



For Immediate Release

March 26, 2026

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FOREST BRIDGES SUBMITS MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE FOR WESTERN OREGON BLM LANDS

ROSEBURG, Ore. — “More than ten years of collaboration between conservation, environmental, timber, Tribal, governmental and public interests has produced nearly 500 pages of scientific deliberation and Active Conservation Management proposals forming the foundation of the Forest Bridges Alternative delivered to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on March 22, 2026,” says Elin Miller, Forest Bridges’ President and former EPA Region 10 Administrator.

In the interest of sustaining forests and conserving habitat in the face of wildfire, the Forest Bridges’ Alternative is the Roseburg-based grassroots nonprofit’s response to the BLM’s February 19, 2026 Notice of Intent (NOI) to revise the 2016 resource management plans (RMPs) for approximately 2.46 million acres of BLM-administered western Oregon public lands. These include traditional BLM O&C lands and Coos Bay Wagon Road lands.

Emphasizing the O&C Act of 1937’s mandates to supply domestic timber and boost local economic revenue, the NOI states that the BLM’s primary goal is to increase sustained-yield timber harvest to nearly 1.1 billion board feet, the average from 1960 – 1989. After significantly dropping in the 1990’s, harvest volumes on these BLM lands have ranged from 45 to 275 million board feet since 2020.

The NOI goes on to say that the BLM also “seeks to enhance its ability to implement forest treatments to mitigate the devastating effects of wildfire and to salvage timber killed by wildfire, drought and other disturbances.”

“Although the BLM’s stated primary purpose is timber harvest, returning to annual harvest levels in excess of a billion board feet is just too high to sustain,” says Rick Sohn, Forest Bridges co-founder and Board member, “We stood committed to submitting an Alternative based on our collaborative’s Active Conservation Management Principles of Agreement and strategies.” These, he explains, focus on using harvest and prescribed fire as tools for sustaining the diversity of wildlife habitats, increasing fire resilience, and building carbon sequestration with old-growth forests throughout BLM’s proposed lands available for active management.

“Our proposed Alternative estimates an annual harvest level of around 675 million board feet annually,” says Denise Barrett, who recently transitioned from Forest Bridges Executive Director to Board Treasurer. “This is nearly three times what the BLM harvested and would be achieved via a 30-year Active Conservation Management program in dry, moist and transitional (mixed dry-moist) BLM forests, which is then repeated to address forest conditions out of alignment with the pre-European contact Indigenous period.”

For example, in dry forests overly stocked with hazardous fuels and lacking in diversity and structure, Forest Bridges proposes using variable density thinning and prescribed fire to create mosaic forests that reflect the tree spacing, diversity and structure of the pre-contact Indigenous period. “This is aimed at a sevenfold reduction in the rate of high-severity wildfire, from the current estimate of 36%, according to the Nature Conservancy, to around 5%,” Barrett says. “Most fires, when they inevitably occur, would then be of lower severity allowing for greater flexibility for appropriate suppression, and facilitating future prescribed fire to sustain forests as they were for 15,000 years when Indigenous people stewarded these lands.”

And in moist forests, Forest Bridges proposes the BLM use a defined amount of variable retention regeneration harvests—never clear cuts—together with thinning and prescribed fire. Over the long term, these treatments on moist forests would address shortages of younger forests and accelerate the development of old-growth forests—from 25% today—to our goal of 50% old-growth. Tribal co-management, of prescribed fire and other treatments based on Indigenous Knowledge and practice, is also proposed by the organization.

Other important improvements the Forest Bridges Alternative would generate cut across ecosystem services to the public—e.g., clean water, clean air/smoke management, recreation, etc.—as well as would increase and help stabilize timber receipts that the 18 O&C Counties rely on to provide critical human and public safety services in their communities. Forest-reliant businesses would have a predictable program upon which to invest in infrastructure; forest-based restoration jobs would also flourish.

According to Miller: “We do highlight in our Alternative that due to the enormity of forest restoration needed, our proposed Active Conservation Management program will require additional federal appropriations for the full range of public benefits.”

“I support the BLM including the Forest Bridges Alternative in their draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement,” says Garrett Kleiner, Vice President of Inland Forest Management, Sandpoint, Idaho, and Forest Bridges Board member. “Forest Bridges’ estimated increase in output from timber harvest and thinning on the BLM lands will create sustainable forests and increase fire resilience.”

Portland-based conservationists, Dave and Christine Vernier say: “We applaud Forest Bridges for having diligently stayed on mission with their sustainable, habitat- and conservation-oriented strategies through challenging times.”

According to Sustainable Northwest’s President Dylan Kruse: “Forest Bridges has provided a thoughtful vision for the future management of the O&C lands. Their outcome-driven strategy for the benefit of forest and watershed health, wildlife habitat, and good jobs is the kind of approach needed to solve current challenges, incorporate diverse perspectives, and chart a more durable and collaborative path forward.”

“It’s time the divisive discourse ends, and all of us in conservation, timber, Tribes, community and government come together to find common ground in resolving the devastating ecological impacts on our forests,” says Miller. “And with our Alternative we will achieve that, boost rural economies and protect the health of all Oregonians.”

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