

**For immediate release**  
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## **Court Decision Safeguards Old-growth Forest Reserve on Deschutes National Forest**

EUGENE - US District Court Judge Michael Hogan halted a Forest Service logging project in an old growth reserve on the Deschutes National Forest southwest of Bend, Oregon.

Three conservation organizations, scientists and local citizens repeatedly requested the Forest Service to modify the Five Buttes Project, which involved logging on 4,235 acres in an area surrounding the Cascade Lakes Highway, and reduce its negative impacts on wildlife and old growth forests. The League of Wilderness Defenders - Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project, Cascadia Wildlands Project, and the Sierra Club obtained assistance from noted fire ecologists Dr. Dennis Odion and Dr. Chad Hanson to educate the court about the key scientific information the Forest Service had failed to disclose and consider.

The Court found that the Five Buttes Project would result in long-term impacts to the Davis Lake Old-growth Reserve. This area was set aside to recover imperiled populations of forest species, including the threatened northern spotted owl. The ruling highlights the problems with "fire-risk reduction" projects that focus exclusively on tree removal without considering the negative impacts on the wildlife that inhabit these areas and the potential for old growth logging to increase fire risk.

The Forest Service claimed that it must log older forests in the reserve in order to prevent spotted owl habitat from burning in a future wildfire event. Leading scientists have documented how logging mature and old-growth forests actually increases the severity of future wildfires and undermines the purpose for the reserves in the short and long-term. Even the Forest Service's own analysis disclosed the Five Buttes Project would lead to the degeneration of suitable northern spotted owl habitat for up to 50 years.

"This ruling underscores how the Forest Service did not use science, but instead premised this project on the myth that it needs to log old-growth forests to save them," says Dan Kruse, Legal Director of the Cascadia Wildlands Project. "This project was not about forest health, but rather it was about short-term commercial profit from logging big trees in a reserve."

The conservation groups have been working to support active measures to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire and improve forest health in priority areas. In particular, they have

highlighted the need for thinning in managed and fire-suppressed stands and controlled burning. This decision highlights the Forest Service's unwillingness to focus on priority areas that all interested parties agree need attention.

"The Forest Service's proposal to log fire resistant old growth trees is counter to the goal of creating healthy forests," says Asante Riverwind of the Oregon Chapter Sierra Club. "Logging big trees removes the shading canopies, increases flammable shrubs, dries out the forest floor and generally increases the severity of wildfire."

This decision will help inform forest legislation currently being drafted by Senator Ron Wyden and Congressman Peter DeFazio. The decision highlights the importance of establishing, maintaining and protecting old-growth forest reserves on the eastside of the Cascade Mountains to guide risk reduction priorities and ensure the recovery of fish and wildlife.

"This is a great victory for wildlife, recreational enthusiasts and the protection of biodiversity," says Karen Coulter, director of Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project. "The Five Buttes timber sale area includes beautiful, old-growth mixed conifer forests, where logging was planned with no limit on the size of trees that could be cut. The forest's wildlife habitat value is now saved from the saw."

The plaintiffs were represented by staff attorney Dan Kruse from the Cascadia Wildlands Project in Eugene, Ralph Bloemers from the Crag Law Center in Portland, and private attorney Ann Kneeland in Eugene.

●●● *Photos and the court decision are available upon request.*

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