the 2.1 million acres of BLM O&C and CBWR lands are located within an Oregon community’s drinking water supply. Increased logging could harm the drinking water for 79 Oregon communities (serving 1.5 million Oregonians, see Table).

According to the report’s author, Dominick DellaSala, “these BLM lands are ground-zero in efforts to hold on to some of the highest water quality, best salmon habitat, and oldest forests remaining in Oregon. Intensively logging them to solve

¹http://defazio.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=759&Itemid=81

for the counties fiscal predicament is short-sighted and will squander the natural assets that make Oregon one the most beautiful places in the nation to live and work in.”

The report also identified co-benefits of managing these BLM watersheds to maintain and improve water quality:

- five stocks of salmon, including Endangered Species Act-threatened coho, occupy these drinking-watersheds that would also be impacted by increased logging.
- High-quality watersheds have low levels of pollutants, including logging-related sediments that are otherwise costly to remove by public water utilities.
- Over 434,000 acres of older forests in these drinking- watersheds store the carbon dioxide equivalent of 38 times the state’s annual greenhouse gas pollution and thus are important to the President’s recent global warming appeal to “manage our public lands and natural systems to store more carbon.”²

Removing sediments from public water systems can be a costly business. In 1996, the City of Salem spent \$100 million on new treatment facilities after logging in upper watersheds combined with storms lead to high levels of sediment in the water supply. Heavy logging in these watersheds will require water users to pay for costly water treatment improvements. Instead federal land managers could emphasize protection of high-quality watersheds and restoration of degraded ones.

The Medford Water Commission, for instance, is likely to benefit from improved water quality resulting from recently completed restoration measures on Little Butte Creek, a tributary of the Rogue River, that is taking some of the burden off of the water treatment plant³. The same stream features that reduce sediment loads in the water provide good opportunities for spawning salmon.

When it comes to managing drinking area watersheds protecting them from logging and restoring degraded ones is good for Oregonians and the environment.

² <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/image/president27sclimateactionplan.pdf>

³ <http://www.geosinstitute.org/green-solutions/restoring-freeways-for-fish.html#>

The report identified the top 26 areas with drinking watersheds overlapping with at-risk BLM lands (53 others with lower percentages are also included in the online report):

Public Water System Name	Population Served	% of Drinking Water Source Area Containing O&C Land
BUELL-RED PRAIRIE WATER ASSN	980	90.62%
CANYONVILLE, CITY OF	1,265	54.00%
CARLTON, CITY OF	1,570	51.52%
MILO ACADEMY	195	43.61%
RIDDLE, CITY OF	1,225	40.70%
SCAPPOOSE, CITY OF	3,500	39.91%
MYRTLE POINT, CITY OF	2,715	39.19%
ANGLERS COVE/SCHWC	-	39.05%
GRANTS PASS, CITY OF	24,000	36.49%
CLARKS BRANCH WTR. ASSOCIATION	140	36.02%
DRAIN, CITY OF	1,145	34.05%
LAWSON ACRES WATER ASSOCIATION	75	33.64%
TRI-CITY WATRI-CITY JW & SA	3,500	32.72%
YAMHILL, CITY OF	1,500	31.74%
GLENDALE, CITY OF	860	30.62%
YONCALLA, CITY OF	1,095	29.45%
LONDON WATER CO-OP	50	29.12%
WILLAMINA, CITY OF	1,760	28.52%
COLTON WATER DISTRICT	1,200	28.03%
ROGUE RIVER, CITY OF	2,000	26.73%
CRESWELL, CITY OF	3,380	20.64%
COQUILLE, CITY OF	4,300	19.48%
WINSTON-DILLARD WATER DISTRICT	5,500	19.35%
MOLALLA, CITY OF	3,100	19.17%
ELKTON, CITY OF	170	19.17%
MEDFORD WATER COMMISSION	131,000	19.10%