

Testimony Highlights

SB 1151: Relating to Western Juniper

**Prepared for the House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry
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By
Larry Swan, U.S. Forest Service
Forest Products Economic Development Specialist

At the Request of the
Ad Hoc Western Juniper Commercialization Steering Committee

Precipitating Event for Legislation - First dedicated commercial western juniper harvest operation began in the Klamath Falls area in 1998. Questions arose concerning interpretation of Forest Practice Act rules, administration of other State Forestry Department regarding juniper harvest (e.g. state fire liability laws), administration of other agency programs by the State Forestry Department (e.g. Department of Environmental Quality and Clean Water Act rules), and applicability of forest harvest taxation laws.

Why is Juniper a Problem?

- Acreage & Trends - Western juniper woodlands now occupy about 2.2 million acres of Eastern Oregon. This is a 500% increase since the mid-1930s. Scientists predict that within the next 50 years western juniper woodlands will be the dominant forest type in Eastern Oregon (rather than ponderosa pine);
- Biological and Economic Effects - Over one million acres of woodlands already show clear evidence of loss of site productivity, decline in number of wildlife species, decline in watershed health indicators, and overall reduction in biodiversity. The financial viability of many Eastern Oregon ranchers have been seriously impacted by the combination of: 1) Significant decreases in forage caused by juniper competition; 2) Decline in net worth because of land occupied by juniper; and 3) Low cattle prices.

Watershed Restoration Results - Proper juniper management can significantly improve watershed conditions, increase domestic forage, and improve wildlife habitat. Juniper management can also yield surface watershed response in small upland watershed basins, and substantially increase precipitation going into the water profile.

Rural Economic Development - Oregon Economic Development Department, U.S. Forest Service, and local economic development boards support of efforts to commercialize western juniper are beginning to show results and defray cost of juniper management in some locations. Over 35 full-time equivalent jobs have been created in more than 14 Eastern Oregon communities. Private industry indicates that the number of jobs related to juniper processing are expected to double

within the next two years. The ad hoc Steering Committee believes that the juniper industry will eventually generate gross sales of over \$20 million per year, which translates to more than 250 direct and indirect jobs in rural Eastern Oregon communities.

SB 1151 Legislative History- Ad hoc Western Juniper Commercialization Committee was asked by the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources to provide background information and issues at an information session (January 25, 1999). The Senate Committee chose to sponsor legislation related to clarifying Forest Practice Act rules as they relate to western juniper (SB 1151).

SB 1151 was later amended and expanded to include a review of State Forestry programs, and programs administered by the State Forestry Department for other state agencies, to determine programmatic and regulatory issues related to juniper, and how the Department can respond and resolve the issues identified in a manner that will benefit landowners, and improve watershed and rangeland health. Also included was language to exempt juniper products and logs from harvest taxes.

During testimony, members of the agriculture community raised concerns about which agency has jurisdiction over activities conducted on rangeland, and how to ensure noxious weed management is a part of commercial juniper harvest operations. State Forestry Department testimony supported review of its programs and programs administered by the Department for other state agencies, with or without legislation, but not the harvest taxes exemption provision.

The Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources voted unanimously for "Do Pass" and the bill was passed by the Senate on May 14th with no dissent.

Further Information - For information concerning the ad hoc Western Juniper Commercialization Steering Committee and juniper commercialization projects, please contact Larry Swan, U.S. Forest Service:

Phone: 541/883-6714; FAX: 541/883-6714;

Email: lswan/r6pnw_winema@fs.fed.us;

Address: U.S. Forest Service, 2819 Dahlia St., Klamath Falls, OR. 97601