

Certification on State Trust Lands (Part 2): Forest Interests Converge in Support of Washington DNR Certification

On June 8 in Olympia, Washington, the Pinchot Institute and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) hosted a public briefing on the certification assessment of the DNR's management of the 1.2 million acres of west-side state trust lands. The certification assessed the compliance of DNR forest management practices with the requirements of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an international nonprofit organization promoting responsible forest management through certification based on a comprehensive set of principals and criteria. The assessment was conducted by Scientific Certifications Systems (SCS), an Oakland-based firm affiliated with FSC.

The SCS report tentatively approved the DNR for certification, pending the agency's commitment to rectify a number of conditions identified in the report. The purpose of the briefing is to summarize the key findings and conclusions from the SCS examination of DNR forest management practices, and to discuss the potential for DNR to move forward on a commitment to certification. This decision must be made by the new Commissioner of Public Lands, Doug Sutherland. The assessment was begun during the tenure of the previous Commissioner, Jennifer Belcher, and continued without interruption under Sutherland.

That the report has been well received by groups on all sides is evidence of the potential that this project offers, and the importance of certification to the DNR and Washington citizens as a whole. At the meeting in Olympia presentations by SCS, the Pinchot Institute, and the DNR described the assessment process, and where this effort

fits within the Institute's broader nationwide study of the applicability of certification on public forest lands. A second set of panelists provided perspectives from the environmental, industry, and retailer communities of Washington. These included comments from the Washington Environmental Council, Sierra Club of Washington, Simpson Investment Company, Mount Baker Plywood, and the Home Depot. All of the speakers supported the certification of Washington's trust lands, though all expressed concerns they hope will be addressed as part of the certification. The consensus view that certification is a step in the right direction is a greater multi-lateral endorsement than was expected from the start. Indeed, it communicates to the state that certification is a worthy goal for several reasons. This perspective was shared by the DNR Chief Land Steward Bruce Mackey, who indicated that the DNR must now examine the implications of the report's recommendations before committing to certification.

The SCS report recommended the state for certification without pre-conditions. However, a set of 27 conditions must be rectified according to various schedules. Some are cosmetic and can be accomplished by changes in language, others are more substantial. The most significant conditions arise from the SCS determination that the DNR is harvesting above sustainable yield. The condition requires that the DNR recalculate annual allowable cut (AAC), and reduce harvest levels by extending

rotation ages from 65 to 85 years or increasing green tree retention in even-age management areas. These changes could reduce trust revenues, and therefore might exceed the DNR's administrative jurisdiction. In such case, as suggested by the DNR at the meeting, the Board of Natural Resources will render a decision by vote. In the meantime the DNR has already begun to re-assess inventory data, and to develop growth and yield models under various policy scenarios. The recalculation of AAC will be completed by early 2002, at which point the agency will better understand the implication of SCS conditions. It is a data-intensive process that will need aggressive action to be completed in the suggested timeframe.

Another significant challenge to the DNR is the re-definition and designation of high conservation value forests. These include old growth and non-T&E species. DNR's management and documentation of high conservation value forests were deemed inadequate by the assessment team. Moreover these and similar resources are the principal focus of criticism from environmentalists in the state. As a consequence, any change the DNR makes to satisfy this condition will be closely scrutinized.

Other conditions in the report focus on capacities that the agency has been unable to develop because requested funding has not been granted by the state legislature. Such issues include inadequate staffing of wildlife and fisheries biologists, the backlog of cumulative impact assessments, and the establishment of a permanent reserve system. If anything, future funding for the agency may decrease, requiring substantial creativity to support these and other

efforts. The requirements in the SCS report for the state to “demonstrate significant efforts” to obtain the necessary funding invokes an uncertain threshold for resolving these issues, and is of concern to environmental groups. It will be a challenge for SCS, and indeed the Forest Stewardship Council, to determine where the standard must supercede the political realities faced by the agency, or when an honest effort is adequate.

These are difficult issues that will be closely tracked by all interest groups and the media. They will also be among the important lessons that will be described in the Pinchot Institute’s final report on the certification pilot projects on public lands. Whatever the outcome, this effort has been a remarkable contribution to advancing the dialogue between the agency and the citizens of Washington, and improving the stewardship of state trust lands.

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Allocating Cooperative Forestry Funds to the States: Block Grants and Alternatives

The Pinchot Institute recently released a report titled “*Allocating Cooperative Forestry Funds to the States: Block Grants and Alternatives*.” In FY 2000, Congress asked the USDA Forest Service to provide an independent study “to assess the feasibility and potential for enhanced program efficiency by block granting all or portions of the Cooperative Forestry program.” The Pinchot Institute was awarded a contract by the Forest Service to conduct this study, and convened a panel of eight independent experts to report on the merits and drawbacks to such an approach.

The Forest Service’s Cooperative Forestry program is charged with administering programs that enhance the management, protection, and stewardship of forest resources on state and private lands throughout the United States. These programs provide technical and financial assistance to rural and urban citizens to help them care for their forests and sustain their communities. The programs, which are funded through the federal government’s budgeting and appropriations process, are managed in accordance with the Forest Service’s State and Private Forestry division’s national priorities, and implemented locally through a series of grants to state forestry agencies. State forestry agencies and others have questioned whether a block-grant approach to allocate such funds would enable each state to receive a greater share of the total appropriated funds, and

allow the states greater flexibility to manage such funds.

The panel, chaired by Perry Hagenstein, invited representatives from numerous forestry organizations to offer comments on the delivery of the Cooperative Forestry programs to ensure that all relevant issues were identified and addressed. The panel’s ensuing report examines several options, including block grants, to enhance the effectiveness of Cooperative Forestry programs.

The recommendations go beyond a simple evaluation of the merits and drawbacks of administering Cooperative Forestry programs through block grants to the states. The issues in funding Cooperative Forestry programs are complex and the opportunities for better serving the public are great. The Pinchot Institute intends for this report to challenge the Forest Service, the state foresters, and other stakeholders to be open to these opportunities and innovative in their responses. The Pinchot Institute provided briefings on the findings and recommendations to Congress, Forest Service leaders, and interested stakeholders.

The report is available electronically at www.pinchot.org/pic/cfnews.htm or can be requested in hard copy by calling (202) 797-6580 or emailing neblock@pinchot.org. Questions or comments about the study should be directed to Nadine Block at (202) 797-6585, neblock@pinchot.org.

