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Merkley, Brock Smith Convene Task Force on Sudden Oak Death

The pathogen poses urgent threat to economies and environment in Curry, Coos, Douglas and Josephine Counties

PORTLAND, OR – Oregon’s Senator Jeff Merkley and State Representative David Brock Smith (R-01) today convened an array of stakeholders in the first task force meeting aimed at addressing the spread of Sudden Oak Death, a disease that poses severe economic and environmental threats to counties in Southern Oregon.

“Oregon has a long history of pioneering innovative ways to resolve urgent natural resource issues,” said Merkley, who co-convened the task force with Brock Smith. “I’m proud that in a time of political divisiveness, we in Oregon are coming together to tackle a pressing issue for our southern counties. Sudden Oak Death and EU1 are too great a problem for one agency or one level of government to solve. With the potential for devastating impacts on our local economy and environment, this task force will work collaboratively to look for more and better solutions to fight the pathogens.”

“I am grateful to Senator Merkley for co-convening the Sudden Oak Death Task Force and am very appreciative of his deep understanding of this issue and its potential impact on our region” said State Rep. Brock Smith, who co-convened the task force with the senator.

Sudden Oak Death, caused by a non-native pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum* (*P. ramorum*), is a devastating disease that has killed hundreds of thousands of tanoak trees in Curry County. It was first detected in the county in 2001; about one-third of the county has since been affected. In Oregon, it occurs only in the forests of southwest Curry County, where a containment program is in place to slow the spread. If further measures aren’t taken, it will spread north into Coos County and west into Josephine County in coming years. In California, the disease has killed millions of oaks and tanoaks in the coastal region from Monterey to Humboldt Counties.

Additionally, a European virus, EU1, that affects evergreen trees was recently detected in Oregon.

“The EU1 infestation in Curry County is the only one found in the United States,” said Greg Wolf, County Solutions Director of the Association of Oregon Counties. “The potential negative economic impact is very large if we can’t eradicate it before it spreads.”

To build the task force, Merkley and Brock Smith convened local, state and federal governments, as well as local tribes and industry associations, from the Association of Oregon Counties, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Plant Health, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians, Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon Forest Industry Council, Oregon State University, Curry County, Josephine County, City of Gold Beach, and Oregon Association of Nurseries.

The task force will work to develop a collaboration-based action plan to contain the Sudden Oak Death disease and eradicate the EU1 virus, using the best available science.

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