**College of Forestry ~ Office of the Dean**
Oregon State University, 150 Peavy Hall, Corvallis, Oregon 97331-5704
**Phone** 541-737-1585 | **Fax** 541-737-2906 | http://forestry.oregonstate.edu/

# Testimony before Oregon House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

## Scott Leavengood
## Director, Oregon Wood Innovation Center
## February 26, 2015

Chair Witt, and Committee Members:

I am not offering testimony today on specific provisions of any of the three bills before you, nor am I supporting or opposing them in their current form. I have traveled to Salem today to offer perspective on the work being done to develop and commercialize western juniper products in Oregon, and to say how important it is that we collectively work to support ongoing efforts to leverage the marketplace as a vehicle for addressing the juniper problem faced across the Oregon landscape.

I have worked for OSU since 1994, and spent the first 7 years as a County Extension Agent working in Klamath Falls. In that position, I worked quite closely with community leaders and entrepreneurs striving to develop markets for western juniper products. Then, as now, commercialization of western juniper was seen as a win-win opportunity – thinning juniper woodlands will help in rangeland restoration efforts while at the same time providing a unique raw material for a fledgling wood products industry.

Significant efforts have been devoted to exploring things like how to harvest juniper trees, how to efficiently produce lumber from them, and how to make value-added products such as furniture and flooring from the wood. One key hurdle we encountered was the lack of familiarity with the species in the marketplace and, in particular, lack of published data on its engineering properties. This is now one area of focus for my work at the OSU College of Forestry.

For example, I am contacted several times a year by architects or engineers wanting to design a structure such as a deck or a home that uses juniper beams and timbers. Their primary question is where to find the published data on the properties of juniper wood such as its strength or stiffness when used as a floor joist or a column. Until these strength data are developed – and we will develop them through our work at the College – these design professionals have little choice but to use another wood species. This is a lost opportunity to leverage private sector markets as part of a statewide strategy for actively and effectively managing at-risk landscapes here in Oregon.

I also want to talk about an ongoing project at the College of Forestry that is a great example of the role our University researchers and Extension agents are playing to help break through some of the existing market barriers to utilizing juniper. Given the exceptional natural durability of western

juniper, the Oregon Department of Transportation began to express interest in using juniper for guardrail posts, guardrail blocks, and for sign posts back in 2012. For good reason however, state purchasing guidelines stipulate a specific minimum strength value for products like guardrail and sign posts; and here again, the absence of published strength values for juniper has precluded its use as a locally sourced material for these products.

The good news is that these barriers will soon be removed. Thanks to funding from Business Oregon, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and the USDA's Rural Development Business Enterprise fund, the College of Forestry is now engaged in a project that is being referred to simply as 'certification' of juniper lumber. Sustainable Northwest is managing the project and the testing work will be conducted at the OSU Forest Research Lab at the College of Forestry.

Here's a quick summary of the steps required for us to complete certification:

- The U.S. Department of Commerce's American Lumber Standards Committee oversees testing and publication of lumber grading standards and engineering values.
- We must implement a sampling plan for the juniper we test that will be reviewed and, we hope, approved by the American Lumber Standards Committee in April of this year. This plan is intended to ensure that our tests are conducted on juniper lumber from throughout the native range of the species.
- Once the sampling plan is approved, we will acquire the necessary lumber, conduct the tests, and publish the data in industry standard references such as the West Coast Lumber Inspection Bureau's grading rules manual.
- While our actual testing will require approximately 3 to 6 months, we expect it will take an additional 12 months for the results to be published and available in the grading manuals – bringing total project time to approximately 18 months from the time we acquire the lumber to publication.

To recap, determining and publishing the strength values for western juniper lumber will aid in economic development by removing a market barrier for the species – both for structural use as well as for use by the State for things like sign posts. In simple terms, this project will help move juniper into 'prime time' – juniper will gain some needed recognition in the marketplace.

However, while this work is foundational for market development for the western juniper industry, it is of course just one small step. Even with this barrier removed, small juniper enterprises in rural Oregon will still face additional hurdles such as acquiring working capital, as well as for training and recruiting workers, and for business planning and marketing. It is my hope that this body will seek ways to add to the grass roots momentum I am witnessing. Again, it's a win-win opportunity for Oregon – thinning of juniper woodlands to restore rangelands and jobs in our rural communities that desperately need an economic shot in the arm.

Thank you.