

**WASHINGTON, DC**— Representatives Peter DeFazio (OR-04), Greg Walden (OR-02), and Kurt Schrader (OR-05) sent letters to Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, and Representative Doc Hastings (R-WA), Chairman of House Natural Resources Committee to request hearings on long-term solutions for the O&C lands. The Representatives requested that both their bipartisan proposal and Governor Kitzhaber’s recent 94-page report on the O&C Lands be included in the discussion.

“Given our mutual concern about the plight of Oregon counties and the statutorily uniqueness of the O&C Lands- and given the enormous amount of time, energy, and resources committed over the last year to solving this multi-generational problem set- the time is ripe for a substantive hearing and open discussion about solutions. We would be happy to testify,” wrote the members in a letter to Wyden.

The request comes a week after Governor Kitzhaber released a substantive report that outlines possible management solutions and outcomes and a year after DeFazio, Walden, and Schrader offered a realistic, bipartisan proposal that would help stabilize Oregon’s rural communities, create thousands of jobs in the woods, and better manage our forests.

“It’s time for action,” DeFazio, Walden, and Schrader said in a collective statement. “We think hearings on realistic, long-term solutions for the statutorily-unique O&C Lands that would create jobs and provide certainty to counties in both the House and Senate would be productive next steps.”

The hearing requests also come in the wake of a recent announcement that a portion of the final Secure Rural Schools payments to O&C Counties that pay for vital county services like law enforcement is being withheld by the Department of the Interior in anticipation of indiscriminate across-the-board budget cuts called sequestration. Unless the discrepancy is resolved quickly Oregon counties will be forced to cut additional law enforcement positions, further restrict jail capacity, and eliminate public health professionals.

□

## **Background**

Last year, DeFazio, Walden, and Schrader worked with stakeholders to reach a bipartisan agreement on a long-term plan for the O&C counties. The proposal would create jobs, sustain the local manufacturing base, provide revenues to rural Oregon counties, save the federal government hundreds of millions of dollars, and protect fish, water, and old growth. Their proposal secured broad support across the state and initiated an important discussion about long-term management solutions convened by Governor Kitzhaber.

The letter to Senator Wyden is below.

□

Senator Ron Wyden

Chairman

Energy and Natural Resources Committee

304 Dirksen Senate Building

Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Wyden:

We congratulate you on your new position as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources and look forward to continuing to work with you on these important issues.

While we understand the committee you now lead must focus on issues of national scope and significance, we are writing to express our collective concerns about the plight of rural and timber-dependent communities in Oregon.

As you well know, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act you helped author and extend has now expired. Oregon counties have received their final support payments. To make matters worse, we recently learned that a portion of the final payments is being withheld from the O&C counties in anticipation of the budget sequestration threatening additional cuts to vital services like law enforcement and health care. A long-term extension of the program is unlikely.

Some counties in western Oregon are on the brink of bankruptcy and are considering insolvency, or turning over their responsibilities to the state. Rural communities are suffering from chronically high unemployment rates. Our forests are unhealthy. Uncertainty of federal funding is devastating to counties and must be replaced with jobs and economic growth. We know you are intimately familiar with these problems.

Last February we offered a realistic, bipartisan proposal to help solve these problems. Our proposal would create jobs, provide revenues to failing Oregon counties, help sustain the local manufacturing base, save the federal government hundreds of millions of dollars, and protect water, fish, and old growth.

Our proposal secured broad support across the state, including: the Oregon House, Oregon Senate, fifteen county boards of commissioners, the Oregon State Sheriffs Association, and labor and industry groups.

Given the serious challenges these problems pose to our state, Governor Kitzhaber convened a panel of conservationists, O&C County Commissioners, and timber industry representatives to discuss our bipartisan proposal and other long-term management options. While the panel did not come to a consensus, the governor recently released a substantive 94-page report that outlines possible management solutions and outcomes.

We believe both our bipartisan proposal and the governor’s O&C Lands Report are largely consistent with the “Principles for an O&C Solution” your office released in December. We also remain optimistic that a long-term management solution exists and that together we can craft responsible, bipartisan legislation that provides certainty to all constituencies.

In order to keep the process moving forward, we respectfully ask that you hold an oversight hearing to discuss long-term solutions for the O&C Lands – including our bipartisan proposal and the governor’s report. We have made the same request to the Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Doc Hastings.

Given our mutual concern about the plight of Oregon counties and the statutorily uniqueness of the O&C Lands – and given the enormous amount of time, energy, and resources committed over the last year to solving this multi-generational problem set – the time is ripe for a substantive hearing and open discussion about solutions. We would be happy to testify.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,

Peter DeFazio  
Schrader

Greg Walden

Kurt

Member of Congress  
Congress

Member of Congress

Member of

-30-