

Re: Lane County Membership in AOCC 16  
Presented to Lane County Board of Commissioners April 23, 2013  
Letter written to Register Guard by Lane County Resident Mora Dewey Fields

### **It's time for Lane County to uncouple from a secret organization**

In 2010 Lane County relinquished membership in the Association of O&C Counties (AOCC). The AOCC is a private, non-governmental organization which has historically conducted meetings without transparency or public access. Shortly thereafter Lane County rejoined with stated expectations that the AOCC would conduct meetings in accordance with Oregon open meeting laws, increase its number of board members, and have as its highest priority the reauthorization of federal timber payments. The Lane County delegate to the AOCC, Commissioner Faye Stewart (a longtime AOCC board member), was entrusted by the county to promote these changes within the AOCC.

The AOCC subsequently *did* increase the number of board members, and now nominally allows public attendance at its meetings. I have attended several of these monthly meetings. However, I have been requested to leave so that private matters can be discussed (not allowed under Oregon open meeting laws), and asked to leave when executive session has been hastily (also not allowed) or improperly called, yet most other non-board-members have not been asked to leave. Effectively, these are *still* closed meetings and *not* conducted according to open meeting laws.

From what I have observed of the AOCC's discussions, re-authorization of SRS payments is not the priority of the AOCC. Increased harvest of federally-owned O&C lands without regard to effects on water, wildlife, or ecosystems, appears to be the main objective. The group claims to seek jobs and stabilization of county finances, but solely by means of increased timber harvest on these public lands. To this end, the AOCC has proposed and supported resolutions and legislation which allow selling or entrusting these forests to interests not subject to federal environmental protections. At a recent meeting, some members stated the desire to de-federalize these forests rather than continue to receive SRS payments.

The primary beneficiary of increased harvest levels on public lands is the corporate timber industry, which, with its hugely expensive and efficient harvesting and milling equipment and often multi-national infrastructure, can easily underbid small operators and win harvest contracts. These corporations have a higher profit margin than small operators, yet contribute almost nothing to county or state finances in the form of taxes. Since they have overharvested and exported so much of their own timber, is it any wonder they now require our publicly-owned mature and old growth forests?

The AOCC can lobby for cutting as much old growth on public land as it wants, since it is a private organization. But what is Lane County doing endorsing such actions without the consent of its citizenry?

Since Commissioner Stewart has failed in his efforts to align the AOCC with Lane County's stated expectations for open meetings and SRS funding priorities in Board Order 09-10-28-7, I request that Lane County end its membership in the AOCC. Perhaps the yearly savings in membership dues and special assessments and fees could fund a few county jail beds.

*Mora Dewey Fields is a small woodlot owner in Lane County. She has previously worked as a researcher and writer in various fields. She moved to Oregon 9 years ago with the view that most Oregonians treasure the incredible gifts of natural beauty, wildlife, fresh air and clean water of which we are guardians.*