Program preserves forests for Oregon's future

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Grant applications are now being accepted for a program aimed at preserving Oregon's forest future by acquiring threatened forestland and assisting conservation of forests. The Forest Legacy Program, administered by the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), is a cooperative program of the U.S. Forest Service that seeks to conserve private forestlands that may be lost to non-forest uses, preserve forest resources, and enhance community forest conservation partnerships. "We're focusing our efforts on areas that face immediate threats to conversion to non-forest uses," said Jennifer Wright, ODF Forest Legacy Program coordinator. "These are large areas of private forest land that face the possibility of development within the next decade, where the consequences are great in terms of overall losses to ecological, social and economic forest related benefits." The Forest Legacy Program is designed to bolster state and community efforts to keep forestland viable. The voluntary program provides financial incentives -- using land acquisition or conservation easements -- for private landowners to protect environmentally important working forests (those that provide forest products as well as clean water, fish and wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities) that are threatened by development and other non-forest uses. Landowners submitting proposed projects for funding during the federal fiscal year beginning October 1, 2009, should contact ODF and submit projects prior to August 29, 2008 for consideration. Additional guidelines for the Forest Legacy Program, and the application form for the program, are available on the ODF website, www.oregon.gov/ODF. Oregon welcomed its first Forest Legacy Program project in September 2007. The City of Eugene received $460,000 to allow city staff to work with a private landowner and preserve more than 25 acres of oak habitat called South Eugene Hills Phase One on Eugene's Wild Iris Ridge. For more information about the program, contact Jennifer Wright at 541-267-1753 or jwright@odf.state.or.us.