Association of O&C Counties

**---PRESS RELEASE--**

January 5, 2017

**O&C Counties Question Objectivity of Science Synthesis**

**Informing Revisions to Northwest Forest Plan**

The Association of O&C Counties (AOCC) today said a scientific review process that federal agencies are utilizing to revise the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) is flawed and does not address the original plan's failure to account for the human element and support rural communities.

AOCC filed comments this week regarding an analysis of the NWFP currently in progress. The "Northwest Forest Plan Science Synthesis" is reviewing new information developed since the NWFP was adopted 22 years ago. The Science Synthesis is the first step in a multiyear process that will likely lead to revisions in the NWFP.

"After too many years of community decline, we are relieved to see the NWFP revision process finally get underway," said Tim Freeman, Commissioner from Douglas County and AOCC's President, "but we have serious concerns about the draft document released to the public. At first blush, it seems like the usual suspects talking among themselves, without consideration of new ways of looking at things."

According to the website of the organization leading the Science Synthesis effort, "[A]t the request of the Forest Service, the Ecological Society of America is coordinating a peer review of the synthesis by 30 independent ecologists." AOCC questions the objectivity of some of the participants: at least one of the "peer reviewers" is not an ecologist at all, but is instead an attorney who specializes in suing the agencies that manage under the NWFP. "We cannot see how a litigation advocate for environmental organizations bent on further limiting management can possibly be viewed as independent analyst," said Commissioner Freeman.

AOCC also questions some of the assumptions found in the draft Science Synthesis document. For example, the draft states that *“Under the NWFP record of decision, trees older than 80 years cannot be harvested . . . ",* a statementthat is is plainly false. As pointed out in the comments submitted by AOCC, "nowhere in the 1994 NWFP Record of Decision (ROD) does it state that trees older than 80 years cannot be harvested. The NWFP ROD estimated the annual probable sale quantity of 1.1 billion board feet for the NWFP, which was based on a sustainable strategy of thinning and regeneration harvest entirely from the Matrix land use allocation. Most of the volume in those estimates was from mature forest older than 80 years."

Among other major defects, the draft does not provide disclosure of why economic outcomes have not been achieved under the NWFP.  This is a critical, missing problem identification step needed to focus the Science Synthesis on how to improve the NWFP for the future.

"The socioeconomic section seems to have abandoned President Clinton’s promise of predictable and sustainable supply of timber. It does not delve into the science as to how sustained yield forestry can achieve both economic and ecological goals to address the most significant failure of the NWFP," said Rocky McVay, AOCC's Executive Director. "As far as rural communities are concerned, it was bait and switch. President Clinton promised a long-term stable timber supply, but that is a promise that has not been kept, and the draft Science Synthesis makes us wonder if it will ever be kept," said McVay.

AOCC acknowledges that the concept of the Science Synthesis is a good one, to address new information, such as the barred owl effects on spotted owls and effects of wildfire and climate change. But, it will be over a year since the Forest Service began the Science Synthesis phase, and there is no schedule for revising the long overdue revisions of the Forest Service's management plans.  The Forest Service reports it will take at least another 4 years to revise the plans once they have begun, if in fact they are ever begun. "Over 22 years to even begin and at least 4 more years to complete revisions is adding insult to the injury rural communities have suffered under the NWFP," said Commissioner Freeman. "This glacial pace is not at all responsive to the needs of rural communities. It is high time the federal government took seriously the economic promises of the NWFP."

A complete copy of AOCC comments is attached to this Press Release. For additional information, contact Rocky McVay, AOCC's Executive Director, by email sent to: Rocky@blupac.com