

Forestry rules win assent

■ The proposed state regulations would protect fish-bearing streams on private timberlands

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SALEM — Something rare in timber politics — agreement on all sides, however grudging — greeted a new slate of stream-protection rules for private lands Wednesday.

The Oregon Board of Forestry also agreed that the rules would move the state in the right direction and sent them out for four public hearings in February.

Unless it hears persuasive evidence to the contrary, the board will approve the rules in April and then spend the summer training private timberland owners and its own foresters in how to apply them. On that timeline, they would take effect in September.

The rules will affect forest practices on about 13,000 miles of major fish-bearing streams and 28,000 to 38,000 miles of smaller streams.

Pam Homer of the Department of Water Resources said the important thing was to get the new rules on the books. "We're a year behind schedule," she said. "We're losing critical time for the resource, the longer we wait."

The goal of the new rules, ordered by the 1991 Legislature, is to return ripari-

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an areas to conditions found in a 120-year-old forest by requiring landowners to leave more large conifers along streams.

Timber-industry representatives who served on an advisory committee that helped develop them, said the rules would cost them money but they could live with them.

"This is a very carefully crafted package," said Blake Rowe of Longview Fibre Co., who spoke for the Oregon Forest Industries Council. "For the first time, we've quantified desired future conditions that we can actually measure and monitor over time."

The rules are the state's best attempt to answer three questions, Rowe said: How to balance short-term stream protection with achieving long-term ecological goals; how to balance protection of a public resource with the landowner's legitimate need to produce timber; and how to motivate landowners to do more for streams than is strictly required.

Under the rules, landowners who return some large trees to streams to provide structure for fish will get a break on how many conifers they have to leave standing.

"My greatest concern is how to shepherd this package through the rest of the process while holding it together," Rowe said.

Jim McCauley of Associated Oregon Loggers said he was confident that loggers would be able to implement the rules, which require leaving more conifers within streamside zones and setting aside no-cut strips 20 feet wide along all fish-bearing streams.

Environmentalists who served on

the committee and scientists who reviewed the rules qualified their praise, saying that while the rules would strengthen protection of large streams, they're probably inadequate to protect small streams. And several speakers stressed the importance of ongoing stream monitoring to determine whether the new rules do what they're supposed to do.

"We believe (a monitoring requirement) should be in the rule language, because it will institutionalize the need and help you with the (legislative) Emergency Board and the 1995 Legislature" when funding for monitoring is threatened, said David Moskowitz of Oregon Trout.

Paul Ketcham of the Audubon Society of Portland said he would have preferred a goal of returning stream banks to old-growth conditions. He said he was also concerned that the plan incorporated "a morass of silvicultural theory" that hasn't been tested scientifically.

"Any plan is a dynamic process," he said. "Hopefully, this is just one point along a continuum."

Stan Gregory, an Oregon State University aquatic scientist, said the most important thing about the rules was that they provided a "blueprint for creating Oregon's future forests" and a reference point for measuring progress. The model used to create the forest-practices rules also could be used to develop rules regulating agricultural and development practices along streams, he suggested.

Gregory criticized the rule, however, for failing to address protection of broad flood plains. "The Mississippi River showed us how important flood plains are," he said. "Sooner or later, these streams are going to rip."