The Nature Conservancy
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The Nature Conservancy in Oregon
821 SE 14th Avenue
Portland, OR 97214-2537

tel 503 802-8100
fax 503 802-8199
nature.org/oregon

February 26, 2015

Representative Brad Witt, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
c/o Beth Patrino, Committee Administrator

Re: Support for HB 2997 and HB 2998

Chair Witt and Members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bills 2997 and 2998.

The Nature Conservancy in Oregon is keenly aware of the problem of juniper expansion beyond its natural range and the negative impacts this encroachment has on wildlife habitat and rangelands. We have worked with the Western Juniper Alliance (formerly Western Juniper Utilization Group) since its inception to collaborate on juniper management efforts and help craft a set of guiding principles for ecologically sound juniper removal. Those principles, attached to this testimony, reflect the common objectives that led to both HB 2997 and 2998.

We support HB 2997 and the continued efforts of the Western Juniper Alliance in promoting the sustainable harvest of western juniper, access to product harvested during restoration projects, expansion of markets for western juniper and support for the businesses engaged in "adding value" to a product that might otherwise be considered waste. In the same spirit, we support the program described in HB 2998 to provide assistance to small businesses engaged in western juniper harvesting or product manufacturing.

We understand there may be amendments proposed to HB 2998 that change the bill to retain the oversight of juniper harvest within the Oregon Forest Practices Act (OFPA). We support those amendments and **respectfully ask that the committee amend HB 2998 to keep juniper harvest within the jurisdiction of the OFPA.**

While TNC supports these bills and ecologically sound harvest of juniper, we want to **note the value of old growth juniper in providing important habitat for a variety of wildlife** and the need to protect those trees. The restoration principles referred to earlier recognize the value of old growth western juniper, stating that juniper management should "avoid harvest or utilization of old growth juniper, typically located in less-fire prone areas".

In closing, we respectfully urge your support for these bills and ask that you move them along in the process with a do pass recommendation.

Amanda Rich
Director of State Government Relations
The Nature Conservancy in Oregon
arich@tnc.org

WHITE PAPER

Key Western Juniper Woodland Management Practices When Juniper is Removed and Utilized

Background

Juniper is removed from thousands of acres of public and private forests and rangelands each year in Eastern Oregon. Many of these projects involve both a landowner and a funding agency and are conducted for a variety of ecological and economic objectives using a range of site specific prescriptions. Cooperating entities include, but are not limited to:

a. Private Landowners (including tribal lands)
b. Federal Agencies (e.g. DOI Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, DOI Bureau of Indian Affairs, USDA Natural Resource Conservation)
c. Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD)
d. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)
    i. Mule Deer Initiative
    ii. Sage Grouse Initiative
e. Oregon Department of Agricultury (ODA)
f. Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB)
g. Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF)
h. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
i. Oregon State University Extentsion Service

Each partner in a cooperative agreement to treat juniper woodlands has their own objectives in addition to the common goals. In many cases, a management plan is adopted to provide site-specific prescriptions for the goals and objectives of each party, including juniper treatment methods, post-treatment management and monitoring.

In limited situations, juniper logs are removed and transported to small sawmills or sawn on site. There are many reasons why juniper is not widely utilized after it is felled, but an important one is that road systems are either primitive or non-existent, and the volumes involved are too small to justify investments for improvements.

This document provides key management practices and operational suggestions for removal and/or milling of juniper logs on-site. These guidelines and practices are not intended to alter or modify previously agreed-upon site specific restoration standards between the landowner, management agency and funding entity. However, they are intended to highlight ecologically appropriate practices where some portion of the cut juniper is utilized for an economically beneficial purpose, and provide assurances to potential buyers of juniper products that they are in

fact byproducts of carefully thought-out and planned restoration activities with many watershed and wildlife benefits.

White Paper Goal

Provide assurance to consumers that the juniper they purchase from reputable juniper wholesalers or retailers are byproducts of rangeland habitat and restoration projects that have been conducted in an ecologically appropriate manner.

Guiding Principles, Key Management Practices

- Design and implement juniper treatment projects to improve watershed function and surface water flow (often done by thinning juniper woodlands to release groundwater lost to juniper transpiration, and reduce interception and sublimation of local precipitation).
- Avoid harvest or utilization of old growth juniper, typically located in less-fire prone areas.[1]
- Consider and incorporate methods to improve wildlife habitat, especially for sage grouse and mule deer.
- In suitable locations, reduce juniper competition with native shrubs, forbs and grasses, and native tree species, such as pine, fir and aspen.
- Design juniper treatment projects to prevent or reduce existing and potential soil erosion and in stream sediment flows.
- Implement management practices that will prevent or reduce establishment and spread of noxious weeds.
- Consider reducing prescribed burn intensities where appropriate to reduce long-term damage to native vegetation.
- Consider ways to design and implement juniper treatment projects to provide access for juniper to be extracted, and provide local economic benefit.

Operational Suggestions

- Live Branches on Stumps - Cut all live branches from each juniper stump to reduce regrowth.

[1] Old growth juniper exhibit two (2) or more of the following characteristics: 1) Flattened, rounded, or uneven top with little to no vertical leader growth (less than 1 in/year); 2) Spreading crown; 3) Large branches near the base of the tree (open stands only); 4) Large dead branches, missing bark, and abundant light green lichen; and 5) Thick fibrous bark with well-developed vertical furrows.

- Leave Trees – Consider leaving clumps of juniper to maintain spatial heterogeneity for wildlife cover and forage.
- Aspen Stands - Avoid injuring other tree species, especially in aspen restoration areas.
- Sage Grouse – Avoid juniper harvest activities within 2 miles of sage grouse leks between March 1 and June 15 or as otherwise instructed by applicable fish and wildlife guidelines.
- Streams and Waterways - Comply with the Oregon Forest Practices Act as agreed upon with local Stewardship Forester.
- Equipment Weed Reduction Practices – Clean all vehicles and equipment prior to arriving at juniper project sites to reduce the introduction/spread of noxious weeds.
- Equipment Operation in Juniper Woodlands – Minimize soil disturbance by avoiding sharp turns that dislodge soil, and avoiding operations on wet or steep soils. Reduce exposing bare ground and operate on slash where possible to reduce spread of invasive species.
- Log Landings and Milling Sites – Design log extraction process to minimize size of log landings and milling sites, and reduce damage to existing roads, and drainage and erosion control structures.
- Erosion Control – Design and install sufficient erosion control structures to reduce and avoid erosion, especially near fish bearing streams and riparian areas.
- Native Vegetation Retention – Design juniper treatments to protect and enhance mountain mahogany, aspen and other hardwood stands.