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March 25, 2021

The Honorable Jeff Golden, Chair
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: SB 544 (**SUPPORT**)

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Heard and Committee Members:

For the record, my name is Amanda Astor. I am here on behalf of the Associated Oregon Loggers (AOL) as their forest policy manager.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the voice of nearly 22,000 forest operators, many of whom helped significantly during the Labor Day Fires and are out regreening Oregon's forests as we speak through salvage logging and replanting.

Post fire restoration achieves social, economic and environmental goals that lead to a more sustainable future for Oregon's forests.

This type of work removes hazards to recreators and travelers on roadways. It proves jobs for Oregonians with opportunities to improve damaged roadways that would otherwise produce more sediment into our waterways. This work removes carbon sources and future fuel loads that can lead to increased fire risk and hazardous smoke-filled air, instead replacing them with carbon scrubbing machines, aka young trees, that act as carbon sinks. This work helps to get forests back into production mode which is beneficial for all Oregonians.

The inability to salvage also leads safety issues if fires reburn in old fire scars making it more dangerous and difficult for firefighters to take action.

When AOL's forest contracting members regreen our forests, they are also providing economic resources to the landowner so that additional mitigation and restoration work can be done on the landscape, such as slope stabilization and road maintenance as you heard from Mr. Williams.

It is important that this work occurs promptly as to ensure maximum returns can be driven back into this other cost-prohibitive work. For more information, please see the attached excerpt from AOL's comments on ODF salvage work and the monthly natural resource column I wrote for October last year in The Register-Guard.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 544. I am available for any questions you may have.

Graciously,

Amanda Astor (she/her/hers)
Forest Policy Manager

Excerpt from AOL's comments on the North Cascade District Draft Implementation Plan Major Revision, i.e. The Santiam State Forest Post-Fire Restoration Plan

Prescriptions

First off, AOL is concerned that there is no standard for identifying risk of mortality in the burned areas of the Santiam State Forest. Multiple factors should be used to identify this risk including crown scorch, bole scorch, and root scorch. Because assessing risk can be very subjective, having a framework for all staff to work off of can create consistency. Please consider these prescriptions for included salvage and/or hazard tree timber taken from the Willamette National Forest:

DESCRIPTION OF INCLUDED TIMBER
Fire damaged Hardwoods, Douglas-fir and other coniferous species except for Pacific yew within 1½ tree length distance from the road edge and within 300 feet slope distance on the uphill side or 200 feet slope distance on the downhill side of the road, measured from the road edge.
Fire damaged Hardwoods, Douglas-fir and other coniferous species except for Pacific yew with less than 20% live green crown.
Fire damaged Hardwoods, Douglas-fir and other coniferous species except for Pacific yew with half or more of its exposed roots that are burned or scorched.
Fire damaged Hardwoods, Douglas-fir and other coniferous species except for Pacific yew where fire has burned through the bark and penetrated the bole of the tree on two or more panels. Separate areas of burnt bole 1 foot or closer are to be considered the same panel.
Fire damaged Hardwoods, Douglas-fir and other coniferous species except for Pacific yew where fire has burned bole with less than 50% cross-section of sound wood.

Other Requirements:

All physical damage to root system, trunk, stem, or limbs and the direction of lean of the tree shall be evaluated in addition to fire damage for removal. Inspection of the cambium layer will provide an indication of potential tree mortality. Structural stability shall also be considered in evaluation of the Danger trees.

Definitions:

Panel: A panel is defined as one quarter the circumference of a tree.

Astor: Post-fire forest recovery is necessary

Amanda Astor

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https://www.registerguard.com/story/opinion/columns/2020/10/17/astor-post-fire-forest-recovery-necessary/3667852001/

Oregon is well on its way to full containment of wildfires that started around Labor Day. As Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams assess the damage, actions are already being taken to mitigate hazards and Oregon's timber industry recently pledged its commitment to the recovery and restoration of our forested landscapes.

As a forester, I am often asked what will happen to our forests with hundreds of thousands — if not millions — of dead and dying trees caused by this year's historic wildfires. The answer comes as a surprise to many: It depends.

Post-fire restoration on privately owned lands will start quickly, as required by law (ORS §527.745), while the majority of federal lands will turn into carbon sources exacerbating the negative climate change effects from the wildfires.

Efforts are already underway to remove burnt timber on private lands in order to replant and restore them. Burnt material will be delivered to local mills, turned into lumber and other critical forest products and serve our community's forest product needs. When completed promptly, the process will stabilize soils, protect water supplies, provide habitat to wildlife and ensure a future generation of healthy trees providing climate solutions.

While private lands will recover quickly, similar post-fire operations on federal lands is prohibitive.

On federal lands, management plans governing our federal forests (Bureau of Land Management's Resource Management Plans and U.S. Forest Service's Northwest Forest Plan) strictly ban or heavily restrict any form of post-fire mechanical activity in designated reserves, wilderness, wild and scenic river corridors, and other congressionally protected areas. More than 80% of the federal lands in Oregon fall under these "no touch" and restrictive areas.

Where post-fire activities are allowed, agencies will have to be strategic, prioritize limited resources and use every tool in the toolbox to tackle this environmental catastrophe.

To add insult to injury, anti-forestry groups are promising to do everything in their power to legally block or delay restorative actions from being implemented on the ground.

The inability to remove standing dead and decaying timber will not only contribute to high fuel loads and greater carbon sources in the future but may also complicate both agencies' ability to reforest these areas safely and effectively.

Furthermore, research by the Forest Service's Northern Research Station shows that young trees pull carbon out of the atmosphere at an exponential rate, which enhances carbon sequestration and restores the forests' role as carbon sinks.

Instead of observing an endless sea of dead trees out of the car window when driving Highways 126, 22, 224, 138, 97, etc. for decades to come, we should take common sense and climate-friendly action: Remove dead timber from our federal lands to reduce future safety and fire risks; process the wood at local mills to create jobs and lumber to rebuild our communities; and replant our federal forests to avoid fire-caused deforestation and enhance carbon sequestration.

These actions are important because the only way to restore our forests while mitigating climate change is by doing necessary post-fire management.

Amanda Astor writes a monthly column for The Register-Guard and has degrees in forestry and forest carbon: science, policy and management. She advocates for sustainable, economic and operationally feasible federal forest management.