DNR Proposes More Money to 'Timber Counties'

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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Olympia, WA - Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark yesterday urged Governor Christine Gregoire to distribute $10-million to 20 cash-strapped "timber counties." Goldmark pointed to dwindling budgets and tight wallets at the county level when he said "I believe that we can afford to redistribute $10-million to the counties..." The Department of Natural Resources has twice lowered the management percentage this year from 25 down to 21 percent, increasing the revenue to counties from timber sales.

“Counties are cutting budgets and strapped for cash. When we can, we should provide some relief,” Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark said. “I believe that we can afford to redistribute $10 million to the counties to aide them through unprecedented budgetary challenges.” The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages just over a half million acres of state forestlands on behalf of 20 counties, mostly in western Washington. In fiscal year 2011, those lands generated $96 million in non-tax revenue that was distributed to those counties from the Forest Development Account. "We appreciate the Commissioner taking this step to help out timber counties. This is a big deal for us," said Wahkiakum County Commissioner Dan Cothren. DNR uses a portion, currently 21 percent, of those revenues to manage natural resources sales, plant trees after timber harvests, protect clean water, and restore habitat on those lands. Much of the acreage was deeded by the counties to the state’s care in the early 20th Century after the lands were heavily logged and abandoned by private owners. Goldmark proposes to distribute the funds based on the 10-year average of each county’s revenue from the Forest Development Account. If approved, the account would still have a six-month cushion for operations. **Management Funds**Responding to a strong timber market, the Board of Natural Resources has twice lowered the management percentage this year – from 25 percent to 23 percent in April, and from 23 percent to 21 percent in October. Those earlier actions increase the revenue that flows to counties from DNR’s timber sales during the 2011-13 Biennium.