



OREGON WILD

Protecting Oregon's wildlands, wildlife, and waters since 1974.

**Oral testimony of Sean Stevens, Executive Director of Oregon Wild,
before the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources,
regarding S.1784, the Oregon & California Land Grant Act of 2013. February 6, 2014.**

Thank you to Chairman Wyden, Ranking Member Murkowski, and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today.

I am the executive director of Oregon Wild, a conservation organization representing over 13,000 members and supporters. In 2014 we celebrate 40 years of protecting and restoring Oregon's wildlands, wildlife, and waters.

Over the last two decades we have worked closely with Chairman Wyden and his staff on important environmental policies for Oregon. We worked together to protect more of Mount Hood and the Columbia Gorge as Wilderness, and joined with the Chairman's staff and the logging industry to negotiate the Oregon Eastside Forest Restoration, Old-Growth Protection and Jobs Act of 2009. Oregon Wild has sought to balance the protection of Oregon's special places with science-based management that benefits the environment and sustains rural communities.

It is from this perspective of appreciation for our past work with Senator Wyden that we must oppose S.1784. The vast majority of other conservation organizations are similarly opposed and have sent letters to this effect.

S.1784 seeks to re-link funding for 18 Oregon counties to aggressive logging of publicly-owned Bureau of Land Management lands in western Oregon. The bill would dramatically weaken President Clinton's historic 1994 Northwest Forest Plan and significantly undermine federal environmental laws such as the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

In one sense, S.1784 was drafted with the best of intentions – attempting to keep county governments in Oregon from going bankrupt. No one wants to see public services in rural Oregon disappear. However, while we face these budget challenges in real time, we must not forget how we got here.

For decades, the BLM and Forest Service operated as if their only mission were to clearcut public lands. It took a tremendous outpouring of public demand to reform the agencies to ensure wildlife, wild salmon, clean water, and clean air received equal priority to logging as the law then, and today, requires.

Had Oregon not clearcut nearly 90% of our ancient forests, pushed numerous wild salmon runs to the brink of extinction, and muddied clean drinking water through excessive logging – we may have faced a much different world today. The O&C Land Grant Act of 2013, had it been written and passed in 1984, could have been a sane alternative to the destruction that occurred.

But this isn't 1984, and we cannot ignore the huge mistakes of the past. We must chart a path forward that repairs the damage to our forests, not a path that makes it worse.

Chairman Wyden, you were right when you worked to pass the Secure Rural Schools Act and de-linked logging on public lands from funding for county services.

At the time, you said in *The Oregonian*: "The new relationship between the counties and the federal government means that the 21st century relationship is not just going to be about cutting trees."

That statement is as wise today as it was 14 years ago. It makes no sense to fund local county governments – counties that have some of the lowest local tax rates in the nation – by logging public lands that belong to all Americans.

When we see our forests as natural resources to steward rather than simply as piggy banks, amazing things happen.

Oregon Wild has seen it on the ground. While we are often accused of being so, we are not anti-logging. For nearly two decades we have worked alongside the Forest Service, timber companies, and other local stakeholders to push collaborative forest restoration in places like the Siuslaw National Forest. Because of our work restoring forests and sending trees to the mills we've twice been recognized with the Two Chiefs Award from the Forest Service and NRCS.

Still, we should be clear-eyed – in 2014, logging is no longer the driver of Oregon's economy – even its rural economy. Last year Oregon ranked third in the nation in job growth, thanks to a thriving high tech industry, and our tourism and outdoor recreation economy. Oregon's quality of life – our forests, rivers, and mountains – are integral to that success, bringing new people and new investment to our state.

Chairman Wyden, while the goal of your legislation is laudable, it puts Oregon's economic and environmental future at risk in an attempt to resurrect the economy of the 1980s. As you wisely pointed out more than a decade ago, funding county budgets by aggressively logging public lands is a failed model.

We can and should find a balance between active management and preservation – and we appreciate your efforts to write into this legislation protection for some of our oldest forests and Wilderness gems.

However, during the last century, the scales have tipped so far towards harmful logging that in the future we must create balance by restoring lands we have mismanaged and protecting other natural resource values that will drive Oregon's future.

Will this cautious, sensible approach we recommend result in a massive bailout check for county politicians? No.

Will it preserve Oregon's environmental values and pass on a natural legacy to future generations? Yes it will – and that is the balance we need.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you here today.