

Logging Companies Want to Make Tree Sitting a Felony



Logging corporations in Oregon are trying to kick environmentalists out of their trees by getting the state to make it a felony to protest logging by tree sitting and allow companies to sue protesters for financial damages caused by such protests.

In April, Oregon's House [passed two bills](#) that would allow police to charge tree sitters and non-violent protesters with felonies that carry mandatory minimum sentences upon

conviction. A first offense would be a felony with a mandatory minimum sentence of 13 months. A second offense would garner a \$25,000 fine and five years in prison. Another bill would allow logging companies to sue protesters for up to \$10,000 in lost income.

The legislation follows plans to increase logging in Oregon's Elliott State Forest and on federal forest lands. Environmental activists have staged protests at Elliott State Forest at the Oregon State Capitol in May and June 2012, which led to arrests. Activists can already be prosecuted for disorderly conduct, trespass, property damage and criminal mischief, but the two bills vastly increase the penalties in an effort to stop protesters.

Which is all to say that if passed into law, these bills will go straight to the courts. The American Civil Liberties Union and our friends in Oregon already say they will challenge these bills if they become law, and we hope the courts recognize that protesting is one of the main reasons we have the First Amendment.

The bigger worry, however, is that if the courts allow this type of legislation to stay on the books, then more corporations could follow suit—[frackers](#), [oil pipelines](#), [nuclear power](#) plant operators and others could all benefit from laws that keep the rabble from mucking up their doorsteps.

Of course the rabble is us—Americans who want to create a better world with clean water, clear air and a natural world to be enjoyed and observed.

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