



**COLUMBIA COUNTY
SHERIFF'S OFFICE**
Jeffrey M. Dickerson, Sheriff

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Oregon Board of Forestry
Oregon Department of Forestry
Salem Headquarters
2600 State Street
Salem, Oregon 97310

Members of the Board of Forestry:

I come before you today to speak of the important role that timber harvest funds from Northwest State Forest Lands plays in allowing my office to carry out its critical public service mission for the residents of Columbia County.

Our operations cover a wide variety of duties from law enforcement, to the delivery of civil papers, to maintaining and operating the jail, execution of court orders, providing safety and security to the county courthouse, organizing search and rescue operations –often on our forest lands – and preparing for and coordinating responses to many public safety emergencies in our county.

Overseeing such a diverse operation in the current economic climate in our county presents numerous challenges to our ability to fulfill our mission to conserve the peace and keep our county a place where residents and visitors can live, work and recreate. We are like many rural/natural resource counties in our State, grappling with funding shortfalls for key services, and my office is impacted by the cuts counties have had to make to these key services in recent years.

Since taking office in 2009, my Enforcement Division has been cut by roughly 40 percent. I currently only have one patrol deputy assigned to two shifts per day. Early morning hours are not covered at all, except for the response of on-call deputies for urgent response needs. This leaves us generally with just one deputy per shift to handle calls in a 680 square mile area. With each deputy responsible for thousands of calls every year, we have been forced to prioritize the call load and leave many calls for service on the back burner for later follow-up by telephone.

Until last year, our jail was heading toward certain closure when a last minute jail operations levy passed, which allowed us to keep our jail open. Other operations of the sheriff's office cannot use the money dedicated to the jail, and must use general fund money that is still woefully short of the need to staff what should be a 24-hour law enforcement agency.

This shortfall in staff puts stress on overworked staff and creates anger in the public when we don't immediately respond to all their calls for service. They see that they pay taxes but cannot understand that in an economically distressed county, the amount of taxes they do pay collectively isn't enough to meet what is needed to provide more deputies to handle these calls for service.

Columbia County brings in a relatively small amount of property tax revenue (roughly \$6 million this year) for its size and population, due to the loss in revenue from timber lands and the elimination of federal funds to offset those losses.

In this budget environment, every dollar counts and every job that adds to our County's tax base counts. That is why I implore the Board of Forestry, as it considers the future of forest management for the Northwest State Forest Lands, to adopt a plan that ensures appropriate conservation measures along with an active management level that will ensure increased funding into our County and, thereby, an increase in jobs in our communities.

I have had the privilege of serving as Columbia County's Sheriff since 2009. It is my duty to fight for the necessary resources to conserve the peace. I ask the Board of Forestry to assist me in that endeavor by adopting a forest management plan that works for the people of Columbia County and for the people of Oregon.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey M. Dickerson
Sheriff