

Understanding the Private Forest Accord

Background

For many years there have been deep political and social tensions over the Oregon Forest Practices Act (FPA). The FPA was one of the first in the nation in 1971. But as science and public expectations grew, neighboring states like Washington and California dramatically revamped their forest laws to better protect water quality and fish and wildlife habitat than in Oregon. Oregon evolved only incrementally. Efforts by fishing and conservation groups to advance reform through the Board of Forestry or the state legislature were consistently unsuccessful. Key federal agencies also weighed in strongly on the need for reform, and they [cut off millions of dollars](#) in grants to coastal communities because [Oregon forest laws did not protect water quality](#).

In contrast, timber industry advocates took pride in the current rules and argued that changes were unnecessary.

In late 2019, a coalition of fishing and conservation groups filed [a set of ballot measures](#) to reform forest laws. Soon after, the timber industry filed a set of competing measures, [like this one requiring compensation](#) for new land use rules. In response, Governor Brown convened the parties to seek resolution outside of the ballot box. The [result of intensive negotiations](#) was a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#), which resulted in the ballot measures being withdrawn, agreement to seek some immediate changes to forest laws around pesticides, and a commitment to pursue mediation to seek a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for private forests. The HCP would focus on protecting imperiled fish, but not terrestrial species (birds, mammals, etc.).

Legislative leaders affirmed the MOU in [Senate Bill 1602](#) and provided support funding and direction to drive the mediation. This overall approach -- agreement by the parties to set aside past conflicts and to work together to a common goal -- came to be called the Private Forest Accord.

The start of mediation was delayed, in part, by long fire seasons in 2020, as well as Covid 19. But the talks kicked off in 2021, when the [state hired a mediator and the Governor appointed negotiating teams](#).

The parties worked steadily throughout 2021, with multiple long meetings every week via applications like Zoom.

The parties signed an agreement early in the morning on October 30, which the Governor [announced later that morning via press release](#).

The ten summary documents that follow were prepared by the conservation and fishing negotiators to provide shorter descriptions of the issues covered in the agreement.

All of the documents that were affirmed on October 30 [are available here](#).

The agreement of October 30 now advances to the legislature to be codified into law; following that, a plan will be developed to present to federal fish and wildlife agencies for final approval under the Endangered Species Act.