

# Appeals court blocks BLM timber sale near Ashland

Environmental groups file challenge to lower-court ruling allowing the Sampson Cove sale

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By [Sam Wheeler](#)  
for the Mail Tribune

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has issued an injunction blocking a U.S. Bureau of Land Management timber sale near Ashland that was given the go-ahead by a U.S. District Court judge in May.

Five Oregon-based conservation groups, led by the Soda Mountain Wilderness Council, filed an appeal in the San Francisco court after U.S. District Judge Owen M. Panner dismissed the plaintiffs' case against the BLM's Sampson Cove timber sale in May.

The Court of Appeals granted the injunction in June but has not yet made a ruling on the case.

The 2.6-million-board-feet timber sale is made up of about 30 units scattered mostly between Dead Indian Memorial Road and Highway 66 east of Ashland, an area conservationists say has the potential to expand the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument.

"This is a really special area and we wish that the BLM would be focusing on how to enhance it instead of trying to squeeze every last drop of blood they can out of it," said Dave Willis, chairman of the Soda Mountain Wilderness Council. "The sale is commercially driven and depends on reopening old roads and new road-building, and that is just not appropriate here."

KS Wild, Oregon Wild, the Center for Biological Diversity and Cascadia Wildlands joined the Soda Mountain Wilderness Council last year in filing two separate lawsuits against the BLM to stop the Sampson Cove timber sale and the nearby 3.2-million-board-feet Cottonwood timber sale in the area of Jenny Creek between Highway 66 and Howard Prairie Lake.

The Cottonwood timber sale is awaiting final judgment in Medford's U.S. District Court, and the plaintiffs are prepared to appeal the ruling if it is not in their favor, Willis said.

"Local scientists have recommend that this area be included in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument," Willis said. "We have several concerns ... but we think Cottonwood has serious problems with what it does to Pacific fisher habitat."

For each timber sale, the BLM completed a National Environmental Policy Act analysis and determined that no significant environmental impact would arise from the logging, records show.

Medford BLM officials did not return telephone messages.

Although none of the timber sales can be awarded until the pending lawsuits are settled or decided upon by a federal judge, they have been sold.

Cottonwood was purchased by Murphy Co. of Eugene for about \$173,674; Sampson Cove was purchased by Boise Cascade LLC of Boise for about \$255,000, records show.

In each lawsuit, the conservation groups ask the court to block the timber sales until the BLM carries out more thorough environmental analyses of the units and complies with NEPA and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, which they claim the BLM hasn't complied with.

"It's an area that should be managed for its ecological attributes, but the BLM seems bent on putting timber sales in there," Willis said. "It's not the highest and best use of an area."