



Oppose Senate Joint Memorial (SJM) 201

Senate Joint Memorial (SJM) 201 is aimed at encouraging a solution to the funding crisis facing some Western Oregon county governments by advocating a return to aggressive logging practices on federal public lands—lands that belong to all Americans. A number of the claims made in SJM 201 are exaggerated or inaccurate. Oregon Wild and the Sierra Club urge you to vote “no” on SJM 201.

- **Misleading Statement: SJM 201 states that public “O&C” lands in Western Oregon “...are intended to be used for sustained timber production and county stability.”**

The O&C Act of 1937 did link revenues from O&C lands logging to county funding, but that 77-year-old Act also [required the lands to be managed sustainably](#)¹. In addition, the 1937 law does not exempt these lands from other laws like the federal Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and Endangered Species Act. It also does not exempt them from former President Clinton’s historic 1994 Northwest Forest Plan. In fact, under federal law the O&C lands are legally required to be managed for a variety of values, including wildlife, salmon, and clean water, not simply for logging or county revenue.

- **Misleading Statement: SJM 201 states that “...timber harvests have been reduced by 90 percent over the last 20 years...”**

This is based on a comparison of current logging levels on federal public lands to the level that occurred during rampant clearcutting of the late 1980’s—**the highest level of clearcutting ever to occur on public lands in Oregon**. That unsustainably high level of logging led to endangered species listings, public protests, and conflict that ultimately led former President Bill Clinton to adopt the compromise 1994 Northwest Forest Plan.

- **Misleading Statement: It goes on to state that the above reduction in harvest “...resulted in a drastic decline in revenues ...and left many of the 18 Oregon counties in which O&C lands are located without adequate revenues...”**

Counties did receive a share of the revenues from the unsustainably high logging levels of the 1970’s and 80’s. This allowed them to grow government services beyond what local tax rates could support. However, in 2000, the U.S. Congress enacted the Secure Rural Schools program to transition counties away from dependence on federal subsidies. That program is now ramping down, and some Oregon counties have done little to prepare for it.

Actually solving the county funding crisis will require these counties to [modernize their local tax structures](#).² That is unpopular, but it is reality. In 2012, Curry County, one of the hardest hit of the 18

O&C counties, maintained the lowest property taxes in the state at \$4.30 per \$1000 of real value. The median for Oregon as a whole was \$8.90/\$1000 and the national average was \$9.70/\$1000, according to the U.S. Tax Foundation.

- **Misleading Statement: SJM 201 states that due to the reduction in federal timber harvest revenue, “...counties have suffered a perilous loss of jobs and infrastructure due to sawmill and peeling mill closures and the disappearance of other forest-based industries...”**

These losses have more to do with the mechanization of the logging industry and record levels of raw log exports to China than they do with federal public lands logging. Logging levels on public lands have been relatively stable for over a decade, and the O&C lands have produced an average of about 160 million board feet of logging per year.

Governor Kitzhaber rightly recognized the problem in a speech before the Oregon Board of Forestry in 2011, where he said:

“To me this amounts to no more than exporting our natural capital and exporting our jobs, and we’re at risk, I think, of becoming a timber colony for Asia while undermining our mill infrastructure and their surrounding communities – and at the same time increasing pressure for harvest on state lands.”

A bill in the Oregon House, co-sponsored by Representatives Paul Holvey and Peter Buckley, seeks to address this problem and provide increased funding for county services. [HB 4101](#)³ would re-institute the severance tax on logging that was eliminated in Oregon in 1990’s, while creating a tax credit to promote in-state milling and directing revenues to fund counties. HB 4101 is a far more serious, responsible, and realistic measure to address county budget shortfalls than SJM 201.

- **Misleading Statement: SJM 201 claims that “...current management of O&C lands has caused significant increases in the risk of forest fires and the production of greenhouse gases...”**

[Science increasingly shows](#)⁴ that conserving forests, and allowing more forests to recover to old-growth conditions, is the most effective contribution the Pacific Northwest can make to combating climate change. A recent [study in the scientific journal Nature](#)⁵ found that not only do older forests capture and store more carbon than young, heavily logged forests, but that old-growth trees are the most effective at capturing and storing greenhouse gas pollution.

Logging produces far more greenhouse gases than fire or other natural disturbances, from the fuel burned in heavy equipment, to the slash piles burned, to the relatively short lifespan of wood products.

That does not mean we should not take steps to reduce fire risk, like thinning projects that protect homes and communities. But evidence clearly shows that heavily logged, densely-planted industrial logging lands produce more greenhouse gases, and a greater risk of forest fires, than federal public lands.

- **Misleading Statement:** “...members of the Oregon Congressional Delegation have proposed plans that would result in stable county revenues in an effort to avoid the financial crises...”

Independent analyses have shown that neither Senator Wyden’s nor Representative DeFazio’s bills would actually solve county funding woes, or result in major job growth. This statement also [fails to acknowledge](#)⁶ the important role these lands already play in Oregon’s economy, from providing clean drinking water to our communities to sustaining our growing tourism and outdoor recreation industry.

Finally, this statement also ignores the controversy these proposals have generated. President Obama has already said [he would veto](#)⁷ HR 1526 and DeFazio’s logging plan, and Senator Wyden’s legislation has been [widely criticized](#)⁸ by mainstream scientists and conservation organizations.

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¹ http://www.oregonwild.org/oregon_forests/old_growth_protection/westside-forests/Western%20Oregon%20BLM%20Backyard%20Forests/history-of-blm-and-o-c-lands#the-o-c-act

² <http://www.andykerr.net/storage/conservation-uploads/Larch%20OC%20Shared%20Responsibility-Counties.pdf>

³ <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2014R1/Measures/Overview/HB4101>

⁴ http://www.oregonwild.org/oregon_forests/global-warming-and-northwest-forests

⁵ <http://www.natureworldnews.com/articles/5658/20140116/older-trees-grow-faster-take-up-more-carbon.htm>

⁶ <http://pacificrivers.org/o-c-economic-analysis>

⁷ http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/legislative/sap/113/saphr1526r_20130918.pdf

⁸ <http://fisheries.org/scientists-question-wyden-oc-logging-plan>