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Statement to the Oregon House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources  
February 16, 2017  
by Tim Palmer, PO 1286, 608 Oregon Street, Port Orford, OR 97465  
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As a resident of southwestern Oregon, a small business operator, and a writer and photographer specializing in the outdoors, I appreciate this opportunity to urge the Committee to reject House Bill 2365 regarding a "Federal Land Transfer Task Force."

The premise behind this bill—that public land should be transferred out of federal ownership—is flawed in every conceivable way.

Public lands under federal administration in Oregon serve the public as open space for hunting, fishing, walking, and recreation of every type. They provide for logging and resource extraction within reasonable constraints of federal and state laws. They are the source of most of our drinking water. They are crucial to our sport and commercial fisheries worth many millions of dollars per year and thousands of jobs. They provide for open space that makes our communities attractive and desirable to residents and to prospective newcomers who are drawn to relocate in our state. They provide for clean air needed by all, and for the sequestration of carbon that's essential in addressing the problems of climate change.

The federal public lands of Oregon are the reason that my wife and I live in Oregon, and these lands are essential to our livelihoods and careers. As with so many Oregonians, these public open spaces are almost out our back door, and we consider ourselves extremely fortunate for that.

Many economic studies, such as those at Headwaters Economics based in Bozeman, Montana, have revealed that western communities that are surrounded by protected federal land have the healthiest economies. Our rivers are very important to us, and their health requires careful management of the land throughout their watersheds. There is a reason that local Chambers of Commerce call our region the "Wild Rivers Coast" and not the "clearcut," "suburban sprawl," or "strip mined" coast—all of which would be likely outcomes if federal lands are liquidated. When we look to the mountains around our home, we want to see National Forest land managed for multiple use, and not the clearcuts that typify industrial forest land—though there already are plenty of those.

Any argument that state ownership of our public lands would be better is a specious one that ignores all evidence and the reality of life in our communities. Look no further than the Elliott State Forest to see what would happen to lands transferred from federal to state ownership: they would be sold to the highest bidder, and soon become just another tract of industrial forest land.

In other respects, as well, the transfer of federal land to state ownership would be an onerous mistake. Does the state want the multi-million-dollar bill to fight fires on forest land all across Oregon? Regarding resource extraction, any delusions that the state would be able to evade federal laws regarding the Clean Water Act and other national mandates are simply that—delusions—and the state, rather than the federal government, would end up with unwanted obligations, commitments, and endless litigation.

Our federal agencies are not our enemies, but provide our neighbors with thousands of jobs through their staffing requirements, and for thousands more that benefit by the federal investments in our state. It would be foolish to reject that support.

At a more personal level, our federal lands belong to all of us; they are mine and yours. This is not our burden, as HB 2365 implies, but rather our great fortune. We in Oregon benefit and enjoy a vast estate of land that is unavailable to people elsewhere. In fact, 38 states have nominal amounts of public land. Those who prefer the conditions of New Jersey, Illinois, Mississippi, or any number of other states can easily migrate there to enjoy whatever advantages they might imagine by living in a state that lacks our wealth of public land.

Valuable state funds would be spent pursuing the short-sighted goals of this bill. Rather, our legislature should be looking forward to a future that embraces the values of public land: a vibrant recreational and tourism economy, the continuation of traditional commodity industries within the limits of federal and state laws, the appeal of public land around our homes and our communities of the future, and a realization that a healthy economy requires a healthy environment.

Our federal public lands are the best thing we have going in Oregon. This priceless inheritance of all Oregonians would be at risk with passage of HB 2365. I urge you to reject this short-sighted and regressive bill.

Tim Palmer

Attachments: "Public land belongs to all Americans," *Oregonian*, Sept. 29, 2016  
"Don't give up public land," *Medford Mail Tribune*, Jan. 8, 2017

Oregonian, Sept. 29, 2016

# Public land belongs to all Americans (Opinion)

By **Guest Columnist****Follow on Twitter**

on September 29, 2016 at 7:00 AM, updated September 29, 2016 at 7:02 AM

**By Tim Palmer**

The trial of those involved in the armed standoff at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge again draws attention to the controversy and the values of our public land.

Beyond the guns, the bravado and the deeply fractured logic of those claiming to stand by the Constitution, political attacks on the property owned by all Americans are underway. These range from the platform of the Republican Party to "compromises" designed to allow more drilling, logging and unrestrained profiteering off national forests, national parks, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) landscapes and wildlife refuges.

With 650 million recreational visits per year to federal land, 60 percent of Americans' water supply coming from national forests alone, and with these places serving as the cornerstone of wildlife habitat, everybody should be concerned with what reporter Maxine Bernstein of The Oregonian/OregonLive called "the turbulent politics of public land ownership" ("[Malheur jury selection begins](#)," Sept. 7).

Some county commissioners and some members of Congress (not mine, I'm proud to say) have jumped on a boisterous bandwagon that raises troubling questions about the mantra of "taking back" federal land. First of all, you can't do that. Nearly all the federal land in the West has belonged to America's taxpayers ever since we took it from the American Indians.

What the naysayers mean is that they want to "take" our federal land away from all of us who own it. Sometimes they soften their claim by advocating for state ownership. But look no further than ongoing efforts to sell off the Elliott State Forest to see where state control of our federal estate would end up.

## Share your opinion

Submit your essay of 700 words or less to [commentary@oregonlive.com](mailto:commentary@oregonlive.com). Please include your email and phone number for verification.

Liquidating or otherwise compromising even *pieces* of every American's greatest inheritance would diminish us all. Our Western backcountry -- just out the door -- is available for everyone to visit, camp, walk, drive, hunt, fish, paddle, ski and simply relax. Our federal properties produce clean air and vistas of green that draw visitors and homeseekers alike from no less than 38 states that have only nominal amounts of public land available to their residents.

## Nearly all the federal land in the West has belonged

The values of public land most evident to me in the pursuit of my own livelihood are in the rivers flowing from national forests and BLM land. Look no further than the water we drink, the streams where we swim and the fish we catch for sport or in commercial fisheries at sea.

## to America's taxpayers ever since we took it from the American Indians.

Virtually every one of Oregon's renowned waterways -- from the Rogue to the Deschutes, the Umpqua to the Willamette, the Snake to the Siletz -- flows relatively clean and unspoiled because of the nationally owned acreage at its headwaters and along its banks. Appreciate clean tap water? Like to fish? Then the land at the sources of those streams must be protected -- as only the federal government has been able to do.

In my travels and photographic expeditions to rivers statewide, I've been amazed and heartened at how widely shared our rivers and public places are by Oregonians and visitors alike. I see hundreds of people appreciating our public estate for every person that I hear complaining about "too much federal land."

Malcontents like the ones waving guns at law enforcement officials and at the people of Burns, Oregon, are not going to care about the values that these lands provide to the rest of us. Nor are the county commissioners who claim that state or private ownership of our magnificent commons is necessary to balance their budget next year.

Here in the West, the best thing we have going is public land. We all need to protect it as if it were our own, because that's exactly what it is.

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**Tim Palmer** is the author and photographer of "Rivers of Oregon" as well as "Field Guide to Oregon Rivers" and "America's Great National Forests, Wildernesses and Grasslands."

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## Don't give up public land

**Sunday**

Posted Jan 8, 2017 at 12:01 AM

By Tim Palmer

The Republican Party platform has supported liquidation of federal land by giving it away, and on the opening day of the new Congress, the House of Representatives began paving the way to do just that.

Buried in a package of House rule changes on Jan. 3, an obscure provision banned the Congressional Budget Office from considering lost federal revenue if public land is transferred to other entities. In other words, Congress and we taxpayers are blocked from knowing the values of what we would lose. Those values are already missing in rhetoric about "taking back" federal land.

To be clear, nobody can take public land "back." Our national forests, national parks, national wildlife refuges and Bureau of Land Management acreage have been owned by America's taxpayers since the founding of our nation. States, counties, businesses or privilege-seeking people can't "take back" what they never owned. They can only take federal land away from the American people - each and every one of us. Together, we own the world's greatest estate of mountains, forests, deserts, grasslands, and rivers. But not for long if the Republican House members have their way.

Even if a member of Congress thinks our common inheritance in public land should be given away - and it's no secret that the ultimate benefactors would be oil companies, multinational mining corporations and deep-pocket political contributors - how did our elected representatives rationalize a ban on simply knowing the value of what we taxpayers would be relinquishing?

Thanks to this vote, the House is set to turn a blind eye to sensible economic analysis that any of us would demand for decisions about our own property, and about decisions that should - in any ethical or constitutional context - be in the best interests of American taxpayers. The Jan. 3 rule change was a know-nothing triumph; it passed along party lines, 234 to 193. Rep. Greg Walden, Oregon's only Republican representative, voted in favor.

Nonpartisan economic studies by organizations such as Headwaters Economics in Bozeman, Montana, repeatedly find that public land is an asset - not a cost - to Western communities and to our nation.

As a resident of a state and a county with half their acreage in federal ownership, I'm convinced that federal land is the best thing about living in the West. I can fish, hunt, walk, drive or just look at open space almost out the back door here in Southern Oregon. In contrast, 38 states have only nominal amounts of public land.

Our public land belongs to all of us. It provides us with clean water, pure air, resource and land management jobs, recreation serving not only our sanity, happiness and family vacations, but also \$17 billion in economic activity for Oregon alone, according to the Outdoor Industry Association, not to mention open space that makes our communities livable and desirable for everyone.

Our federal land in the West gives us a way of life that's uniquely ours, and it should not be given away.

In its first day in office, on Jan. 3, the House of Representatives did a disservice to us all.

- *Tim Palmer of Port Orford (www.timpalmer.org) is the author of "Rivers of Oregon," "America's Great National Forests" and "Field Guide to Oregon Rivers."*