

Environment

Forest conservation

Environmental groups, timber firms sign pact

SALEM, Ore., Feb. 11, (AP) — Environmental groups and timber companies in Oregon, which have clashed for decades, on Monday unveiled a road map for overhauling forest practice regulations, a step that Gov. Kate Brown called “historic.”

The agreement came after the two sides quietly held meetings, facilitated by the governor’s office, in Salem and Portland over the last month to try to find common ground, instead of filing competing initiative petitions and lawsuits.

“I walked in on the first meeting, and I knew folks were serious when the timber industry folks had their shirt sleeves rolled up and envoys were in suits and ties,” Brown said at a news conference.

The meetings resulted in leaders of around a dozen environmental groups, including Oregon Wild, the Audubon Society of Portland and Cascadia Wildlands, and of a dozen timber companies, including Weyerhaeuser, one of the largest forest products companies in the world, and Lone Rock of Roseburg, Oregon, signing a memorandum of understanding.

Oregon leads the nation in wood-products manufacturing, according to industry experts, even though environmental groups and the timber industry have been backing rival initiative petitions that seek to put measures on the ballot. They have also backed rival legislation and filed lawsuits.

Under the new agreement, both sides would complete a stand-down from pursuing changes through the initiative process, related legal actions, and legislative and regulatory proceedings.

The agreement represents a departure from 20 years of tension, said Bob Van Dyk, Oregon and California policy director for the Wild Salmon Center. He appeared with Brown at the news conference.

That animosity “results in a lack of trust, gridlock on forest policy and a growing public demand for broader reform,” Van Dyk said. “Today we’re starting a new approach ... It’s a path of collaboration toward stronger conservation measures and more certainty for the timber industry.”

Greg Miller, a long-time timber industry executive and representative of the coalition of forest companies, told reporters he hopes the memorandum of understanding “sets Oregon up for the most comprehensive, forward-thinking forest policy in the nation.”

Both sides underscored that while it is a big moment, it is only a first step.

“Conservation of Oregon’s forests, and communities that live around them and rely upon them, is not guaranteed at the end of this process. It will require significant work over the next two years to modernize forest rules,” said Sean Stevens, executive director of Oregon Wild.

Under the agreement, both sides would support immediate legislation to establish helicopter pesticide application buffers, or no-direct application zones, around inhabited dwellings and schools and around streams.

Nik Blosser, Brown’s chief of staff, described in a telephone interview how the two sides came together. The seed was planted when a group of timber company CEOs met with Brown in January and asked her if she could broker a deal on all the litigation and initiative petitions.

Blosser then contacted the environmentalists, thinking that this was a long-shot effort.

“I called them and said, ‘Are you interested in sitting down and having this conversation?’ And they said, ‘Well, we’re not sure how serious they really are. And I said, ‘Well, I think they’re pretty serious, so why don’t we do one meeting and give it a try?’ Blosser recalled.

There wound up being four meetings, with five people representing each side, Blosser said. Everyone was fully engaged.

“Nobody looked at their phones, which is kind of remarkable in a meeting nowadays. Everyone was listening and everyone was acknowledging the other person talking and that what they said was sincere,” Blosser said.

The memorandum they agreed to sets up a process for overhauling the Oregon Forest Practices Act — a set of laws enacted in 1971 that made Oregon the first state to implement a comprehensive set of laws governing forest practices. It contains provisions for activities such as how timber harvests happen on private forest lands, providing riparian buffers along rivers and streams and the replanting of trees.



Brown



This undated file photo shows a large fir tree heading to the forest floor after it is cut by an unidentified logger in the Umpqua National Forest near Oakridge, Oregon. (AP)

Climate

Africa locust outbreak spreads

UN warns of ‘shock’ over locusts

JOHANNESBURG, Feb. 11, (AP) — Uganda scrambled to respond to the arrival of the biggest locust outbreak that parts of East Africa have seen in decades, while the United Nations warned Monday that “we simply cannot afford another major shock” to an already vulnerable region.

An emergency government meeting hours after the locusts were spotted inside Uganda on Sunday decided to deploy military forces to help with ground-based pesticide spraying, while two planes for aerial spraying will arrive as soon as possible, a statement said. Aerial spraying is considered the only effective control.

The swarms of billions of locusts have been destroying crops in Kenya, which hasn’t seen such an outbreak in 70 years, as well as Somalia and Ethiopia, which haven’t seen this in a quarter-century. The insects have exploited favorable wet conditions after unusually heavy rains, and experts say climate change is expected to bring more of the same.

Keith Cressman, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization’s senior locust forecasting officer, said Kenya has received “waves and waves of swarms” since the beginning of the year from the Horn of Africa, and “over the weekend they moved on the side of Mount Kilimanjaro across the border into Tanzania.”

“Also over the weekend they moved into northeastern Uganda,” he told a news conference at UN headquarters in New York. “We’re expecting any day they will move across the border into the southeast corner of South Sudan,” where another several million people face hunger as the country struggles to

emerge from civil war.

A medium-size swarm of locusts can eat the same amount of food as everybody here in the tri-state area, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York. So not taking action in time — you can see the consequences.”

UN officials warn that immediate action is needed before more rainfall in the weeks ahead brings fresh vegetation to feed new generations of locusts. If left unchecked, their numbers could grow up to 500 times before drier weather arrives, they say.

Severe

“There is the risk of a catastrophe,” UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock told a briefing in New York on Monday, warning that 13 million people already face severe food insecurity — 10 million in places affected by locusts — and the region can’t afford another jolt.

Dominique Burgeon, the FAO’s emergency and resilience director, warned at the UN briefing that another 20 million people in the region are in danger of becoming food insecure.

Without enough aerial spraying to stop the swarms, the locust outbreak could turn into a plague, “and when you have a plague, it takes years to control,” Burgeon told The Associated Press last week.

The UN has asked for \$76 million in immediate aid. So far just under \$20 million is in hand, including \$10 million released by Lowcock from the UN emergency relief fund and \$3.8 million from FAO, officials said. The United

States said Monday it has released \$800,000 and the European Union has released 1 million euros.

“The response today is not gonna work, unless there’s a big scale-up,” Lowcock said.

The locusts are eating the vegetation that supports vibrant herder communities in the region, and Kenyan Ambassador Lazarus Amayo warned of the “inherent risk of communal conflict over pastures.”

The outbreak is so severe it might even disrupt the planting of crops in the coming weeks, he said, adding that the locusts “do wanton damage.”

The swarm spotted in Amudat district was “certainly big,” and the prime minister was expected to lead an evening emergency meeting on Uganda’s first major locust outbreak since the 1960s, Owor said.

In rural Somalia, where about 50% of the people depend on animals for their livelihoods, the locusts are eating the pasturage. The animals weaken, their milk decreases and small children, who depend on the milk to survive, suffer skyrocketing malnutrition, the experts said.

The locusts at that stage are bright pink and in their most voracious state, like “very hungry teenagers,” Cressman said. By now, many people in Kenya and Ethiopia know them well.

After a month or so, the locusts will be mature adults, ready to reproduce. Soon after copulating and laying eggs the locusts will die, “but their progeny will be hatching,” Cressman said. “And we have another generation of locusts to contend with, with about another 20-fold increase.”



This Feb. 7 photo provided by the Los Angeles Zoo & Botanical Gardens shows female Western Lowland Gorilla, N’djia, and her newborn baby resting in their enclosure at the zoo in Los Angeles. The zoo announced the female baby gorilla was born on Jan. 18, 2020. The baby, who doesn’t yet have a name, is the first gorilla born at the zoo in more than 20 years. (AP)

Discovery

**Bid to speed cleanup:** Federal environmental officials have unveiled a plan to speed the cleanup of the Housatonic River in western Massachusetts and require General Electric to pay local communities \$63 million.

Under the long-awaited deal announced Monday by the Environmental Protection Agency, highly contaminated sediment will be removed from the river and floodplains and transported to existing licensed hazardous waste landfills in other locations in the country.

Lower-level PCB-contaminated materials will be consolidated into a double-lined upland disposal facility to be built in Lee, Massachusetts.

The agreement also calls for the removal of more contaminated sediment from the river than previously required by the EPA’s 2016 cleanup plan.

“This landmark agreement is a major milestone in our collective efforts to address PCB contamination in the Housatonic River and we are looking forward to more comprehensive and faster cleanup activity in the river,” said Environmental Protection Agency Regional Administrator Dennis Deziel, referring to the polychlorinated biphenyls released into the river by Boston-based GE from a Pittsfield plant for decades through the 1970s.

Deziel said in a statement that the agreement protects human health and the environment and “ensures that the Housatonic River and its floodplain are restored and preserved as an asset to the community and wildlife.”

The EPA is planning a series of public hearings to provide details about the agreement.

Roger Martella, director of environmental, health and safety for GE, said in a written statement that the agreement “makes good on our longstanding commitment to a comprehensive cleanup” that fully protects the environment. (AP)



Deziel



Martella

**‘Infection traced to farm’:** Investigators have traced a deer on a Douglas County farm that was infected with chronic wasting disease to a farm in Pine County that supplied the animal, the Minnesota Board of Animal Health has said.

A doe on the Pine County farm that tested positive has been put down and the eight other deer still alive there will be destroyed, board spokesman Michael Crusan said. The herd owner is working with the US Department of Agriculture on compensation. (AP)

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