Cascadia Wildlands
we like it wild.

For immediate release
November 14, 2012

Contact:
Josh Laughlin, Cascadia Wildlands, (541) 844-8182
Noah Greenwald, Center for Biological Diversity, (503) 484-7495
Bob Sallinger, Portland Audubon Society, (503) 380-9728
Tanya Sanerib, Crag Law Center, (503) 525-2722

Citing Marbled Murrelet Lawsuit, Oregon Suspends Clearcutting on 914 Acres of Old-growth Forests on the Elliott State Forest
Conservation Organizations Applaud the State but Push for Lasting Protections

SALEM, Ore.— After a lawsuit by conservation groups, the State of Oregon has suspended logging of 914 acres of old-growth forest on the Elliott State Forest that is habitat for the threatened marbled murrelet. Previously, ten timber sales were suspended in response to the lawsuit filed in July by Cascadia Wildlands, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the Audubon Society of Portland. The suit asserts that the state is harming the rare seabird by logging its nesting habitat in violation of the Endangered Species Act.

"The state of Oregon has been playing fast and loose with the law for years in the way it claims to 'protect' the imperiled marbled murrelet," said Francis Eatherington, conservation director of Cascadia Wildlands. "The decision to further defer hundreds of acres of clearcuts is one that we welcome and provides interim relief for the murrelet."

Plaintiffs discovered the logging deferral announcement in an Oregon Department of Forestry memo, dated Sept. 19, 2012, that was just recently posted to the Department's website. The memo suggests that the State will defer 15 additional timber sales until the lawsuit currently pending in U.S. District Court is resolved, and that the State will work to identify other logging projects that are free of the contested issues in the case. Plaintiffs have long advocated the state focus its timber operations on young plantation forests in need of restoration rather than older forests that are critical to the survival of a host of endangered species, including marbled murrelets.

"Logging on state forests cannot be done at the expense of the survival of the marbled murrelet or any other animals that depend on old forests for their survival," said Noah Greenwald, endangered species director with the Center for Biological Diversity. "The last remaining old forests in Oregon are precious and need to be protected not just for the marbled murrelet, but for future generations."

The most recent status review of the murrelet by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found the birds have been declining by about four percent per year and that this decline relates to continued loss of habitat, primarily on state and private lands.

The State of Oregon recently abandoned its decade-long attempt to develop habitat conservation plans (HCPs) for the Elliott, as well as the Clatsop and Tillamook State Forests, that would have given it a federal permit for limited impacts to marbled murrelets in exchange for habitat protection measures designed to enhance the bird's conservation. Rather than improving habitat protections, the state walked away from the HCP process altogether and instead ramped up logging on all three forests. The lawsuit seeks to force the State to halt logging practices that are harmful to murrelets until it develops a plan that will protect murrelets and the mature forests on which the birds and other species depend.

"It is time for the State to return to the table and negotiate a balanced plan for each of the state forests that will provide adequate protection for the murrelet, allow for responsible and sustainable logging, and ensure that the State meets the requirements of the Endangered Species Act," said Bob Sallinger, conservation director for the Audubon Society of Portland.

The conservation organizations are represented by outside counsel Daniel Kruse of Eugene, Tanya Sanerib and Chris Winter of the Crag Law Center, Nick Cady of Cascadia Wildlands, Scott Jerger of Field Jerger LLP, and Susan Jane Brown of the Western Environmental Law Center.

####