

POLICY POSITION



IN SUPPORT OF LOCAL CONTROL AND STEWARDSHIP OF OREGON'S PUBLIC LANDS

Summary

OCC supports the local control and management of our forests, rangelands, and watersheds.

Date

October 2025

Stewardship of Oregon's local public lands by Oregonians and the local entities they comprise protects and enhances natural resource values through hands-on management by the people most knowledgeable and most affected by our local environment.

KEY TENETS

BACKGROUND

53% of Oregon's lands are public and federally managed. This figure comes from the federal government's "ownership" of about 32.6 million acres out of Oregon's total 61.6 million acres, with most managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. In Harney County, a shocking 75% of the land is managed by the federal government. Most other states, particularly those east of the Rockies, do not have a high percentage of their lands "owned" and controlled by Washington D.C. with 27% the average across the U.S. and only 4.2% the average in eastern states.

Federal management of Oregon's public lands has been an unmitigated disaster in terms of government overreach, inadequate stewardship, and restrictions on industries such as ranching, logging, and mining. Catastrophic megafires due to poor forest management, low timber harvest and grazing, and restricted road access have exploded in recent years. Federal policy-makers often have no direct knowledge of Oregon with agencies headquartered 3,000 miles away. Policies like sage grouse protections have imposed grazing cutbacks, threatening ranchers' livelihoods. Similarly, reductions in timber harvests since the 1990s, to protect species like the spotted owl, have led to mill closures and job losses, with counties losing revenue that once funded schools and roads.

RESIDENT STEWARDSHIP

Oregonians know and care about our natural resources to a much greater extent than bureaucrats or exogenous politicians. We live here and depend on our lands and waters for our very survival. We know our forests and grasslands, our mountains and valleys, our streams and rivers, and our wildlife and vegetation. We know how they grow and thrive. When they are damaged, we are damaged. We are the first (and often the only) to suffer from preventable

natural disasters. Stewardship of our environment is our birthright and responsibility, not someone else's. We have the expertise, the experience, and the caring necessary for stewardship of our own lands and waters.

CORRECTING THE PROBLEM

Oregon is not a colony or a territory; it is a state within the United States like the other 49 states with every privilege and duty afforded to us. Article I, Section 8, Clause 17 of the U.S. Constitution in conjunction with the Property Clause, Article IV, Section 3, Clause 2 have been interpreted in several Supreme Court rulings as giving Congress the authority to transfer public lands to state control—or not. However, other Supreme Court rulings as recent as 2013 have declared that the statehood Enabling Act contracts did provide states with enforceable rights, which have been honored east but not west of the Rockies in terms of the transfer of public lands. Oregon should be treated similarly and fairly compared to eastern states.

It seems unlikely that the federal government will cede public lands back to the state, though OCC advocates for this step. However, title transfer is not necessary, only the responsibility for management. OCC would also support a reasonable "keep the ownership; give us the keys" model.

In summary: "Conservative" and "conservation" derive from the same root: to conserve, to save some for later, to protect and defend tradition and traditional values. Stewardship of local lands by the local residents is a time-honored tradition and a traditional conservation practice. Local control is vital to rectify the current trajectory of damage being done to Oregon's natural resources industries. OCC believes Oregonians are willing and able to shoulder the responsibility for our own lands and waters, and we must do so for the benefit of all.