

The Register-Guard

Oregon timber companies, environmentalists sign ‘historic’ pact on forest practice regulations

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SALEM — Environmental groups and timber companies in Oregon, which have clashed for decades, on Monday unveiled a roadmap for overhauling forest practice regulations, a step which Gov. Kate Brown called “historic.”

“This agreement proves that we can build a better future for Oregonians if we work together with a willingness to compromise. Healthy forests and a vibrant forestry industry are not mutually exclusive,” Brown told a news conference with representatives.

Leaders of around a dozen environmental groups, including Oregon Wild, the Audubon Society of Portland and Cascadia Wildlands, and a dozen timber companies, including Weyerhaeuser, one of the largest forest products companies in the world, and Lone Rock of Roseburg, signed the memorandum of understanding after quietly holding meetings in Salem and Portland.

They agreed to a process that will drive changes to Oregon forest practice regulations, including seeking a statewide habitat conservation plan to guarantee that critical habitat for endangered and threatened species is protected. Another goal is to create business certainty for Oregon’s timber-products industry. Oregon leads the nation in wood-products manufacturing but environmental groups and the timber industry have been backing rival initiative petitions which seem to put measures on the ballot, and have filed lawsuits.

The signed memorandum of understanding addresses three key issues, Brown said in a news release. It will:

Drive a process for Oregon to update its timber practices: For the first time, Oregon will strive for the endorsement of federal wildlife agencies, signifying that the state's forest practices are protective of threatened and endangered species, including Oregon's iconic salmon. Through this process, the state will seek a Habitat Conservation Plan, allowing Oregonians to continue their long tradition of working in the woods while honoring natural habitats.

Support passage of new legislation for the 2020 session on aerial spraying of pesticides: A state-of-the-art system will build confidence with forest neighbors, who will be eligible to receive real-time notification that aerial spraying will occur. This first of its kind system will expand protected spray buffers around drinking water, homes, and schools.

Expand forest stream buffers in the Rogue-Siskiyou region: New legislation will also expand forest stream buffers along salmon, steelhead, and bull trout streams, aligning forest practices in the area with those of the rest of western Oregon.

Under the new agreement, both sides would "complete a stand-down from pursuing changes through the initiative process, related legal actions, and certain other relevant legislative and regulatory proceedings while the facilitated process is working."