



# COQUILLE INDIAN TRIBE

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**Testimony of Brenda Meade  
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Before the House Committee on Natural Resources  
Hearing on “Tribal Forest Management: A Model for Promoting Healthy Forests and  
Rural Jobs”  
April 10, 2014**

I would like to thank each of you for this opportunity to testify today about my Tribe’s timber management experience. It is an honor to be here and represent my people. The Coquille Indian Tribe is a federally recognized Indian tribe headquartered in North Bend, Oregon. The Tribe is governed by an elected Tribal Council with seven members, of which I am the Chairperson.

As all of you are aware, the state of federal forest management in the United States is at a crossroads, and there is a need to identify sustainable and responsible forest management practices that can be implemented at a landscape scale and that are rooted in sound science and concern for our environment. I believe that these techniques already exist and can be found throughout Indian country today.

I am here today to present just one of the many examples of sustainable forestry that can be found throughout Indian country. Before I begin, however, I would like to provide some background about my Tribe and its journey towards sustainable forest management.

## **Tribal History, Termination, and Restoration**

The Coquille Tribe has inhabited the lands of Southern Oregon since time immemorial. Tribal members managed hunted, fished and gathered resources of these lands and waters to sustain their lives, their Tribe and their culture.

When European colonizers arrived in the early 19th Century, the Coquille people and their way of life was irreparably changed. Coquilles were subjected to massacre and dislocation, and, through the deliberate policy of the United States, forced off the lands they had lived on for thousands of years - all to make way for increased settlement and resource use by non-Indian peoples.

After negotiating but failing to ratify a treaty with the Coquilles, the United States sought to forcibly relocate the Coquille people to the Coast (Siletz) Reservation. A number of families, however, resisted relocation and stayed in their aboriginal lands. Others made perilous escapes

from their confinement on the Coast Reservation to return to their ancestral homelands.

The homelands they returned to were in the process of irrevocable alteration. Tribal members were not able to use or even to access many of the resources they had subsisted upon for food, shelter, and cultural and spiritual sustenance since time immemorial.

Federal policies targeting the Coquille and other Oregon tribes continued to wreak havoc on Tribal people and culture. Some Tribal members received individual allotments of land, but all these were ultimately lost because taxes were assessed and Tribal members were unable to pay them.

In the Twentieth Century, many Coquille children were taken from their homes and forced to attend boarding schools hundreds of miles away, in a deliberate attempt to educate them out of being Indians. The ultimate insult and injury remained. In 1954 as part of the disastrous termination policy, the United States "terminated" the federal recognition of the Coquille Indian Tribe. The Tribe and its members were deemed no longer to be Indians as the federal government saw it, and their ability to access health care, social services and other resources was abruptly cut off.

The impacts of the termination policy were nothing short of tragic: loss of health care resulted in increase in illness, infant mortality, and shorter life spans; loss of social services made the challenges of adapting to a changing society and physical landscape often insurmountable; unemployment soared; alcohol and drug abuse skyrocketed; families were broken up; and, most disastrously, the ties of culture, spirituality, and a common language were broken.

But, like their ancestors who remained or returned to their ancestral lands during the reservation era, the Coquille people refused to accept the federal government's word that they no longer existed. After years of sustained effort, they managed to reachieve federal recognition as an Indian Tribe in 1989. I would like to thank Representative DeFazio for introducing the original House bill to restore the Coquille Indian Tribe.

The Coquille Restoration Act was meant to remedy the harms and impacts of termination. Some of the damage was irreparable of course: an entire generation of Coquille people had suffered under termination, and the loss of language, culture, and resources was substantial. Restoration was the first step in remedying the damage done.

### **The Coquille Forest: A Model of Sustainability**

The next steps were taken by the Tribe itself: rebuilding the infrastructures of a Tribal government, setting up social services, education and health care programs, developing Tribal housing, and establishing a tribal court. The Tribe also created a culture and heritage program to reconnect the Tribe with its ancestral beliefs and practices.

The Tribe also focused on economic development - creating jobs and opportunities for its people. The Restoration Act required the Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to develop a Tribal self-

sufficiency plan which was completed in 1994. The centerpiece of this Self-Sufficiency Plan was to be a restoration of approximately 59,000 acres of forest land to the Tribe, which was expected to provide the Tribe with some level of self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, due to local political pressure, this proposed transfer was ultimately reduced by 90%. In 1996 Congress adopted the Coquille Forest Act, which restored approximately 5,410 acres of timber lands in Coquille's ancestral lands back to Tribal ownership. The Coquille Forest Act, was also part of the attempt by Congress to remedy some of the enduring harms of termination, and to allow the Tribe to reestablish many of the tribal cultural traditions and customs that were once practiced on these landscapes. After deducting all lands set aside for riparian reserve and other reserves, the area of the Coquille Forest that is available for active timber management totals 3,401 acres.

While these lands represent only a small sliver of the ancestral homelands of the Tribe, those lands and the revenues generated by timber harvest are an essential component of the Tribe's economic self-sufficiency plan.

Timber harvest on the Coquille Forest lands also provides employment for Tribal members as well as members of the local community, in both direct and indirect ways.

Timber revenues are a major component of resources used to fund Tribal government programs and services. Reasonably consistent and predictable timber revenues are critical for the successful planning and management of Tribal programs.

The Coquille Forest yields approximately 3.6 million board feet of sustainable yield timber harvest every year off of an annual harvest area of approximately 60 acres. Revenues from our forest support nearly 1,000 tribal members, 103 administrative employees, and provide 60 direct and 140 indirect jobs to the local community. All of the revenues generated stay within our local economy.

The Coquille Forest recently received environmental certification from the Forest Stewardship Council, and was documented as one of the best-managed Tribal forests in the Indian Forest Management Assessment Team's (IFMAT), analysis. This model of tribal forest stewardship has convincingly demonstrated sustained timber environmental/ecological benefits, and social benefits and can be used as a model to improve management on adjacent federal lands.

Because we have lived there since time immemorial and intend to stay in this place forever, the Coquille people are dedicated to sustaining and protecting the region's natural resources, economy and society. Unlike any other tribal forest in the nation, Congress mandated that the Coquille forest must be managed under the same standards and guidelines as adjacent Bureau of Land Management (BLM) forests, which are currently derived from the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP). This forest is unique because it is the only forest within the range of the spotted owl that meets all the environmental and timber targets of the NWFP.

### **Proven Advantages of Tribal Forest Management**

The Coquille Indian Tribe has accomplished what no other federal land manager has: produced

consistent volumes of timber while meeting the highest environmental protection targets. It is the only forest that meets the social, environmental and economic goals of the Northwest Forest Plan –producing logs for local mills while protecting key habitats for threatened and endangered species. The Coquille Tribe has excelled under the same regulatory structure in which other federal managers have faltered.

The reasons for this accomplishment are rooted in the unique approach that all tribes have to managing their forests for spiritual, social, ecological and economic benefits. This approach is wholly different from federal, state and private land managers. Below are some of the characteristics that set tribal forest management apart and offer a path forward to the gridlock facing federal forests:

- Tribes have been on the land since time immemorial and will be there forever. This long-term relationship compels them to honor their sacred responsibility to the land and reject short-term results and ephemeral and harmful fads. Tribal lifeway's are bound to the land. Tribal peoples are directly impacted by the consequences of management of their land and forest resources.
- The Tribal leadership and citizens are fully and permanently committed to the long term health of the forest and those that live in and around it, and steadily maintain that course (healthy communities promote healthy tribes and vice-versa);
- Tribes enlist the help of the scientific community on a regular basis and apply the latest scientific findings quickly on the land;
- Tribes measure environmental variables (stream conditions, wildlife populations, etc.) before and after timber harvest so they know the effect of their actions;
- Tribes manage under the umbrella of the National Indian Forest Resource Management Act, the most modern piece of U.S. forest policy legislation, which is outcomes based and demands accountability, including external independent review every 10 years;
- Tribes know their forest intimately, with a high level of inventory and monitoring, keeping track of what they find and using it to adapt their management actions to be ever more effective.
- Tribes have been on their lands for countless generations and want to be there for many more, so they take care of what they have and are not swayed by short term results or fads;
- Tribes manage for specific outcomes, in an integrated way, not by individual input targets that may or may not produce the desired outcomes.

### **What Others Are Saying about the Coquille's Approach to forest Management**

#### *Ecotrust*

On April 6, 2010 Ecotrust submitted a letter of support for the Tribe's funding request to the Administration of Native Americans. In their letter, Ecotrust trust stated:

*“The Tribe envisions a holistic approach to management of its yet-to-be acquired forest lands responding to values including revenue generation, renewable energy development, cultural restoration, ecosystem services, job creation, education of tribal member youths and the*

*transition of land management values and knowledge to future generations.... The Coquille Indian Tribe's vision and work are extremely aligned with ours."*

*The Nature Conservancy*

The Nature Conservancy submitted a similar letter of support on April 7, 2010 stating:

*"Tribal land management practices would be a marked change from current management and has the capacity to markedly improve watershed health on a landscape-wide scale."*

*Bay Area Chamber of Commerce*

On October 6, 2011 the Bay Area Chamber of commerce submitted a letter to Congressman Peter DeFazio in support of the joint proposal between the Tribe and Coos County stating:

*"The Coquille Indian Tribe has been a strong consistent partner in trying to rebuild our job base. It is becoming one of the largest non-government employers in Coos County. Their partnership with Coos County on the management of and revenues from the Coos Bay Wagon Road lands is vital to our recovery...."*

*Douglas Timber Operators*

In a letter to the Oregon Congressional Delegation, the Douglas Timber Operators stated:

*"The Coquille Tribal Forest is the only entity that has consistently generated a steady timber harvest while meeting the Northwest Forest Plan. We know this first hand. Our members are the companies that have logged those lands, milled and sold the wood. For over 20 years, our employees and our mills have not been able to count on federal forests for their future. Yet the successful management of a mere 2,600 actively managed acres of the Coquille Forest has played a critical foundation in keeping us in business..."*

*Governor John Kitzhaber*

On February 6, 2013, Governor John A. Kitzhaber sent a letter to the Oregon Delegation to report on the work of his O&C panel. In his letter the Governor further described the need for Tribal involvement. He stated:

*"My administration has worked hard to recognize Oregon tribes' role in natural resource management and species recovery. A number of tribes exist with ceded lands and ancestral history tied to the O&C land area. In developing a long-term O&C solution, we must recognize our long-standing and ongoing relationships with these affected tribes and our government-to-government responsibilities. I believe an O&C solution should consider land management impacts on these tribes' ancestral lands, participation in management authority and/or land restoration requests..."*

## **Legal Challenges**

Despite the Tribe's very holistic management model, the "standards and guidelines" language within the Coquille Forest Act still provides litigious, non-mainstream environmental groups the opportunity to subject the Coquille to unmerited lawsuits. There is even a lawsuit ongoing as we speak, in which such non-mainstream groups are delaying timber production and causing the Tribe to incur unnecessary financial costs by advancing what one judge has called a "tortured" interpretation of the "standards and guidelines" language.

It is very unfortunate that litigation plays such a large role in the Federal Government's management of the National Forest System. Litigants continue to use the Equal Access to Justice Act (codified at 28 U.S.C. § 2412 and 5 U.S.C. § 5045), to challenge and or delay land management decisions at the expense of all taxpayers. Rules governing tribal forest management have helped to prevent frivolous appeals and litigation by setting bond and standing requirements. These requirements provide for at least some marginal compensation for the financial loss and delay in timber production resulting from an appeal or litigation.

## **IFMAT**

The National Indian Forest Resources Management Act requires an independent evaluation of the status of Indian forests and forestry to be delivered to the Secretary of the Interior and Congress every ten years. This year's IFMAT report concluded that tribal forests are healthier and more productive than ever. Tribal management practices have increased timber yields, suppressed fire dangers, and maintained a rich biodiversity while providing *a national model for sustainable forest management*, supporting several thousand jobs annually both for tribal and surrounding communities.

The IFMAT report notes that all of these achievements have come despite dwindling federal funding for tribal forest management. The current level of per acre funding is roughly 61 percent of the minimum amount necessary for adequate forest stewardship and timber production. Indian forests receive far less management funding per acre than similar public and private lands.

The Coquille forest was the very first tribal forest studied by the IFMAT team during the most recent assessment. The following are a few of the remarks made by the IFMAT team during its visit on January 4-5, 2012:

- Their vision of the forest (healthy, sustainable, beautiful, proud, and adaptable) and what they want from it is remarkably clear and consistent from those with whom we met.
- Their natural resource staff is well trained, thoughtful, and professional.
- Both tribal members and staff have concerns about the ability to manage to meet tribal goals under the Northwest Forest Plan and, to a lesser extent, FSC certification.
- Staff members are exploring creative solutions to issues like green-tree retention, aggregates, and red tree voles and are monitoring their stands to allow for adaptive management over time.

- There was discussion of regeneration practices under the Northwest Forest Plan, the connection between growth and yield that guides the sustainable harvest level calculation under FSC regulations, and the importance of monitoring.
- Expansion of their land base is a key issue currently, as is the role of various unfunded mandates.
- In evaluating cost of forest management, the BIA covers 26% of the forest management cost while the Tribe is covering 74% of the cost through 10% administration funds and direct Tribal dollars into management operations. The
- IFMAT team also discussed issues of natural resources education and recruitment of qualified staff who are tribal members.
- The IFMAT team recognized the quality of the forestry program and appreciated the highly effective effort and contributions made by the Tribe to host this visit.

### **A Collaborative Approach to Federal Forest Management**

Consistent with its sovereign tribal status, the Tribe has a long history of local community collaboration over natural resources projects within its ancestral lands. One such example of this collaborative approach is the Coos Bay Wagon Road Pilot Project (CBWRP).

In a seminal meeting here in Washington DC on December 8, 2010, former Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar called for the establishment of pilot forestry projects in Southern Oregon. These pilot studies were in response to controversy limiting the kinds of management occurring on BLM O&C lands.

The CBWRP was one of three pilots approved by the Secretary. The CBWRP covers a portion of the revested Coos Bay Wagon Road lands in southwestern Oregon, and a portion of the Coquille Indian Tribe's aboriginal homeland.

The CBWRP provided an opportunity for the Tribe and the BLM to work together and develop a demonstration timber sale in coordination with professors Norm Johnson and Jerry Franklin. This pilot was designed to demonstrate the professors' ecological principles of variable retention regeneration harvest in the Oregon coast range.

The Coquille Tribe served as the interdisciplinary team (IDT) lead and the biological lead for the project. The Tribe also assisted with harvest unit design and layout. The project is expected to come to fruition later this year despite attempts by fringe environmental groups to appeal it.

Much like the intent of the ANCHOR forest concept, this project serves as a very good example of how the Federal Government and Tribes can work together for the benefit of the forest and the local community.

### **A Working Landscape Concept: The Coos Bay Wagon Road Proposal**

In recent years the revenues generated by the Secretary of Interior from forest production on the reconvened Coos Bay Wagon Road lands and other Federal forest lands in Coos County have

declined precipitously and no longer provide an adequate and reliable source of funding to meet the needs of local governments in Coos County; and these lands no longer achieve the objectives of the Act of August 28, 1937 to contribute to the economic stability of local communities and industries.

Tribal members and other residents of Coos County have been and are adversely affected by the persistently high rate of unemployment and underemployment in recent years throughout Coos County and elsewhere in southwestern Oregon, and share a strong desire to create permanent family-wage jobs in the County and to secure stable funding for provision of essential services by Coos County and the Coquille Indian Tribal government;

Coos County and the Tribe share the desire to build new relationships, strengthen existing relationships, jointly advance economic development, and improve management of public lands and waters in Coos County;

Transferring management of the surface resources on certain Coos Bay Wagon Road lands to the Tribe in cooperation with Coos County will demonstrate a new paradigm of Tribal forest management that may encourage further Tribal land management innovations elsewhere in the United States; and The Board of Commissioners of Coos County, Oregon and the Board of Commissioners of Douglas County, Oregon have adopted unanimous resolutions and motions supporting this concept.

This project is intended to complement and share information with the other pilot projects now being launched by the BLM. The goals of the CBWRP are to:

1. Test new silvicultural approaches to regeneration and intermediate harvests on a landscape scale in the very moist and productive forests of the Oregon Coast Range that will enhance the opportunities to meet the environmental protection goal and the community, jobs and economic goals of the NWFP.
2. Provide a long-term and enduring demonstration of long rotation, environmentally friendly forest management adapted to this particular environment and set of biodiversity opportunities and challenges, including the conservation and enhancement, of threatened and endangered species of wildlife and fish;
3. Test new riparian management approaches that demonstrate management aimed at sustaining the long-term productivity of dynamic aquatic ecosystems.
4. Provide an opportunity to demonstrate the National Indian Forest Resource Management Act on federal forest lands that are part of the Tribe's homeland;
5. Support Green Energy production by utilizing a portion of the forest products harvested for biofuels and/or bioenergy production;
6. Provide opportunity for Tribal cultural restoration on ancestral homelands; and,
7. Promote the Interior Department's goals of the America's Great Outdoors Initiative by using science - based management practices to restore and protect our lands and waters for future generations and advancing other priorities of the initiative.



## **Coquille Forest Fix**

The Coquille Tribe has excelled under the same regulatory structure in which other federal managers have faltered. However, there has been an extreme cost to managing under the same standards and guides of the Northwest Forest Plan. Senator Wyden has included a provision in his federal forest management bill that would place the Coquille Tribe on parity with other tribes. This provision would decouple our management from adjacent federal lands and allow the tribe to pursue its management under NIFRMA. I encourage the House to include this provision should federal forest management legislation be negotiated between chambers of Congress.

## **Conclusion**

While we are sovereign nations, our members are Citizens of the United States who care deeply about the well-being of our communities and the health of our forests. It is in everyone's best interest to have healthy forests, thriving rural economies, more jobs in the woods, and adequate funding for schools, roads and law enforcement. We think it is important to recognize that tribes are a critical participants and stakeholders in the overall health and future success of our national forest lands.

Of course, tribal timber management proposals are not without their critics and cynics. I ask, however, that you consider this a worthy challenge to provide for our future. Unlike federal agencies, state agencies, and private organizations and individuals, tribes have managed these lands since time immemorial, and they will continue to be active participants in these lands and in their communities forever.

The Coquille Tribe believes that, by working together, we can achieve more of our forest management and environmental protection goals across the landscape. In order to do this, however, you must engage the tribes and make them active participants in the process.

Tribes will show you that they are committed to defining a new vision for Federal forest management that resolves the current gridlock. Our combination of tried-and-tested experience and innovation is unique. We can help you to create a science-based vision that demonstrates our shared values of excellence, innovation, honor, and integrity. If we keep our vision simple and clear we will be successful.

Tribes have managed our landscape since the beginning of time and we continue to be stakeholders in the economic sustainability of our local communities. We hope that all of you here today take this to heart!

We believe that tribal management will pave the way for future success, and will promote new sustainable ecological management principles at a landscape scale.

We look forward to working with each of you and the President on the development and implementation of a new federal forest management strategy. Let these tribal principles be a stepping stone for each of us as we work together to pave our way to a better more sustainable

ecological and economical future.

Brenda Meade, Chairperson  
Coquille Indian Tribe