

OPINION

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Higher timber taxes not the answer

By BOB ZYBACH

I am in full agreement with Bill Barton of the Native Forest Council's characterization of the recent award of \$740 million over the next four years to Oregon's timber counties as "federal welfare" (guest viewpoint, Oct. 21). Very little of that money will be used to create much-needed tax-producing jobs, and none of it would be necessary at all, if only our federal lands were better managed.

I disagree with virtually everything else Barton states, however, and the manner with which he states it.

Barton's basic argument is that, because the federal dollars equal about \$10 per year for each of the 18 million acres of federal forestlands in Oregon, and because private forestlands pay about \$1.25 per year tax on each of their 11 million acres, private lands should start paying more taxes and stop exporting timber. That, he says, will help finance schools and roads and allow federal lands to "recover."

First, the "federal welfare" Barton decries will last only four years, and private property taxes are forever. Second, federal lands pay no taxes at all. But third, and most importantly, federal lands have been all but closed to active management for nearly 20 years, are being incinerated in "let-it-burn" wildfires and left to rot without salvage — and all without producing

any meaningful income for our schools and roads. Another way to look at these figures, according to the Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon State University and the Pacific Northwest Forest Experiment Station, is that Oregon's forest industries support 190,000 direct and indirect jobs with a total of \$22 billion in annual economic output — about 11 percent of the total output for all of Oregon. Nearly 85 percent of that amount comes from the 11 million acres of private lands, and only about 15 percent comes from the 18 million acres of federal forestlands.

That is, the majority of Oregon's forestland — those lands managed by the federal government — produces about 27,000 jobs and \$3.3 billion in economic output, while only one-third of the land — privately owned and annually taxed — accounts for more than 160,000 tax-producing jobs and more than \$18 billion in output. That's a lot of unfunded schools and roads in timbered counties, and it renders Barton's \$10 vs. \$1.25 per acre tax argument nearly meaningless.

Also debatable is Barton's claim that "there is no sound environmental reason to log." There are, of course, many sound environmental reasons to log, including homes for shelter, furniture, heat, paper and packaging in our cities; and beauty, sunlight, recreation, robust wildlife populations and reduced wildfire risks in our forests.

Barton touts the values of "standing" forests as producing clean air and water, topsoil and "biodiversity." These are exactly the same values realized by a managed forest. And what happens when the standing trees are blown over in a windstorm, as often happens, or killed by bugs or fire?

Barton claims that our "precious" lands could be allowed to "recover" and that these lands "would provide carbon sequestration, flood control, clean air, clean water, and a plethora of wildland experiences to a community that treasures them." Again, these are exactly the same values already realized from our "pre-recovered" forests. What is Barton missing?

Why the seemingly urgent need to stop managing forest lands, and why is that called "recovery"? Do lawns recover after they are mowed, or orchards after they are picked? Or do they just keep growing and producing, so long as they are properly tended?

Finally, there is the inflammatory rhetoric with which Barton expresses his delusional charges. One example is, "the logging industry ... has trashed our drinking water, wiped out our fish runs and pushed several species to the brink of extinction."

Of course, logging has done no such thing, as must be obvious to any Oregonian who enjoys fishing or drinking water — or knows anything factual about the state's wildlife history.

Another example of Barton's rhetoric: "the publicly funded death of our forests" sponsored by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and Rep. Peter DeFazio, who are "firmly in the pocket of dishonest corporate interests."

Why would "dishonest corporations" want to finance the "death" of Oregon's forests (whatever that means), if that were even possible? Who would vote for such untrustworthy political representatives in the first place? What is Barton really trying to say here about Oregon politicians, voters and businesses? And where is he getting his information?

Barton's use of such bluster and invective serves only to discredit him and his organization. His uses of hyperbole, dubious statistics and baseless charges likewise undermine his credibility as a critic.

In summary, Barton's words do not make good sense and should not be taken seriously. Oregon needs more jobs, not more taxes; better forest management, not less.

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