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BABBITT TO GET PREVIEW OF FOREST SITUATION

Summary: The interior secretary plans a visit to Oregon ahead of the Northwest Forest Conference

Interior Secretary Bruce **Babbitt** will concentrate on the future of the forests and the timber industry in a visit to Oregon this weekend to prepare for the April 2 Northwest Forest Conference.

Babbitt's two-day schedule starts early Friday in Molalla and includes visits to two mills that have retooled to use second-growth logs, to an experimental forest and to an ecosystem health project. He goes on to California on Saturday night.

Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy will make a similar visit to Washington state, beginning Sunday. The schedules for the two Cabinet members were announced Wednesday. Administration officials said a list of conference participants and schedule for the conference probably will be announced next week.

Both President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore plan to attend the full one-day conference. "There is a real sense of urgency and a real commitment to resolving these problems," the administration source said.

Also on hand will be **Babbitt**; Espy; Labor Secretary Robert Reich; Commerce Secretary Ron Brown; Carol Browner, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency; and Jack Gibbons, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

The conference fulfills Clinton's campaign promise to convene a "summit" to gather information for a long-term solution to the impasse over Northwest forest management. Congress has failed to produce legislation that would preserve old-growth forests and protect imperiled species while allowing logging at a reduced level to continue. Meanwhile, most federal timber sales are tied up by court injunctions.

Participants in the conference are expected to include representatives of elected officials, labor, timber and other industries, environmental organizations, American Indian nations and community groups.

The source said the format probably will be similar to Clinton's December economic summit in providing an opportunity for questions and answers and back-and-forth discussion. The focus will be on forests of the western sections of Oregon, Washington and Northern California, but the organizers expect some participants to bring up problems of eastside forests as well. Protection for threatened and endangered salmon runs also probably will be discussed.

Babbitt will arrive in Portland Thursday and get an early start Friday, touring Avison Lumber Co. in Molalla at 7:30 a.m.

Avison specializes in producing clear, fine-grain lumber from large-diameter old-growth logs but has also retooled to handle second-growth logs. **Babbitt** will then fly over the Willamette National Forest and Bureau of Land Management's Eugene District forest lands, passing over lands heavily fragmented by logging, on his way to Blue River in the McKenzie River Valley, where he will visit the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest.

Wildlife biologist Eric Forsman conducted early studies of the northern spotted owl on the Andrews forest. It's also the site of the first long-term experiments with "new forestry" techniques led by University of Washington forest ecologist Jerry Franklin.

In the afternoon, **Babbitt** will meet in Salem with state legislators, members of the Oregon congressional delegation and Gov. Barbara Roberts.

Saturday, **Babbitt** will tour a Roseburg Forest Products plywood mill in Riddle, meet with community leaders in Riddle and visit the Applegate Partnership near Medford. The 1-year-old partnership is an experiment in bringing together timber industry representatives, conservationists, the BLM, the Forest Service and community residents to plan for ecologically sound forest management across all ownerships in a single watershed.

Babbitt also plans to tour the area by air and on the ground.

Friday evening, **Babbitt** will meet community leaders in Eureka, Calif.

Espy is scheduled to stop first in Aberdeen, Wash., on Sunday afternoon and to visit the rain forest in the Hoh River drainage on the Olympic Peninsula. He plans to eat dinner with Roberts at a yet-to-be-determined site in Portland on Sunday night.

Espy will tour the Gifford Pinchot National Forest of Southwest Washington on Monday morning. Espy will spend the night in Olympia on Monday, and then meet with legislators and Washington Gov. Mike Lowry on Tuesday.