

U.S. Senator from Oregon

Ron Wyden



wyden.senate.gov | [@RonWyden](https://twitter.com/RonWyden) | [@WydenPress](https://www.wydenpress.com)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: MAY 23, 2013

CONTACT: KEITH CHU, 202-224-0357 OR TOM TOWSLEE, 503-326-7539

Wyden Announces Framework for O&C Legislation; Offers Proposal that will Create Jobs, Provide Revenue to Counties, Protect Old Growth and Wilderness

WASHINGTON, D.C. –Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) today announced a framework for legislation to resolve century old O&C Lands issues that he plans to introduce and see passed into law. Successful O&C legislation will create jobs in the woods, protect our clean water sources, old growth trees and habitats, and establish a permanent and stable source of revenue for O&C counties. The goal of this announcement is to get the greatest amount of local input while fleshing out the legislation.

“This is legislation that can pass the Congress and be signed by the President to increase timber jobs, protect the natural resources that Oregonians depend upon and provide an opportunity for rural communities to fund local services. This legislation will build bipartisan consensus by working within the framework of existing federal laws.” Wyden said.

Wyden, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, has made passage of forestry reform legislation, for both the O&C lands and federal forest land on the east side of the Cascades, a top priority for this Congress. Wyden was a key architect of the only two major pieces of forestry legislation- the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and Secure Rural Schools and Counties Self-Determination Act – to become law over the past 20 years.

Governor John Kitzhaber said: **“I want to thank Chairman Wyden for his strong leadership on this important issue, and for pushing forward a durable solution that provides adequate funds for county services, a stable and certain supply of timber and maintains protections for our forest aquatic environments.”**

His proposal would designate a substantial portion of the O&C lands for sustainable timber harvests while setting aside a roughly equivalent amount of land for permanent conservation. The plan ensures that the revenue from land marked for commercial harvest will be returned to the counties that host federal lands, minus costs to the government.

That proposed revenue would provide a permanent and stable source of funding for O&C counties when added to existing county payments and other federal payments. These future federal payments will be adjusted for communities with tax levels that are not on par with the average resource-dependent rural county.

Lane County Commissioner Sid Leiken said: **“This provides everyone concerned about jobs in rural Oregon and about stable funding for counties and the services they provide with an opportunity to shape the future of O&C lands. I particularly appreciate that Senator Wyden is seeking input from cities and counties as well as local groups and businesses to help shape legislation in a way that it best serves our Oregon communities.”**

The proposal would also create wilderness and other land use designations that would permanently conserve a substantial portion of O&C lands. This conservation will be focused on the clean water sources that Oregonians count on, protecting habitat for wild salmon and other crucial species, preserving wild areas for hunting, fishing and recreation, and protecting our ancient forests.

Steve Pedery, conservation director, Oregon Wild, said: **We look forward to working with Senator Wyden on a solution that preserves the conservation values that Oregonians hold dear. The Senator’s leadership will be invaluable in finding a path forward that enhances protections for clean water, wildlife, wilderness, and ancient forests. These O&C lands are part of the broader legacy of public lands owned by all taxpayers and we must manage them well for future generations.”**

The Oregon and California Railroad Reinvestment Lands, known as O&C Lands, are 2.4 million acres of federal land spread across 18 Oregon counties and largely managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

“Oregon’s O&C lands are truly unique among federal land holdings and deserve separate treatment within the confines of the O&C Act,” Wyden said. **“At the same time, forest managers have learned a great deal about conservation, clean air and water and habitat preservation since the Act was adopted and it must be updated to reflect that progress. This update must also give new life to the original guarantee of jobs and timber production in the Act.”**

Wyden is asking for specific input on which O&C lands will be designated for sustainable harvest and which will be set aside for permanent conservation. He plans to refine that map over the summer with input from representatives of local communities, federal, state and local forestry experts, tribal and conservation leaders. Senator Wyden is also seeking input on the rules for carrying out both sustainable harvest and preservation over the long term.

Joe Gonyea III, Partner, Timber Products Company, said: **“I want to thank Senator Wyden for his leadership to develop a coherent policy for managing the O&C lands in Western Oregon. We look forward to working with the Senator and all stakeholders on this issue. I firmly believe the most effective way to revitalize the economy in rural Western Oregon, is to get people back to work both in the woods and mills that are in their own backyard. Vital to**

making that happen is a dependable and sustainable supply of wood from O&C lands.”

Finally, the proposal would work to eliminate the unworkable checkerboard pattern of today's O&C lands by providing opportunities to consolidate ownership through land exchanges between private owners and federal agencies. The legislation will modernize existing federal laws as they apply to O&C lands so that harvest can continue at a steady, sustainable, and uninterrupted rate after a one time review.

“Sustainable harvest will be consistent with the most advanced forest management practices advocated by Northwest experts and demonstrated in pilot projects and collaborative efforts across the state, including the pioneering and successful efforts in the Siuslaw Forest and Medford BLM district,” Wyden added.

Wyden’s effort earned praise from other members of the Oregon delegation as well as state and local officials and representatives of the timber industry and conservationists:

Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) said: **“Oregon needs to take this opportunity to create healthier forests and protect our environment while making sure that our timber counties have an economic future with sustainable timber harvests. Today’s framework is an important step towards a permanent solution to address the needs of our O&C counties and strengthen our state. I’m committed to working with Senator Wyden and the rest of our Congressional delegation, Governor Kitzhaber and our private and public stakeholders to get there.”**

Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici said: **“Oregon’s rural communities are struggling. They need certainty, which will come through O&C legislation that can pass both the House and Senate and be signed into law by the President. Senator Wyden’s approach represents a great step toward achieving that goal this year. I look forward to working with Senator Wyden, the Oregon delegation and the communities to pass a law that will put people back to work while sustainably managing our forests.”**

###