

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact:

Anna Richter Taylor, 503-378-6169

Jillian Schoene, 503-378-5040

Rem Nivens, 503-378-6496

GOVERNOR PRAISES PROJECT TO AID FOREST HEALTH IN HARNEY COUNTY

(Salem) - Governor Ted Kulongoski today praised the collaborated efforts of Harney County, The High Desert Partnership and The Nature Conservancy to thin forests, reduce fire risks, and protect and create jobs. The collaboration will be a model for similar projects that merge to meet the needs and interests of industry, government and environmental groups.

The initiative, called the Harney County Restoration Collaborative, was established last January by Governor Kulongoski as an Oregon Solutions project. This designation provides the framework under which partners can come together and assures participation of his staff and appropriate state agencies.

"Collaboration driven by local input is the Oregon way. It is through this approach that common ground is found." Governor Kulongoski said. "Healthy forests and the jobs they can sustain and create are important to rural and urban Oregon. I strongly support efforts at the local, state, and federal level to ensure that Oregon has healthy and productive forests for future generations."

The project is expected to generate agreements that will offer multiple benefits for the citizens of Harney County, including wildfire risk reduction, increased forest health, local jobs, as well as improving water resources, and fish and wildlife habitat.

"With difficult natural resource problems like those we face in Harney County, it's important for groups that have been in opposing positions to come together to create common ground and land management approaches that everyone can support," Harney County Judge Steve Grasty said. "Otherwise, we will never move past stalemate, and that is unacceptable to the citizens of Harney County."

"An effective project could offer learning opportunities for other localities to use, with local adjustments, to suit the needs of their

own lands, environmental concerns and forest product companies", said Jack Southworth, a facilitator for the High Desert Partnership. "We believe that healthy communities and healthy forests are fundamentally linked, that there is significant common ground to be found in efforts to promote ecological restoration and community economic development," said TNC State Director Russ Hoeflich. "They are not mutually exclusive."

Other collaborators on this project are expected to include forest sector businesses, local contract loggers, and local civic leaders.

Oregon Solutions grew out of the Oregon Sustainability Act of 2001, and is housed at Portland State University. The program promotes a new style of community governance based on collaboration, integration and sustainability. There are currently 10 Oregon Solutions projects under way across the state, with thirty-eight completed over the past six years.

Oregon Solutions frequently partners with the Governor's Economic Revitalization Team. The Governor's Economic Revitalization Team provides critical assistance in bringing state and local government officials to the table on local Oregon Solutions projects.