

State leaders should reject LEED certification: Guest opinion

September 14, 2014

By Sen. Doug Whitsett

The US Green Building Council is a non-profit, non-government tax-exempt organization that claims to promote sustainability in building design, construction and operation. Its "LEED certified" standard – Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design – for construction of sustainable green buildings has become something of a buzzword. However, at long last LEED standards are starting to come under scrutiny. People are coming to understand that the regulations mandating LEED standards in public construction projects represent little more than social engineering. Yet these arbitrary LEED preferences are being enforced in the construction of schools, hotels, offices and government buildings across America.

One of the many problems with LEED standards is that green building marketers, along with complicit bureaucrats, are being allowed to override the knowledge of those who actually know how to manage our forestlands. The result: The Council rejects most of Oregon's forest resources for points in LEED's score-driven system.

Oregon has nearly 30 million acres of forestland. The Forest Stewardship Council recognizes less than one half of 1 percent of that (about 137,000 acres) as sustainable. The LEED standard only recognizes timber "certified" by the Forest Stewardship Council.

Lumber from timber that is not "certified" is almost impossible to use in LEED projects. This arbitrary designation severely limits the Oregon timber eligible for the "credits" that enable a business to participate in a LEED construction project.

It significantly drives up a LEED building's cost.

The American Tree Farm System and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative are alternative sustainability organizations. Each classifies approximately 30 times more Oregon forestland as sustainable compared to the Forest Stewardship Council. Equally sustainable and far more affordable Oregon lumber could be used in "green" building projects if these organizations were treated equally in the LEED scoring. In short, many Oregon companies would