

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

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### Witness Statement

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Testimony  
Before  
Congress of the United States Subcommittee  
On  
National Parks and Public Lands  
In  
Committee Room 1324 Longworth HOB  
Washington D.C.  
On  
October 21, 1999  
By  
Tom Partin  
Vice-President  
Ochoco Lumber Company

Chairman Hansen, members of the subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, my name is Tom Partin, and I want to thank you for taking my testimony today. I am here to today to urge you to support H.R. 2950, a bill to provide for the exchange of certain land in the State of Oregon. I am testifying on behalf of Ochoco Lumber Company d.b.a. Malheur Lumber Company located in John Day Oregon. My Company is participating in both the Northeast Oregon Assembled Land Exchange (NOALE) and the Triangle Land Exchange. In the NOALE Exchange we have certain lands that we would like to trade with the Bureau of Land Management, and in the Triangle Exchange we have lands that we would like to exchange with the United States Forest Service. Clearwater Land Exchange of Oregon is facilitating both exchanges, and we are only one of over one hundred (100) participants in this exchange.

To better understand why Malheur Lumber Company wants to be involved in these exchanges, I need to give a brief review of our history and our land acquisition pattern. Our parent company Ochoco Lumber Company has been in existence since 1927 in Prineville, Oregon. We have a land and timber base in that area that over the years has exceeded 100,000 acres. This ownership was consolidated into two main blocks by means of land exchanges that took place in the 1960's, 80's, and early 90's. Therefore, exchanging land to consolidate ownerships and improve management is not a new concept to our Company. In 1983 we built Malheur Lumber Company in John Day Oregon, and started acquiring timberlands in various sizes and configurations throughout this area. We have built our ownership up to over 30,000 acres at this time in the John Day area. Our smallest land acquisition was forty (40) acres, and the largest was just over 7,500 acres. In examining an ownership map it can easily be seen that we own small tracts of land within larger blocks of BLM or Forest Service holdings. Conversely, there are areas where we have large ownership blocks that have small isolated parcels of Government lands within.

Clearly land consolidation was the basis for beginning the exchange process back in 1994 and is still an important factor. However, since that time there has been more compelling reasons to complete these

exchanges. One factor that favors a quick consummation of the exchanges is the listing of mid-Columbia stocks of steelhead and Chinook salmon. These species reside in the rivers and tributary streams encompassed by this exchange. Listed species need land set-asides for their protection. The best set-asides for fish species is in the riparian areas near the creeks and rivers where these species reside. Considerable acreage in these riparian areas is now under private ownership, but scheduled to become under Government ownership when the exchanges are completed. Consolidation of ownership in these riparian areas would allow for decommissioning of certain roads thus reducing sedimentation, full length riparian fencing to promote re-growth of vegetation for shading, and more ease in monitoring fish numbers. Another factor that favors quickly completing these exchanges is road rights-of-way through alternate ownership of forestlands. In most cases road easements are not permanent when crossing alternate ownerships, thus every time a road use permit is needed a lengthy process of road examination, purpose of the use, and fee setting must be gone through. These exchanges would eliminate many right-of-way problems thus resolving access questions. Lengthy and costly property boundary location searches could also be avoided by ownership consolidation. It is much easier and cost effective to establish external property lines around large parcels of land rather than around irregular shaped alternate ownerships. Wildfire concerns on adjacent lands could be reduced with these land consolidations.

The case and reasons for the exchanges are clearly stated above, but there are those that will always question the value and quality of land that the US Government is trading for. While Malheur Lumber Company is only one of over one hundred participants in these exchanges, we are a major player in acres traded. Therefore, I think it is important to look at the land use management strategies we have employed on our lands that the US Government will be receiving in these exchanges. Ochoco Lumber Company has been involved in Eastern Oregon forest management since 1927. We are recognized as one of the best stewards of ponderosa pine type forests. Selective timber harvesting and uneven aged stand management on over 100,000 acres of primarily ponderosa pine forests has made the names of Ochoco Lumber Company and Malheur Lumber Company synonymous with good forest management in Eastern Oregon. The public should demand close scrutiny of land exchanges. We must be able to assure that the private lands given in exchange are equal to those the Government is offering in trade. Our exchange lands do involve quality-managed land being exchanged by both parties. Old growth timber will not be an issue within our exchanges because both parties have comparable stands of old growth timber on the parcels being traded. Malheur Lumber Company is also a certified Tree Farm of the American Tree Farm System. Besides timber, the American Tree Farm System also recognizes good management in wildlife, water, and soil resources on forested properties, which exemplify conditions, found on our timberlands. Based on this discussion, I want the members of this committee to know that quality lands on both sides are being traded.

Knowing the quality of lands being exchanged, and the compelling reasons for the exchange, we have attained a broad base of support from various people and groups. We have letters of support from the three Indian tribes within the exchange area, including the Confederate tribes of the Warm Springs, The Umatilla, and the Paiute Nation. Letters of support were also received from Oregon Trout, Oregon Natural Desert Association, The Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club, and from Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber. All local City and County municipalities are in favor of the exchanges because of the positive financial implications they bring. With this broad range of support, the question must arise as to why these exchanges have not been finalized. I quite frankly do not have an answer for this except for possibly procrastination or fear that a decision might be appealed. The BLM has completed and published their Final Environmental Impact Statement for NOALE in June of 1998, and the Forest Service completed a Revised Environmental Analysis in April 1999. Our company has been involved in this exchange process for over four (4) years, and we think it is time to make a decision.

A number of factors have occurred during the last four (4) years that bring a new sense of urgency to the completion of these exchanges. Our Sawmill operates with logs from a variety of sources. We buy Forest Service, BLM, Indian Tribe, State of Oregon, and other private land logs. Timber Sales on the Malheur National Forest have dropped from over 60MMBF in 1996 to 30MMBF in 1999. Likewise timber offerings from other Government agencies have been reduced accordingly. Private timber from other ownerships is not plentiful enough to make up the shortfalls in Government timber sales programs. In addition to this, Company timberland that has been dedicated to these exchanges cannot be managed because standing inventories of timber has been completed and land appraisals formulated. The dilemma we now face is finding enough logs to operate until these exchanges are completed. Log inventories at Malheur Lumber Company are the lowest for this time in October since we began operations 16 years ago. We are running out of options, opportunities, and time. To make matters worse, we learned last week that 60 million additional acres of Forest Service timberland in the West could be locked up in new roadless area set-asides. The one hundred (100) people that work at Malheur Lumber Company are facing curtailments, shift layoffs, or total shutdown if a positive decision is not reached quickly on these exchanges. In addition to knowing our situation as the Vice-President of our Company, I am also the Mayor of the City of John Day, which has a population of approximately 2000 people. I know first hand how important our direct payroll is to the local economy. Grant County, in which we are located, has had Oregon's highest unemployment rate for the last three years. The current August unemployment rates are 7.5%, highest again in this region. I don't want to see a curtailment of our plant because of the impact to our operation and to the community. Our local school District is already on a four day week due to budget cutbacks.

Ochoco and Malheur Lumber Companies are not only good stewards of timberland, but we are also strong economic partners in the communities we are located. Community involvement, good paying jobs and active philanthropy is a few of the attributes our plants and people bring to their respective communities. Historically we have been a Company that is the first to help in times of need, and the last to ask for help in return. Now is a time that I must ask for help; help in the form of support for H.R. 2950. Support for this bill will mean good forest management, jobs for our employees, and a strengthening of our fragile local economy.

Thank you for listening to my testimony and considering this Bill.

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