Potential Solutions Timber Harvest / Infrastructure Issue

Issue (Impediment)

Oregon's rural communities and forest lands are in crisis; poorly managed federal forests put forests and communities at risk of damage caused by uncharacteristically severe fires, rob hard working people of good paying jobs, and cause damage to forests caused by overstocked stands and unchecked pests.

Solution – 1

Enable communities to more effectively participate in management decisions on federal forests and woodlands.

Action Items

- Deploy Oregon Solutions to facilitate community collaborations
- Authorize OECDD to fund key community collaboration participants.

Rationale

Community based, consensus building processes can help build trust and design projects that are accepted by a broader range of constituent groups.

Solution – 2

Prioritize the selection of landscape scale restoration projects (i.e., >100,000 acres) using the following criteria:

- Biodiversity hotspots
- Fire threat to forest and to communities, both within wildland urban interfaces as well as private, state, and federal forests
- Demonstrated willingness of community stakeholders to engage in problem-solving collaboration
- Economic viability; while initially they may require federal, state, or private philanthropy support, over time they should become economically viable.
- Project viability, including established transportation and timber processing infrastructure, and adequate supply of labor force. Focus should be directed towards communities where this labor, transportation, and processing infrastructure are vulnerable to closure.

Action Items

- Enable all relevant state agencies to participate in the selection and prioritization of landscape scale restoration projects
- Instruct agency directors to detail agency personnel to contribute *and* assist the federal agencies in preparing site specific NEPA documents for restoration project

- The State should work with U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NMFS, Air Quality Boards, and USFWS to revise (State of Oregon?) forest, fish, wildlife, water and air management standards in current plans and biological opinions to allow for sufficiently aggressive forest treatments to achieve desired forest conditions following treatments

Rationale
Large areas of federal forestlands are in need of restoration to reduce stocking in overcrowded fire prone stands; upgrade, reduce, and maintain road systems; or accelerate the development of older forest conditions.

Solution – 3
Provide a stable, sustainable woody biomass supply.

Action Items

- Forest Service and BLM need the ability to enter into longer term commitments – beyond 10 years – to supply biomass. Congress should make stewardship contract authority permanent and change the maximum contract length to 20 years.
- Congress should fully fund and support development of the Forest Service Biomass Strategic plan and the commensurate BLM plan. One clear goal of the plans should be to coordinate biomass offerings within a region to increase the stability of supply and attract private investment.
- Congress should increase federal agency budgets for science, planning, implementation and adaptive management of active landscape-scale forest restoration including thinning, prescribed fire and wildland fire use. This will help ensure a long term supply of woody biomass from federal lands, which will be necessary to secure financing of new biomass conversion facilities.
- Congress should support and enhance the ability of the Forest Service and BLM to manage the forest in a way that will complement the biomass industry
- Assist rural power cooperatives and others to upgrade infrastructure through targeted tax incentives and loans
- (Conversation w/ OR Dept. of Energy)
- Congress should address inequity in the federal production tax credit. Currently the credit for energy generated from biomass is less than for other renewable sources, and the credit is renewed for too short a time period to send the right signal to investors.
- Add State incentives for biomass power production (look at California)
- Congress should create targeted incentives for co-generation, and upgrading of milling and extraction technologies to maximize high-value use of small diameter trees.

Rationale

Conservation-based forest management programs will promote healthy forests and wildlife; help Oregon meet its challenge to combat the effects of climate change, and create economic opportunities for business and workers.

Solution – 4

Congress should develop comprehensive forest restoration legislation that:

- Makes stewardship contracting authorities permanent
- Provides targeted funds for community based collaborative projects with locally driven utilization plans for the material removed
- Appropriates money for capacity building programs in local communities
- Develops outcome based performance measures that focus achievements on ecological conditions, developing collaborative partnerships, and creation of rural jobs
- Increase U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management funding for priority landscape forest restoration projects as an investment in future reductions in fire fighting costs, resource loss and carbon emissions.
- Ensure that restoring forest conditions and improving their resilience is identified as a priority in federal forest plans for management of these forests.

Action Items

- Legislation to establish fundamental strategic goals (i.e., seek agreement on agency emphasis for producing multiple values, 1/3 – 1/3 – 1/3?) and clarify mission priorities?

Rationale

Many traditional forest management activities have become controversial on federal lands and projects have become increasingly difficult to implement. Yet many forest landscapes need active management to restore forests to historic stocking levels, improve wildlife habitat, reduce the likelihood of stand replacement fire, or accelerate the development of older forest conditions. Restoration projects are less controversial and could represent a middle ground that will benefit both the economy and the environment.