

Smith pushes for safety net extension

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

One Year Extension Needed Now to Avert Crisis in Rural Counties

Senator Gordon H. Smith (R- OR) continued his fight to extend the county payments safety net for Oregon's rural counties. During a hearing of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests yesterday, Senator Smith raised concerns over potential formula changes and heard testimony from Undersecretary Mark Rey of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Douglas County Commissioner Doug Robertson.

During the hearing Senator Smith pressed Undersecretary Rey about Oregon's limited timber harvest. "We are producing less timber now than we were ten years ago. Ramping up timber harvests will help provide for rural counties. I would like to see a responsible increase in timber harvests. It can be done."

Senator Smith later noted, "Oregonians have long been excellent stewards of federal forest lands. County payments will be needed until we can return to responsible forest management that provides for rural communities. We must work on an immediate extension. Once the urgent needs have been satisfied, then we can begin work on a permanent solution."

Last month, Senator Smith spent nearly three hours on the Senate floor reviewing the impact Congress's inaction has on Oregon. Senator Smith's remarks included a comprehensive review of Oregon forest policy and the impact of the federal government owning over half the land in Oregon. Senator Smith is looking next to emergency spending legislation to provide for a one-year extension.

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