

Final Report for 2011 Legislative Session - OSWA Lobbyist Roger Beyer

Oregon's first annual session began on January 10th with the political parties having equal numbers of representatives in the House for the first time in state history. It looked like the perfect recipe for gridlock which was confirmed by the fact that legislators worked for three days to introduce about 2000 bills then promptly adjourned until the first of February. The adjournment was preplanned, in that by taking most of January off they were able to continue session until the end of June and not exceed the constitutional time limit of 165 days. Session days in June are seen as more valuable than days in January, which in the past have been dominated by waiting for bills to be introduced and assigned to committees.

During the two week break, the bills were assigned to committees by the presiding officers so when they started up again things were ready to move. In the Senate, the process worked as usual, but in the evenly divided House, committees soon slowed to a crawl as committee chairs were trying to figure out what it actually took to come to agreement and work cooperatively. Some committee co-chairs never did work together and consequently not much happened in those meetings.

OSWA's government advisory committee (GAC) met last fall and developed a priority list of issues to work toward. Top on the list was to secure adequate funding for the OSU extension program, ODF fire budget and the ODF private forestland program. All were accomplished, in addition to passing a bill which simplifies and lowers inheritance taxes for small woodland owners. Items from the list which weren't accomplished, such as bringing parity between the forest and agriculture land use laws for storage buildings and forest land tax parity for small woodland owners, will be addressed in future sessions.

In the new legislative system, the next session is only 6 months away. The rules adopted by both chambers allow for limited bill introduction by legislators. If all legislators and committees introduce their allotted amount, there will be about 300 bills to be dealt with in 35 days beginning February 1st, 2012. This schedule makes the interim very important for anyone hoping to pass a bill in the short session and controversial bills will be very hard to pass. The GAC will develop a new priority list for February and all OSWA members should contact their legislators prior to the session to educate them about our issues.

Oregonians will be electing 15 Senators and all 60 Representatives next year and this is the best time to get to know the person who will represent you. These policy makers will hold your future in their collective hands and you have the ability to become involved to make sure our elected leaders reflect your personal values and beliefs. Don't let this opportunity slip away without your input. Get out and meet the candidates for office, donate money to their campaigns and educate them about the issues that are important to you and OSWA.

It is also a key time to recruit new members to the association. When I testify on your behalf to a governmental body, I am speaking for all the individual members, and the larger the number, the greater base of influence it represents. Oregon Department of Revenue lists tens of thousands of small woodland owners in their records and each of these is a potential OSWA member. If each county chapter would exceed its membership goal, the limits of what we could accomplish collectively would expand greatly.