



BARK

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TO: Senator Richard Devlin, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Representative Nancy Nathanson, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means

RE: Full funding for the Oregon Department of Forestry Federal Forest Restoration Program

Dear Senator Devlin & Representative Nathanson,

Bark is a grassroots advocacy organization, with a mission is to bring about a transformation of public lands on and around Mt. Hood National Forest into a place where natural processes prevail, where wildlife thrives and where local communities have a social, cultural, and economic investment in its restoration and preservation. Bark has over 25,000 supporters who use the public land lands surrounding Mt. Hood, for a wide range of uses including clean drinking water, hiking, nature study, non-timber forest product collection, spiritual renewal, and other recreation.

We are writing today to express our support for full funding of the Oregon Department of Forestry Federal Forest Restoration Program at \$4.4 million in the 2017-2019 biennium budget to help ensure that needed restoration projects are undertaken on national forest lands.

More than 60% of Oregon's forests are managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. These forests provide diverse economic opportunities, clean air and drinking water, critical wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities that contribute to Oregon's growing recreation economy. In fact, recreation around Mt. Hood National Forest contributes over \$40 million annually to the gross regional product.

The increased mechanization of the timber industry ensures that even with an increase in volume logged off federal forests, extractions jobs will never "rebound" to the numbers of the past. However, the need for road decommissioning, culvert removal, prescribed burning, trail maintenance, and more all have the potential to provide in-forest jobs that do not require timber extraction. Unfortunately, the National Forest's budget to support this type of work is already too small to meet the demand and the current administration has given every indication that federal agency budgets will keep shrinking.

While Bark believes that the Federal Forest Restoration Program is currently too focused on timber extraction as the solution to every restoration problem, we see that the program has great potential to fill some much needed budget gaps in the Forest Service and allow for critical restoration, and potentially recreation-focused, work to move forward.

Bark staff participates in the three different collaborative groups for the Mt. Hood National Forest, and has come to appreciate the opportunity for different forest stakeholders to understand each other and have more frequent interaction with the Mt. Hood National Forest specialists and decision makers. We also value the insight that the Federal Forest Restoration Program staff brings to the collaborative process. Elements of the program, including Collaborative Support Grants, provide financial resources and expertise to collaboratives that would otherwise not be available to these community led groups. These resources are essential to support the activities of forest collaboratives and contribute to building strong social agreement for forest restoration.

In the 2015-2017 budget, the legislature invested \$5 million in this unique program and expanded it statewide. In the next biennium, we have the opportunity to build upon these successes by incorporating the program in the ODF base budget and developing and implementing the Good Neighbor Authority agreement that Governor Brown recently signed. The increased investment and use of new tools will support additional partnerships between state and federal land managers and enable greater returns and benefits to the State of Oregon and participating partners.

We appreciate the Department of Forestry's implementation of the Federal Forest Restoration Program over the past two biennium and strongly encourage you to continue to support this groundbreaking effort. We support these funds being used to ensure that all restorative components in collaboratively-planned projects are completed, especially the ecologically valuable but inherently non-commercial components. We would also advocate for the flexibility to use some of the funding to improve access to popular recreation destinations.

Full funding for the Federal Forest Restoration Program at \$4.4 million in the 2017-2019 biennium is integral to improving the health and resilience of our federal forest lands, creating and sustaining restoration and stewardship jobs in rural communities, protecting unique habitat for fish and wildlife, protecting and enhancing recreation opportunities, and restoring public lands for the benefit of all Oregonians.

Thank you for supporting this important program.

Respectfully,



Brenna Bell, Staff Attorney
Participant in the Wasco County Collaborative



Russ Plaeger, Restoration Coordinator
Participant in the Hood River Stew Crew



Michael Krochta, Forest Watch Coordinator
Participant in the Clackamas Stewardship Partners

Cc:

Chad Davis, Federal Forest Restoration Program Director, ODF
Dylan Kruse, Policy Director, Sustainable Northwest