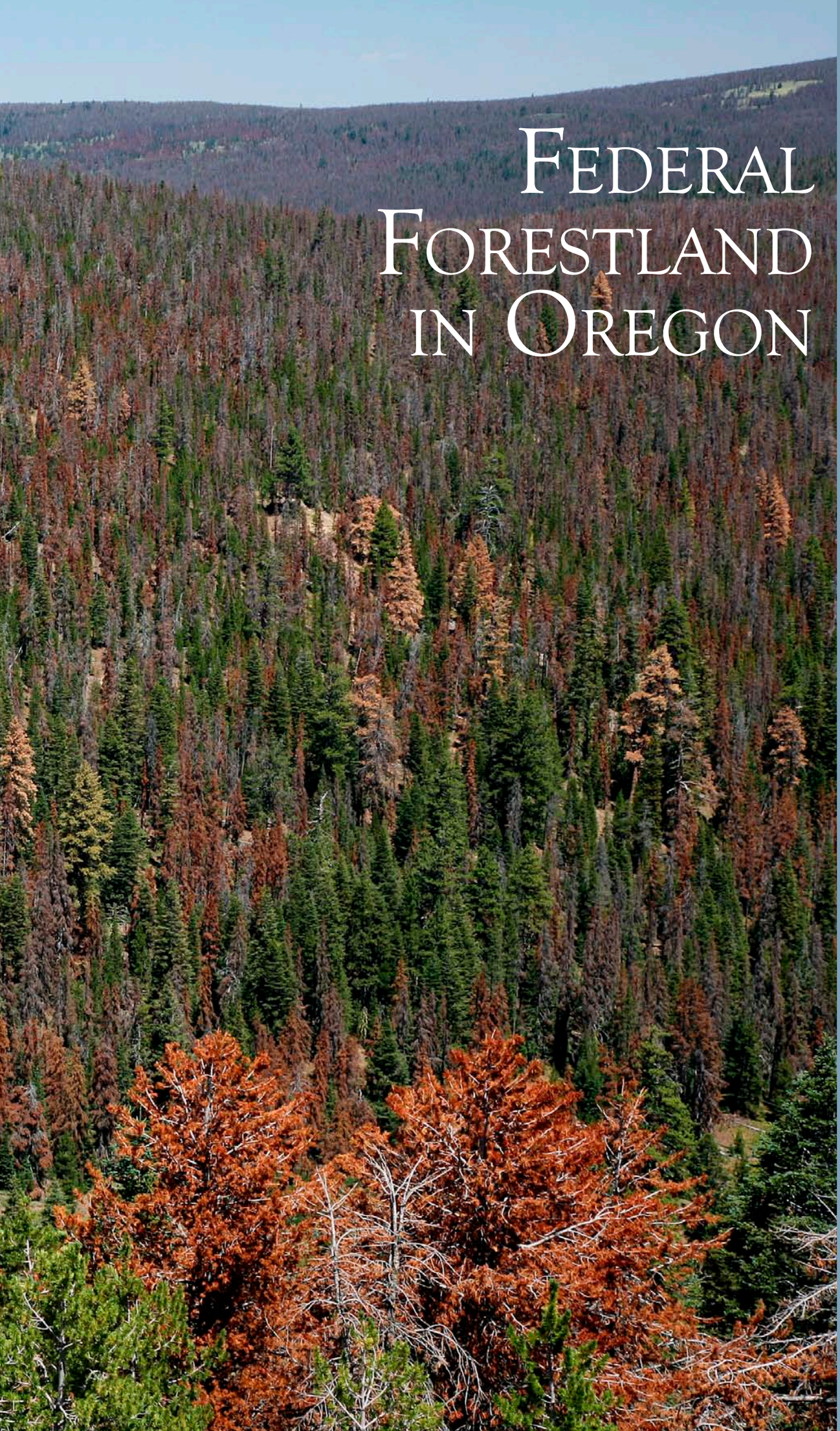


Federal Forestland in Oregon

Coming To Terms With Active Forest Management Of Federal Forestland

A Special Report of the Oregon Forest Resources Institute

On the cover: Bald Butte vista showing large area of beetle kill (Fremont-Winema National Forest). On this page: the McKenzie River Trail (Willamette National Forest).

Federal Forestland In Oregon

Of all Oregon's 63 million acres, nearly half – some 30 million acres – are forested. So it comes as no surprise that Oregon's forest products sector has grown to be an economic force in the state. What does surprise some people, Oregonians included, is that since early in the last century more than 18 million acres of Oregon's forestland have come under federal ownership for the benefit of the people. In other words, some 60 percent of Oregon's forestland – an area nearly the size of South Carolina – is federally owned. In contrast, the U.S. Southeast is mostly privately owned, with less than 10 percent of the land under public ownership.

Large private landowners such as commercial timber companies own about 6 million acres of forestland in Oregon, while thousands of small private owners account for some 4.6 million more. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (14.3 million acres) and the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (3.7 million acres) are by far the largest managers of Oregon's federal forestland.

Despite sharp declines in harvest on federal lands over the past two decades – primarily due to federal management changes intended to protect wildlife species and encourage the growth of older forests – Oregon still holds the title as the leading producer of softwood lumber in the nation, a tribute to the capacity of the land to grow trees. Overall, more of the state is covered by forests today than in 1900, and there is more wood volume growing today than at the beginning of the 20th century. Substantially more wood is growing than is being harvested, and the amount of older forests is expected to increase during the next century.

Oregon's largest forestland owner faces challenges and opportunities.

Today, especially in Oregon's dry, eastside forests, many smaller rural communities are suffering extreme social and economic hardships. Timber-based businesses are closing and the region is losing valuable forestry infrastructure such as mills, logging equipment and know-how. There have been unintended social and economic consequences as well, including loss of receipts from timber sales used to support roads and schools. Historic fire suppression and timber harvests that removed only large, fire-resistant pines, combined with lack of active management to restore forest resilience and health on federal forestland, have put eastside forests in large areas of the state in dangerously overstocked conditions and at high risk of drought, disease or insect-induced mortality, and uncharacteristically intense wildfire.

Unknown is the risk of climate change on these forest conditions, which some have characterized as "out-of-whack" or "out-of-kilter." What might be the effect on wildlife or plant communities? Would more resilient forests be in a better position to mitigate some of these effects?

Wildlife experts and forest scientists have expressed grave concern, and at the policy level there are numerous initiatives underway to alleviate the problem. In addition, creative regional collaborative efforts are attempting to address social, economic and sustainability issues at the local level across the state. ■

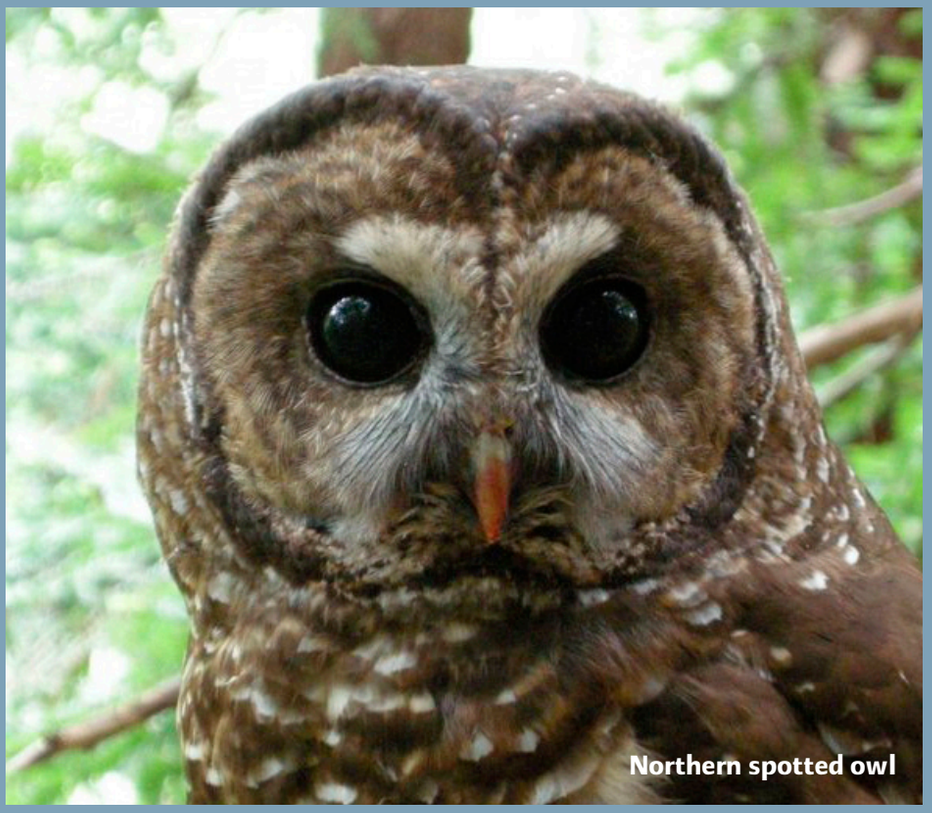
The Impact of Protecting Bird Habitat

Looking back across the past century, perhaps the largest change affecting federal forest ownership occurred in 1990 with the listing of the Northern spotted owl as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act. Following that listing, in 1991, Federal District Judge William Dwyer issued an injunction that shut down the federal timber sale program on most westside forests in Oregon and Washington.

In 1994, the federal government introduced the Northwest Forest Plan as a means of recovery for the owl and other listed species. The plan created large areas of reserves in California, Oregon and Washington, and limited timber harvest to promote older forest characteristics favored by owls and the marbled murrelet. A 1994 record of decision officially adopted the plan, thereby amending existing management plans for 19 national forests and seven BLM districts in those three states. The goals were to take an ecosystem approach to forest management, meet the requirements of existing laws and regulations, provide habitat to support viable populations of native species, and maintain a sustainable supply of timber and other forest products.

In 2005, federal agencies reviewed the first decade of the Northwest Forest Plan and published the results. In response to inventory improvements and lack of harvest, older forest on federal land grew by more than 1 million acres. Water quality improved. Despite protection of owl habitat on federal land, Northern spotted owl populations declined at a greater rate than expected, especially in the northern half of their range. Timber production from federal land dropped by more than 90 percent. Assailed by lawsuits and court injunctions, federal timber harvest achieved 54 percent of plan goals.

BLM lands under the O&C Lands Act of 1937 - land taken back from the Oregon and California Railroad after it broke the terms of a land grant - have a unique mandate. They are to be managed as a permanent source of timber supply, "protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries..." In 2003, the BLM settled a lawsuit over whether management under the Northwest Forest Plan met the original O&C Lands Act mandate and agreed to write new resource management plans for each of its districts. After five years of study and planning, in December 2008, the BLM completed the Western Oregon Plan Revisions, what became known as the WOPR. However, on July 16, 2009, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar withdrew the WOPR because of flaws in the endangered species consultation process. He directed the agency to continue to offer timber sales under provisions of the Northwest Forest Plan pending resolution of consultation issues.



Northern spotted owl

Some eastside federal forests did fall within the Northern spotted owl's range and were in the plan, including portions of the Mount Hood, Deschutes and Winema national forests. Regardless of the owl, public opinion favored preservation of old growth forests. So in similar fashion, albeit by different policy means, national forests outside the owl's range on the east side of the state also adopted plans to increase the number and size of old growth forests there.

The Roots Of Federal Forestland

As the American frontier bumped up against the Pacific in the late 1800s, new voices began challenging the young nation's assumptions about unlimited natural resources. Wood was essential to building and fueling the westward migration, from ships to trains to wagons. The government had deeded more than 1 billion acres for railroads, timber interests and settlement. The time had come to take a breath and assess. In 1896, Gifford Pinchot and John Muir toured the West as part of the National Forest Commission charged with evaluating the nation's forest resources. The next year, they and other conservationists convinced President Grover Cleveland to add 21 million acres of forest reserves to the 13 million acres created in 1891 by President William Henry Harrison. Thus the stage was set for Teddy Roosevelt and the transformational Conservation movement.

Under Roosevelt's presidency (1901-09), the concept of federal forestland ownership evolved and grew dramatically, championed by his friend and adviser Pinchot. Both men shared a love of nature, wilderness and the West. Both saw the National Forest System as a means of preserving America's natural bounty for the permanent good of all people. "You will see to it that the water, wood and forage of the reserves are conserved and wisely used for the benefit of the homebuilder first of all, upon whom depends the best permanent use of lands and resources alike," wrote Agriculture Secretary James Wilson Feb. 1, 1905, in his charge to Pinchot as the first chief of the Forest Service.

Pinchot was a professional forester, among the nation's first. He received his forestry education in Europe because the first schools of forestry here did not open until 1898, initially at Cornell and Biltmore in North Carolina, followed in 1900 – thanks in part to a gift from the Pinchot family – at Yale. (Oregon State University began its forestry program in 1906.) With a cadre of young foresters – fresh graduates of the new forestry schools – Pinchot and Roosevelt forever changed the face of American forestry and forests.

The idea of federal forestland began in the United States more than a century ago.

Roosevelt established the Forest Service in 1905 with initial reserves of 60 million acres. In two years, he tripled the acreage of federal reserves to 180 million. By the time he left office, he had reserved some 230 million acres of public domain lands and waters for conservation purposes, including national forests, parks, monuments and wildlife refuges. As New York Times columnist Timothy Egan noted in his 2009 book, *The Big Burn,* Roosevelt created, during his two terms, an area of national forests, parks and wildlife refuges some 50 percent larger than Texas.

Oregon's federal forestland today comprises 18.2 million acres of Oregon's 30.4 million forested acres. About 14.3 million acres are in the state's national forests, managed by the Forest Service, including congressionally designated Wilderness areas and other areas administratively withdrawn from road or other resource de-

Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator
Oregon

"The creation of the National Forest System is one of the nation's greatest legacies – but one that requires renewed commitment and care. We know there is a way to manage our forests sustainably and, in so doing, yield countless benefits back to the people of Oregon and the nation. But to succeed in today's political and judicial environment, we must learn to seek and claim more common ground, remain grounded in scientific principles and devote ourselves to not perpetuating the impasse of the past several decades."

velopments – from the Wallowa-Whitman to the Rogue River-Siskiyou, from the Malheur to the Siuslaw. Most of these forests were established between 1893 and 1933, many during the Roosevelt-Pinchot era of 1905-09.

Lands under the jurisdiction of the BLM in Oregon include public domain, revested O&C Railroad grant lands, reconveyed Coos Bay Wagon Road grant lands, Land Utilization Project Lands, and certain other categories. While the total amount of BLM land exceeds 15 million acres, just 3.7 million acres are categorized as forestland in the five-year Forest Inventory and Analysis Report published by the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station. The remainder is considered rangeland and is primarily managed for livestock grazing under a system of permits and leases. The remainder of federal forestland in Oregon, about 200,000 acres, consists of national parks, wildlife refuges and monuments.

The Cost Of Federal Forest Policy

Oregon's rural counties and neighboring federal forests historically have enjoyed a close relationship. The forests supplied jobs, forest products, tax revenue and outdoor recreation. Local citizens cared for and protected the resource. In lieu of property taxes, the government provided Payments in Lieu of Taxes, or PILT. The departments of Interior and Agriculture made annual payments to communities to help fund essential services such as fire and police protection, road construction and education.

In addition, counties earned 25 percent of the receipts from sales of federal timber, the remainder going to the U.S. Treasury. For the same purpose for O&C lands administered by the BLM, counties earned 50 percent of timber receipts.

However, with the advent of the Northwest Forest Plan and the near stoppage of timber harvest on federal lands, counties were hit with a double whammy of fewer jobs and less tax revenue. Since 1991, federal taxpayers have provided something of a safety net for these once self-sufficient communities, but that safety net is now frayed.

In October 2008, Congress authorized full funding for the PILT program from 2008 through 2012. In addition, it reauthorized the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act through 2011. Funds under the act decline by 10 percent annually through 2011 and end in 2012.

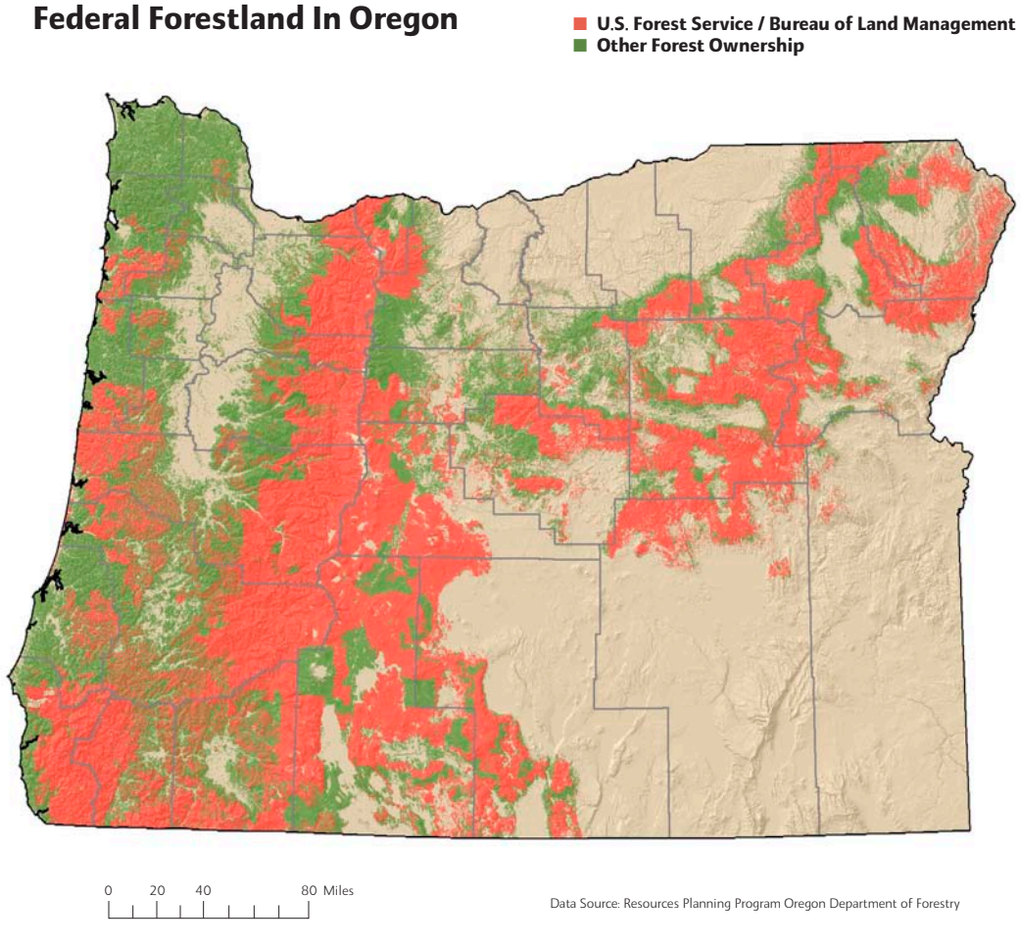
"For decades, towns throughout Oregon such as Burns, John Day, Oakridge and Grants Pass had hundreds, even thousands, of sustainable forest sector jobs. These were prosperous, productive communities that exported valuable finished lumber products to the world," said Rex Storm, forest policy manager for the Association of Oregon Loggers. "Today, they have been relegated by broken federal forest estate policies to beg for government entitlement and welfare, while federal timber languishes unharvested – burning, dying and rotting."

Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot met in 1899 when Roosevelt was governor of New York. When he assumed the presidency two years later, following William McKinley's assassination, Roosevelt's vision included expansion of federal lands for the benefit of the people. Pinchot was a necessary part of that plan. "We dream the same dreams," Roosevelt wrote Pinchot. Together they more than tripled federal lands during Roosevelt's administration.

Valuable Ecosystem Services

Oregon's forestlands, both public and private, provide a range of benefits called ecosystem services. Among the most important is water quality. A tremendous amount of the state's water supply originates in forested watersheds. Whether from underground springs or precipitation that filters through forest soils, the quality is generally

Federal Forestland In Oregon



high. Of Oregon's total runoff each year, close to half is estimated to come from National Forest System land.

Forests provide diverse and abundant habitats to the state's hundreds of native fish and wildlife species. Salmon, of course, are dependent on forest streams. Their condition directly affects the fish's ability to spawn and provide habitat for young fry. Many bird species, the Northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet among them, depend on various forest habitats, not to mention deer, elk and other mammals.

More recently, other values have come to be associated with forests. With increased concern about global warming, we have learned that Oregon forests are a major positive influence on potential climate change because of their ability to absorb and store carbon. Also, biomass from forests in the form of brush and small-diameter trees – the result of thinning and forest health restoration projects – has the potential to provide fuel for supplying heat and generating electricity. Beyond biomass, scientists are exploring methods of creating new products from wood cellulose. ■

Federal Forestland Ownership

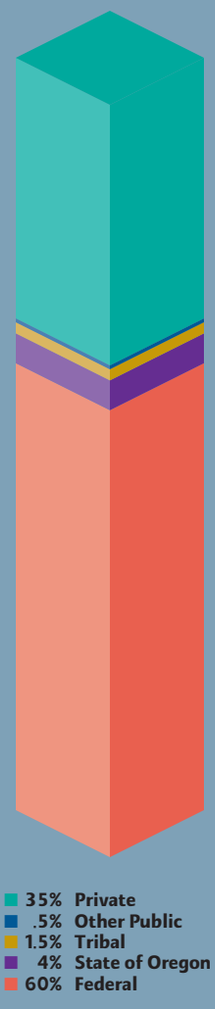
National Forests	Acres
Deschutes National Forest	1,854,000
Fremont National Forest	1,714,000
Klamath National Forest*	27,000
Malheur National Forest	1,542,000
Mount Hood National Forest	1,118,000
Ochoco National Forest	979,000
Rogue River National Forest*	628,000
Siskiyou National Forest*	1,124,000
Siuslaw National Forest	836,000
Umatilla National Forest*	1,194,000
Umpqua National Forest	1,027,000
Wallowa National Forest*	1,071,000
Whitman National Forest	1,317,000
Willamette National Forest	1,791,000
Winema National Forest	1,097,000

*Unit is in two or more states

OREGON TOTALS	
USFS national forests	12,133,000
USFS reserved lands	2,139,000
USFS national grassland	11,000
National Park Service	159,000
Bureau of Land Management	3,760,000
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	16,000
Other Federal	27,000
TOTAL FEDERAL	**18,245,000**

Source: "Oregon's Forest Resources, 2001-2005," U.S. Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, Ore.

Oregon Forestland By Owner



A Paradise – But Not Without Its Problems

Pinchot had an ambivalent relationship with wildfire. At heart he understood that it was a natural part of the forest ecosystem. But he also knew that eradicating fire was a popular sentiment and would be a powerful mission for his new Forest Service. He was confident that the new science of forestry could develop a way to manage fire. The Big Burn of 1910 that swept through parts of northeastern Washington, northern Idaho and western Montana burned through 10 national forests and killed 87 people. It became a defining moment, convincing the public and legislators that the Forest Service should dedicate itself to eradicating every fire. Many forest scientists today question that policy.

Fire in the forest is not the only problem facing federal forestland in Oregon today, but it is certainly a central one. It is directly related to a century-long Forest Service policy of fire suppression. To understand the state of federal forestland in Oregon today requires a capsule history of the last century of forestry here, particularly the last two decades.

Roosevelt and Pinchot set about their task of creating the National Forest System against a backdrop of rapid westward expansion — the age of Manifest Destiny in the latter part of the 19th century. It was the age of land barons, empire builders who are now household names, such as Rockefeller, Morgan, Astor, Whitman, Harriman, Carnegie and Weyerhaeuser. Creating the National Forest System for the benefit of the people was a means of preserving America's natural bounty. Embedded in that concept from the beginning was using the young science of forest management to ensure sustainable timber production, sustainable forage for livestock grazing and water quality for a nation.

In Oregon, particularly west of the Cascades, trees grow like nowhere else in America, and it was not long before timber became king – far and away the mainstay of the state's economy. Throughout Oregon, towns sprung up whose livelihoods were based solely on supplying the nation's growing population and economy with forest products. Across the country and around the world, Oregon wood products helped fuel housing construction and other development. Until the post World War II period, most of that timber came from private forest lands. After the war and until 1993, about half of that wood came from Oregon's federal lands, made available by the Forest Service and BLM through timber sale contracts that were part of sustained yield management plans authorized by Congress and the administration, regardless of which party was in power.

Oregon's Wet and Dry Forest Types

To best understand Oregon's federal forestlands and the issues that surround them, one should have a sense of its two primary forest regions. To generalize, they are often referred to as westside and eastside, or alternatively, wet side and dry side. West of the Cascade Range, excluding the southwest part of the state east of the Coast Range crest, temperatures are moderate and the rainfall abundant. Here we find the rich, dense forests of Douglas-fir, hemlock, cedar and spruce often associated with Oregon, along with a healthy understory of smaller trees

Biscuit Fire, 2002, Lookout Mountain near Selma in the Siskiyou National Forest

Eastside forest

Westside forest

and shrubs. These forests are often referred to as westside, or wet-side, forests.

East of the Cascades, and in the southern interior, comprising portions of Jackson, Josephine, Klamath, Lake and southern Douglas counties, forests are dramatically different. Summers are hot, winters cold and, most significant, there is considerably less rainfall – on the order of 10 or 15 inches compared to 40 to 140 or more on the wet side. Here the ponderosa and lodgepole pine and other conifers historically were much less densely spaced – open landscapes often described as more park like – with very little understory, mostly grasses and low shrubs.

Federal forests in eastern Oregon face fuels buildup, risk of catastrophic fire.

According to a report prepared for the Oregon Forest Resources Institute by E.D. Hovee & Company LLC in 2005, there is substantial difference in the productivity of westside versus eastside forests. Hovee stated that gross annual growth is more than 8 billion board feet on the west side, about 3.5 times greater than the 2.3 bbf of gross annual growth on the east side. Tree mortality is also greater on the east side.

For the general reader, the important distinction here has to do with the way fire acts in wet and dry forest landscapes. On the wet side with all its moisture, relatively little lightning and more moderate temperatures, fire is an irregular visitor, sometimes occurring as infrequently as every few hundred years. When there is fire, however, it is often large and intense – sometimes referred to as stand-replacing – like the extensive Tillamook Burn of the mid-20th century.

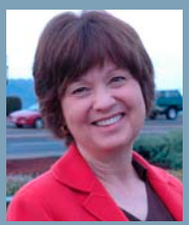
The dry side historically has had a markedly different fire regime. Hotter and drier, with frequent lightning strikes, it experienced recurrent fires, sometimes as often as every three to five years. However, fires were seldom large or stand-replacing, because the understory where they traditionally started was mostly grasses and low vegetation. Trunks of large ponderosa pines are fire resistant and flames stayed low, seldom reaching into the crowns of the largest trees. The results kept the understory low and mostly free of vegetation so that the precious moisture went to the larger trees and kept them healthy.

Changing Fire Behavior

During the past century, policy decisions changed fire behavior in federal forests. One was the decision made after the Big Burn of 1910 to suppress, or put out, fires as soon as they began – if possible, by 10 a.m. the following day. This action slowly began to lengthen fire cycles in the dry forests of the interior West, and those that occurred were more intense because fuel buildup in the understory was not cleared periodically by fire

A Tale of Two Forest Types

Oregon has two distinct forest types. Due to lower rainfall, the dry, east side of the state (opposite page, top) has widely spaced trees, often pine. The fir, hemlock, cedar and spruce forests of the west side (opposite page, bottom), thanks to abundant rainfall, are much more dense. On the east side, the relative lack of understory was due to frequent (often every three to five years), low-intensity fires that burned understory vegetation but spared the larger trees, whose bark is fire resistant. However, a century of fire suppression (the plane at left dropping fire retardant is part of that effort) has allowed understory vegetation to grow, resulting in much larger and more intense fires. Because natural fire intervals are much longer on the wetter west side, fire suppression has been less of an issue.



Susan Morgan
Douglas County
Commissioner
Roseburg

"It's abundantly clear that management decisions on federal lands affect our small towns. When we had a robust timber harvesting program, our communities were much more vibrant. Now there are a lot of vacant store fronts. Almost all the businesses that provided goods and services to the wood products industry are gone. The families that worked the timber jobs and ran the small businesses are gone. Our schools, public safety and other county services have been in decline for some time now. The fiscal and social realities are truly frightening."

as it had been by lightning and indigenous peoples. Fires that burned as frequently as every few years were quickly extinguished and, as numerous fire cycles were missed, understory vegetation built up.

Other factors affecting fire risk cropped up in the early 1990s. Faced with growing public concern about limited natural resources, and especially wildlife dependent on old-growth habitat, the federal government placed large, so-called reserve areas off limits to logging and management activity. The Northwest Forest Plan set aside millions of acres of western forests in California, Oregon and Washington. As well, older forests became a goal for dry-side forests. Toward that end, a range of measures were adopted and lawsuits ensued that effectively limited management activity in the national forests of the Columbia Basin – a huge region encompassing most of Oregon, Washington and Idaho, parts of Montana, Utah and Wyoming – as well as the southeastern portion of British Columbia (though not affected by U.S. policy).

The Nature Conservancy estimates that approximately 9.5 million acres of Oregon's eastside forests are either moderately or severely departed from healthy ecological condition, largely due to fire suppression and the irruption of small-diameter trees. The risk now is that, when fire does occur in dry-side forest stands in these conditions, what would have been a non-lethal ground fire will grow rapidly because of the understory fuel buildup. More problematic, understory trees can act as ladder fuels, enabling fire to climb into the crowns of the largest trees, killing them and creating the risk of a rapidly spreading and devastating "crown fire," in which fire literally leaps from tree top to tree top.

To compound the problem, overstocking in the understory means that more trees and vegetation are competing for already scarce moisture and nutrients. Understory vegetation is taking water that once went to larger trees, stressing them and making them susceptible to insect infestation and disease.

The Cost Of Fire Suppression

The current interagency policy of fire suppression also comes at an enormous financial cost. Throughout the past two decades wildfires have increased in size, severity and destructiveness, and so have budgets to fight them. Regional Forester Mary Wagner, head of the Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Region 6, says that a 10-year rolling average of fire suppression costs has to be built into its budget. Fire suppression used to be about 13 percent of the budget nationally, but is now approaching 50 percent. Nationwide, the Forest Service spent about $1.6 billion in 2009, which included both fire suppression and fire preparedness costs.

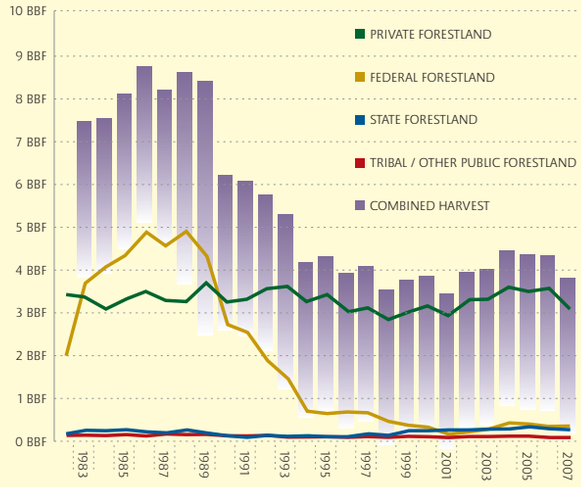
The 2010 Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement Act (or FLAME, as it is called) will help with fire suppression costs. It will make funds available to cover the costs of large or complex wildfire events, and it will serve as a reserve when amounts provided for wildfire suppression in the regular Wildland Fire Management appropriation accounts are exhausted.

But beyond dollars, unanticipated conflicts arise from human attempts to control nature or impose fixed boundaries. Differing management objectives sometimes become quite clear at property lines, for example, where a passively managed federal forest with a dense, unthinned understory abuts an actively managed private

Rick Kriege (center) discusses operations with employees at a site on Ochoco Lumber land near Prineville. Although such work used to be its mainstay, Kriege Logging has not cut any timber for Ochoco Lumber on federal land in over six years. Down to four employees at one point, Kriege said, "We're just holding on by our fingernails, hoping things will get better. I have been learning more about stewardship contracts and the application process, so that may have some potential. Today you have to hustle and turn over a lot of rocks to find work"

Drop in Federal Harvest

Since 1990, timber harvest on federal land in Oregon has dropped by more than 90 percent, while harvest from private lands remained at a stable, sustainable level. The seven to nine billion annual board foot average harvest that had existed since World War II has slid over the past two decades to under four million board feet. Only about 10 percent of that comes from federal land.



Data Source: Oregon Department of Forestry

stand in which the understory has been thinned. Fire recognizes no boundaries. With changing fire conditions and reduced federal agency funding for management activities, such as road maintenance and thinning, there is increased risk of fire spreading from federally managed lands to adjacent private lands.

Wade Mosby, senior vice president of The Collins Companies, cites several instances in southern Oregon and northern California where his company lost, in one case 3,000 acres and 6,000 acres in another, to fires that got out of control on federal land and spread to Collins' stands.

In another example, the 2009 Williams Creek Fire near Roseburg started in a national forest. To contain the wildfire, firefighters set a backfire that destroyed 500 acres of 20-year-old trees on private land. Subsequently, a group of landowners sought a meeting with federal agency representatives to develop solutions to the problem of fires from federal forests spreading to adjacent lands. Out of that meeting grew the Interagency-Landowner Standing Committee that will seek ways to minimize future resource losses.

Another related issue is a societal trend to build primary residences or second homes at the forest edge, often abutting national forests or other federal land. Since fire fighting's primary mission is to save lives, these homes demand attention, sometimes at the expense of nearby forests. Homes can be insured and rebuilt, but not forests – at least not quickly. Further, homeowners don't always accept the inherent risk of forest living by making their homes fire safe and defendable by firefighters. This interface issue affects firefighting strategy and accounts for an increasing amount of firefighting costs.

The Human Dimension

Beyond the ecological considerations, forest management objectives have social and economic dimensions. About three-quarters of all forestland east of the Cascades is in federal forests. Since the early 1990s, timber production from eastside federal forests has fallen 92 percent. As a result, a negative, cascading economic effect has occurred on the state's east side. Mills have been unable to get timber to process. Forest operators have had no timber contracts on federal land. An entire economic and social infrastructure has been significantly and dramatically reduced.

John Shelk, head of Ochoco Lumber Company in Prineville, said he was forced to close his Prineville mill for lack of timber from federal forests. In his region, 80 to 90 percent of the merchantable timber comes from federal land. "At one point, the Ochoco National Forest was selling 120 million board feet per year, and that's dropped to as low as 5 million board feet recently. There was a time when there were five sawmills in town employing 1,000 people, and now the mills and the people are all gone." According to data assembled in 2008 by Paul Ehinger and Associates, 50 eastside Oregon mills have closed since 1980, leaving only 15 mills east of the Cascades.

To be sure, other issues have impacted the forest sector economy as well, including international competition, the recession and mechanization. However, without raw material, mills must either cut back or close, and their disappearance has unforeseen consequences. For years, John and Lynne Breese have sustainably managed their small forestland acreage outside Prineville. At one time, they hauled their logs a few short miles to the Ochoco mill. Since it closed, they are forced to haul 100 miles, either east to a mill in John Day or south to Gilchrist. What used to take an hour to truck logs to the mill now takes most of a day, not to mention fuel and vehicle maintenance costs. Once home to a thriving timber economy, Harney County today suffers from an unemployment rate of 19.5 percent – nearly one of every five people. Stories such as these repeat themselves throughout the rural communities of the state. ■

Steve Grasty
Harney County Judge
Burns

"When I came here in 1971, Burns and Hines were thriving communities. At the time, Edward Hines Lumber alone had over 1,000 employees. Louisiana Pacific left in 2007, and today we have nothing left in capacity to handle even one ounce of fiber. We've tried all sorts of ideas to create jobs and keep our forest products industry viable, but federal policy keeps stopping us. The federal government spends millions of dollars on forest restoration; however, it's been estimated that if they would include a very small number of commercially valuable trees to thinning projects, it would be enough to pay for restoration and maintaining forest health. Even one tree in the 14- to 21-inch class could offset the cost for an acre of thinning."

The Potential Of Forest Management

Forest fire has been the subject of intensive study by forest scientists, fire ecologists, wildlife biologists and others. The Forest Service's interest in the subject is decades old. Scientists at the oldest and biggest fire lab – the Missoula Fire Sciences Laboratory – examine the behavior, chemistry and effects of fire. At the Pacific Wildland Fire Sciences Lab in Seattle, established in 2003, scientists study fuels, fire behavior and air quality issues. There are tools in the forest science tool box for addressing some of the problems of the dry, fire-prone forests of the interior West. Combined with what is now a sophisticated knowledge of fire behavior and migration patterns, scientists feel there may be a new way to manage forests. And therein lies the key. To protect natural resource values, overstocked fire-prone forests must be managed to reduce fuels.

Most scientists agree that strategies to date for creating older forests in the dry forests of the interior West have not been effective. Leaving already out-of-kilter areas with no management will, without question, leave understories crowded and overstocked, and lead to uncharacteristically intense wildfire. The result will be deteriorated habitat until large trees return hundreds of years in the future, that is, if repeated fires do not take them out as young trees.

Recent polling data indicates that the public understands enough of the problem to know that they want to see it addressed. And, in fact, the Forest Service has conducted some major restoration efforts indicating that there are signs of success. Regional Forester Wagner said the Forest Service has observed changed fire behavior due to forest restoration and fuel reduction measures.

In some areas, the Forest Service is seeing fire do remarkable things, managing landscapes as foresters would like, she said. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell has said he hopes to increase the resiliency of federal forests through projects such as thinning out young trees and underbrush to change fire behavior.

Alternative Management Approaches

Two scientists at the Forest Service's Forest Sciences Lab in Wenatchee, Wash., have been working on the problem since the early 1990s and see the potential for a new strategy. John Lehmkuhl, a wildlife biologist, and Paul Hessburg, a research ecologist, championed a strategy that would replace the reserve concept and its notion of making defined forest stands off limits to management with a new, whole-landscape approach.

Protecting the fire-prone forests of the interior West will require active management.

Hessburg sees reserve strategies as counter to nature's dynamics and contrary to the sort of problem-solving approach he and Lehmkuhl feel is necessary. "Setting up large areas as hands off to management and saying, 'This is going to work for 50 years in the face of wildfires and ongoing insect outbreaks' – how do you make that work?" Hessburg asked. "The processes that can destroy the reserves are contagious and migratory in

nature. Habitat conditions that are vulnerable to these disturbances are largely contiguous under current conditions," he concluded.

Hessburg and Lehmkuhl believe one solution may include targeted restoration treatment – isolating or disconnecting stands on the landscape in terms of fire and insect migration in order to break their patterns of movement. The source of their theory came from studying historical forest structure, which they describe as a mosaic across the inland Northwest, and the behavior patterns of insects and wildfire.

Professional Foresters Advocate Active Management

"The Oregon Society of American Foresters supports active forest management prescribed by professional foresters to achieve and maintain healthy forests, consistent with land management objectives. To accomplish this, a wide range of proven forest management strategies and tools must be available to forestry professionals... Many federal forests in Oregon now have an especially acute and long-term need for active management that will require diverse strategies and tools, including road access and administrative flexibility to effectively expand and maintain such management. Broad benefits, from wildlife to recreation to forest products, can be achieved and sustained through active management on public and private forestlands."

– Oregon Society of American Foresters Position Paper

Norman Johnson, professor of forest resources at the Oregon State University College of Forestry, and Jerry Franklin, professor of ecosystem science for the University of Washington School of Forest Resources, arrived at a similar solution. Their analysis, "Restoration of Federal Forests in the Pacific Northwest: Strategies and Management Implications," released in August 2009, is based on what they call ecological forestry – in which forest management activities typically are planned at the landscape and stand scales. ■

Forest Management Restoration At Work

This series of pictures shows forest management at work. The site is near Suttle Lake in the Deschutes National Forest not far from Sisters. The top picture shows the site before any treatment, very fire-prone with a dense, overstocked understory. A wildfire at this point would likely decimate the entire stand. The second picture shows the same site after crews went in and performed thinning operations, removing some trees and much of the understory. Next (third picture) shows the result of some controlled prescriptive burning to further thin the stand and reduce the risk of a stand-replacing fire. Somewhat later there was a wildfire, but it did not kill the entire stand. The fourth photo shows the same site five years later. This type of stand is closer to historic norms. Naturally-occurring wildfire would thin smaller, low-lying vegetation but be much less likely to kill the entire stand.

The Complex Politics of Restoration

At state and national levels, policymakers recognize that forest restoration and management has the potential to solve forest health and fire issues while alleviating the social and economic displacement that has taken place since the early 1990s. The solutions are thorny, in part because so much of Oregon's forestland is under federal management, and the state lacks authority to craft cohesive policies to address issues that cross state and federal property lines. In some respects, it's a classic example of the tensions of states' rights versus federalism that has been part of the national debate since the nation's founding. As Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski put it, "I want to build a strong federal-state partnership, but I consider this an issue that cries out for states' rights."

In any discussion of the environmental, social and economic goals that help define sustainability in Oregon's forests, one might think of federal forestland – 60 percent of all the state's forested acres – as the elephant in the room.

Policymakers see the forest's value and work to address roadblocks to action.

Oregon State Forester Marvin Brown said, "Federal land is so pervasive here that you can't deal with forests without dealing with federal forestland and the agencies that manage them. Inevitably, they have a huge impact, not just on the state of our forests and issues such as fire protection, but also on the economic viability of Oregon's communities."

Collaborative Process Takes Shape

In the fall of 2004, Kulongoski called on the Oregon Board of Forestry to, "Create a unified vision of how federal lands should contribute to the sustainability of our state forests." The governor, recognizing the root of the problem and seeing the need for common goals in managing all of the state's forest resources, felt the ODF – a national leader in bringing the principles of sustainability to bear on resource-based economies – should take the initiative in convening discussions among the diverse stakeholder groups.

The following year the Legislature passed Senate Bill 1072, encouraging the Board of Forestry to create a forum for interagency discussion geared toward collaboration on achieving a common vision for Oregon's forestlands. To realize these goals, the board created the Federal Forestlands Advisory Committee and charged it with crafting a document that articulates the state's vision of a sustainable forest land base and ways federal forest management can contribute to that goal.

Wide representation was a key objective, said Kevin Birch of ODF, who served as staff liaison to the committee. Participating in the process were representatives from the Oregon Board of Forestry, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Environmental Quality Commission. Federal agencies included the Forest Service and the BLM. There were also county commissioners, industry members and representatives from the environmental community, labor and tribes as part of the group.

Process Leads to New Ideas

The FFAC met regularly from its establishment in 2006 to the end of 2008, listening to testimony from a diverse group of people who included forest scientists, climate researchers, fire ecologists, environmentalists, fisheries scientists, forest hydrologists, forest operators, mill operators, and representatives of community and conservation collaboratives.

What emerged was a better understanding of the issues that need to be addressed, among them: forest health and resiliency, reduced timber harvests, establishment of older forests on federal lands, a general lack of trust and repeated court challenges, changing public values, a desire to achieve landscape-scale objectives, and inadequate and unstable funding.

The report listed a set of local and state recommendations aimed at addressing these problems and improving forest ecosystem health:

- The governor and the Legislature should create a federal forestland liaison program to support federal agency and local community efforts to improve forest health on federal forestlands.
- The governor and the Legislature should assist federal agencies in providing administrative, financial and technical resources to local governments and collaborative partnerships to build trust and help identify scientifically informed and socially acceptable forest management projects to improve forest health.
- Local collaborative groups, in cooperation with the federal agencies, should first assess forest health conditions and then plan projects at the landscape scale to address high priority needs.
- Collaborative groups should define and delineate the amount of older forests that should be conserved and re-established to maintain ecological sustainability and resiliency as part of their landscape assessment.
- Leaders from state and federal agencies, county and tribal governments, and private forestland owners should meet on a regular basis to discuss and coordinate all the policies that affect forest health issues.

FFAC Calls For National Action

It was clear to the FFAC that local groups and the state of Oregon cannot address these fundamental issues alone. National action at the congressional level is an absolute necessity, according to State Forester Brown. There are, at present, uncoordinated forest policies, a potpourri of often-conflicting goals and mandates, and generally inadequate funding for federal agencies necessary to carry out management and restoration measures. There is a need for a comprehensive federal policy that promotes sustainable forests across all lands, Brown said, with federal lands being an integral part of that policy and an integral part of achieving sustainable forests nationwide. This effort should be on par with the federal farm and energy bills, he said.

To make federal forest restoration and resiliency top priorities, the FFAC report calls for national legislation that recognizes new scientific knowledge and stewardship goals, removes legal and pro-

Mary Wagner
Regional Forester
U.S. Forest Service
Portland

"The notion that all of us need to work together toward the same end is a large part of the Forest Service's vision. We see great value in reinstilling the connection of the land to the people, and many voices around the table make a big difference to us. I think one of the important things coming out of the FFAC's work is a recognition of the importance of partnerships with communities. When we meet communities halfway, they have a positive influence on where we're going and how we get there."

The Oregon Department of Forestry's Marvin Brown (right), state forester, and Kevin Birch, staff liaison to the Federal Forestlands Advisory Committee. While seeing much value derived from the group's deliberations, Brown feels on balance that there needs to be focus on forestry issues nationally at the congressional level if progress is to be made on the fundamental issues facing Oregon and other states.

Always an organization oriented toward serving the public, the Forest Service sees the importance of working and collaborating with local citizens and community-based groups to address forest restoration and other issues facing federal forestland. As the Forest Service and BLM look to treatments designed to reduce fuels and other restoration measures, these organizations recognize the importance of local knowledge in making informed decisions.

cedural barriers to implementing treatments, and funds local restoration efforts. It also urges increased funding for a variety of forest management activities. Increasing appropriations, capturing cost efficiencies, separating firefighting costs from agency budgets, and stretching dollars through state and local partnerships could all help boost budgets to improve forest ecosystem health.

Though the FFAC's recommendations were approved by the Board of Forestry and accepted by the governor's office, budget constraints caused by Oregon's severely depressed economy resulted in no new funding for implementation. A working group comprising state and federal agencies, as well as business interests, tribes and many non-governmental organizations, formed in early 2009 to keep the FFAC recommendations alive and act as an information-sharing group.

Brought together by Oregon Solutions, a program of the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University, nearly a dozen organizations signed a Declaration of Cooperation aimed at implementing the FFAC recommendations. Oregon Solutions promotes community governance based on the principles of collaboration, integration and sustainability.

Nationally, policymakers recognize the need for action. In December 2003, following two years of devastating wildfire in the West, Congress passed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. According to government sources, HFRA contains a variety of provisions to speed up hazardous-fuel reduction and forest-restoration projects on specific types of federal land that are at risk of wildland fire and/or of insect and disease epidemics. HFRA passed Congress with large bipartisan majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. In it, Congress affirmed the need to reduce the risk of wildland fire to communities, municipal water supplies, forests, rangelands and other important landscape components.

On lands meeting specific criteria, HFRA provides streamlined approaches to satisfy National Environmental Policy Act requirements for collaboratively selected fuels treatment projects. The provisions of HFRA can be applied nationally to as many as 20 million acres of land managed by the Forest Service and the BLM. While treating that acreage would have an impact, the scale of the problem is much, much larger. Federal land managers estimate that approximately 190 million acres nationwide are at high risk of catastrophic wildfire and large-scale insect and disease outbreaks due to unhealthy forest conditions.

In December 2009, a bipartisan group of U.S. House members, including Healthy Forests Caucus co-chairs and Oregon Reps. Greg Walden and Kurt Schrader, introduced legislation to promote healthier federal forests in rural America. Among the points of the bill, The Healthy Forests Restoration Amendments Act of 2009, or HFRA II, is a clause that would remove the 20-million-acre limitation in the original HFRA.

Also in late 2009, a group of Oregon timber executives and representatives of environmental organizations stood alongside Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden in Washington, D.C., as he introduced a bill, the Oregon Eastside Forests Restoration, Old Growth Protection and Jobs Act of 2009. The legislation's goal is to promote active management and thinning projects on the 8.3 million acres of federal forestland in eastern Oregon while at the same time protecting watersheds and larger diameter trees. Long-time conservationist and old growth advocate Andy Kerr, of The Larch Company, said, "If the legislation becomes law, it will mean the end of the timber wars in eastern Oregon."

Collaboratives & Community-Based Forestry

Across Oregon – and for that matter, in many of the remote regions and towns across the West and the country – people are coming together in collaborative organizations, seeking creative ways to deal with job losses and economic hard times. In Oregon much of the economic stress to the timber economy has been exacerbated by supplies of wood from federal forests coming to a virtual halt for the better part of two decades. Small communities throughout the state have felt the impact, but particularly those east of the Cascades.

Said Martin Goebel of Sustainable Northwest in Portland, an umbrella organization for those geographically disparate collaboratives and community groups, "These people are motivated by a sense of community and a palpable relationship with the land. It may be economic, recreational or spiritual, but they have a connection to the landscape they live in that those in urban communities don't."

The relevance of these groups to a discussion of federal forestland and related restoration problems is that they have become important to the stewardship contracting of the Forest Service and BLM. As the agencies design treatments and fuels reduction projects, these collaboratives are becoming community partners, bringing local knowledge to bear on the planning, design, implementation and monitoring aspects of the effort.

Sustainable Northwest coordinates the activities and is a core group member of the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, a group of organizations that have joined together to promote balanced, conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the West. ■

Kurt Schrader
U.S. Representative
Oregon 5th District

"With regards to federal and state forest policy, two things need to be addressed: creating jobs and promoting healthy forests. The mentality in Congress that our forests are the problem, instead of the solution, must change. The time has come to lay down obsolete prejudices against our forests products industry and allow them to help us properly maintain our forests.

"This industry is cleaner, smarter, and more environmentally friendly than ever before. Given the opportunity, they can create much-needed jobs in our rural communities. That is why I formed the Healthy Forests Caucus with Congressman Walden during the 111th Congress. This caucus will serve as a forum to educate members of Congress how America's forests can and should be managed to maintain healthy forests, provide jobs, produce biomass, sequester carbon, and supply goods and services to help rebuild our rural economies."

Seeing The Way Forward

Though the condition of dry, overstocked forests is severe, researchers know it is not too late for restorative management. Scientists may disagree to some extent on treatments, but there is certain agreement that we have passed the point where passive management – that is, letting nature take its course – is an option. Polling indicates the public as well wants action taken to address the problem. When it comes to on-the-ground solutions to specific forest problems, one approach showing promise is local collaboration. Professional forest managers and community-based groups can engage local knowledge in crafting treatment approaches. In Oregon, local groups are forming to share ideas and approaches for keeping rural communities viable.

Fire ecologist James Agee, retired professor of forest ecology at the University of Washington, said, "We have come to realize the paradox inherent in our fire suppression efforts. The more intensely we have protected the forest from fire, insects and disease, the worse many of our problems have become."

So if science is telling us how to solve the problem, why are we not doing it? We know enough about fire behavior to make a plan, so why not move forward with the cure? One reason is magnitude. Millions of acres need treatment. The number is staggering. And once treated, forests are always growing and changing so that treatment may be required again in 10 to 20 years. It took a century to create the problem, scientists say, and the solution can't happen overnight. The magnitude has obvious budgetary implications, and there is some question about the ability of our political system to sustain an effort that will take years to show results. Former Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas said that forest managers are in the difficult position of having a 100-year vision, an annual budget and a Congress on a two-year election cycle to approve it. The Forest Service does not have the funds or the manpower.

> In the absence of a "silver bullet" solution, work goes on to address forest-land problems.

The answer, some say, is for the Forest Service to use the funding technique it employed in the past to achieve its management objectives – develop a management plan and authorize timber contracts to fund the necessary restoration work. Simply write a contract to employ local forest operators to perform the silvicultural restoration treatments and let them take enough merchantable timber to pay for the work.

Others contend it is unlikely that the public would allow widespread use of that model any time soon. The forest products industry and the Forest Service must overcome years of distrust by some environmental groups that want to see no profit coming from federal timber. While the Northwest Forest Plan stipulates some treatment and timber harvest, and eastside management plans call for restoration-oriented work, litigation or the threat of it by environmental groups has succeeded in stopping or slowing plans.

The Forest Service and BLM must contend with a host of fed-

eral laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Administrative Procedures Act and the Equal Access to Justice Act. The Forest Service must also comply with the National Forest Management Act while the BLM must comply with the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act. All of this is fertile ground for lawsuits and court action.

Changing Public Attitudes

In recent years there has been growing public recognition of the forest's value beyond a demand for timber. There is increasing awareness of the role forests play and the need for management efforts to treat overstocked forest stands. Conservation groups such as The Nature Conservancy, Sustainable Northwest and Defenders of Wildlife have seen the need for action and now work with the Forest Service to plan operations.

TNC has become more proactive, planning and conducting such treatment on its own managed lands. Its work is helping to inform restoration efforts on public lands, including the introduction of prescribed burning. TNC's Sycan Marsh Preserve in southern Oregon, for example, has conducted numerous thinning and burning operations, and is partnering with the Forest Service as the Oregon site for its Birds and Burns Network – studying the relationship between fire and wildlife response. Other environmental organizations are working directly with the Forest Service in planning treatments, lending invaluable local knowledge and expertise to restoration efforts.

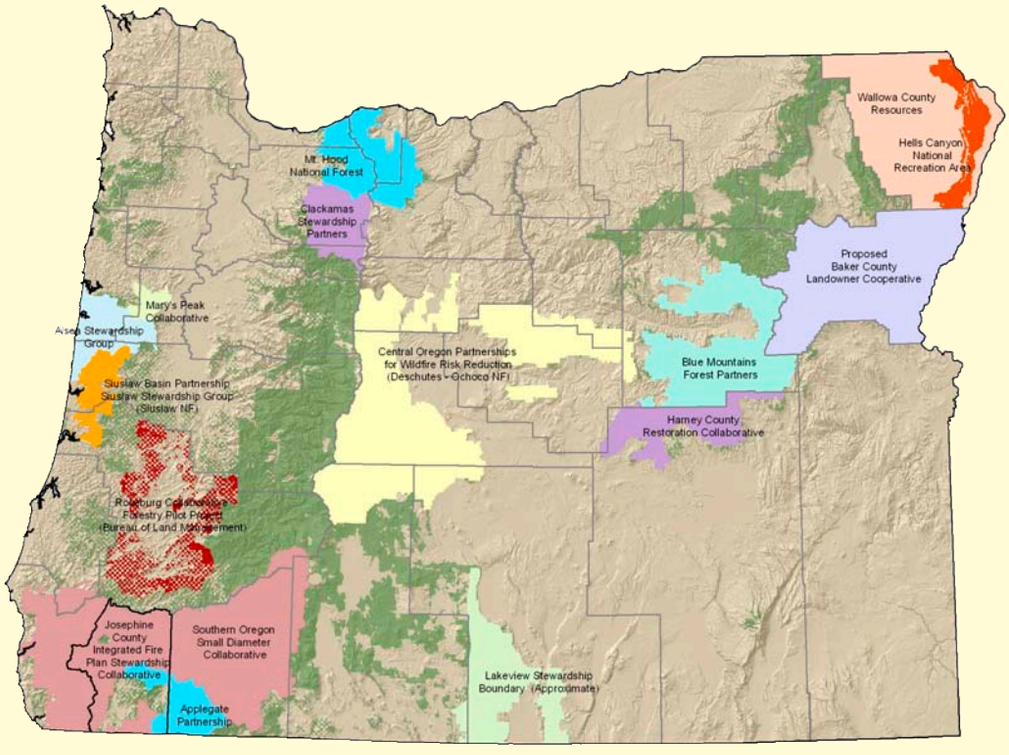
Diane Vosick, forest restoration program manager with TNC, says her position with the organization is focused exclusively on public land. She works directly with federal land agencies. She sees them shifting their own focus to move beyond timber harvest, which has been their expertise, to embrace the broad range of ecosystem services. Cal Joyner, a deputy regional forester for the Forest Service, concurs: "Our focus for forest management is restoration based in both the wetter forests and the fire-prone landscapes. This is in the context of salmon and spotted owl recovery, water supplies and endemic species habitat. Our response has to be socially, ecologically and economically viable."

Sharing Stewardship Responsibilities

Federal agencies today are actively engaged in restoration efforts that are collaborative in nature. They are seeking local and regional input as they design and fund restoration efforts. Area contractors

The Influence of Collaborative Groups

In recent years, community-based groups of concerned citizens have formed to provide support and local knowledge in the management of forests on national forests in their respective regions. They have become an important voice in Forest Service management planning.



■ **Federal Forest Land Outside Collaborative Areas**

Greg Walden
U.S. Representative
Oregon 2nd District

"Perhaps it's how I was brought up on a cherry farm, or owning a small business for over 21 years, but one thing I learned is that you don't solve a problem by ignoring it. Federal forest health has been ignored long enough by government policy for us to take stock of the results: staggering unemployment in rural Oregon, catastrophic wildfire, massive bug kill, and threatened habitat and watersheds.

"Simply put, our federal forests are a national treasure in peril. It's time to act and get our rural communities working and taking care of the forests again. That means giving federal foresters and scientists the proven tools they need to restore the forests' balance with nature, so they can once more be home to quality habitat, healthy trees, and good jobs for Oregonians. This agenda has been a top priority of mine for years, and I will continue to advocate firmly for our forests' and rural communities' needs."

Diane Vosick
The Nature Conservancy
Bend

"Everyone has different needs from the forests now, and it's disorienting. The great thing about forests is that they have the potential to draw diverse stakeholders around a common goal. The Nature Conservancy forestry initiatives focus at several scales: first at the project-level scale — what trees to cut; then with collaborative groups to identify treatments people can broadly agree to; and then at landscape scale to determine where are the large tracts of forestland we think are most important. The Conservancy has been very outspoken in emphasizing the need for a viable forest industry on the east side. We all need qualified wood workers to thin forests to lower stress levels. Healthy forests are everybody's responsibility, and we all have to take a part in addressing the problems and solving them."

then have the opportunity to bid on doing the work, creating a boost to the economies of local communities. According to Regional Forester Wagner, the Forest Service has a number of active community projects for wildlife and general environmental enhancement that include stewardship contracts to achieve their goals. Ed Shepard, who heads the region's BLM, said that in 2009 his agency had some 60 stewardship contracts underway.

Under a stewardship contract, federal agencies collaborate with local groups to develop and implement projects that focus on end result ecosystem benefits and outcomes instead of timber removal only. Examples include removing vegetation to promote healthy forests or reduce wildfire hazards, restoring watershed areas, and restoring wildlife and fish habitat. Generally, no money passes hands. The contractor provides services in the form of restoration projects in exchange for goods in the form of forest product removal.

Local forest operators see the value and benefits of stewardship contracts and are learning how to respond to requests for proposals. For Scott Melcher, president of Melcher Logging in Sweet Home, such contracts are now a major part of his work. "Our contracts with the Forest Service may involve a whole range of services," he said. "They may include stream enhancement through riparian treatments, soil improvement, mowing and other fuels reduction measures. For work we don't do ourselves, such as hand thinning and piling, we subcontract and manage the work." Contracts may be for short periods or up to 10 years, involving multiple entries and activities. Melcher Logging, which in 2009 was named Logger of the Year by the Associated Oregon Loggers, has done such work for The Nature Conservancy.

For its part, TNC both actively manages its own lands and collaborates with other groups to identify treatments on federal land to which people can broadly agree. It seeks to help collaborative groups examine the problem from a landscape scale and to identify the most important and strategic places in need of restoration. TNC also does some policy work – recently arguing to increase the Forest Service budget for treatments, for example.

Oregon Wild, formerly the Oregon Natural Resources Council, has mounted a major demonstration project in the Glaze Meadow near Sisters, which has been visited by a number of interested parties, including the Forest Service, Oregon legislators, forest products companies, the general public and the Sierra Club. The project aims to add more heterogeneity in terms of species variety and more old growth trees. The restoration work included thinning and prescribed burning. Tim Lillebo of Oregon Wild described the landscape as having old growth, second growth, meadows, aspen and riparian zones. "This was a good model for the Forest Sevice," he said. "The Forest Service agreed that nearly everyone was happy, and there were no appeals or litigation. Using variable-density thinning, we were even able to derive some wood products from it, including logs, boards and chips for biomass." Melcher Logging, incidentally, was the contractor on the project, which was planned and administered by the Forest Service.

One of the potential beneficiaries of future restoration efforts is Oregon's emerging biomass industry, which has the potential to utilize otherwise unmerchantable small wood material and burn it in facilities either as a heat source or as fuel to generate electricity. Ron Saranich, a biomass specialist with the Forest Service, works with many of the community-based collaboratives in Oregon and serves on a state biomass working group that supports the industry's development.

John Pine, a biomass expert with ODF, feels that there is great potential in capturing otherwise useless biomass material that comes off forestland undergoing treatments to reduce fire risk. "It's really a byproduct of restoration thinning," he said. "We're talking about all those little three-inch trees packed together in overstocked forests. And going in and removing those small sticks doesn't mean you're done with that stand forever. They continue to grow. That's why there will be a steady supply."

The Search For Long-term Sustainability

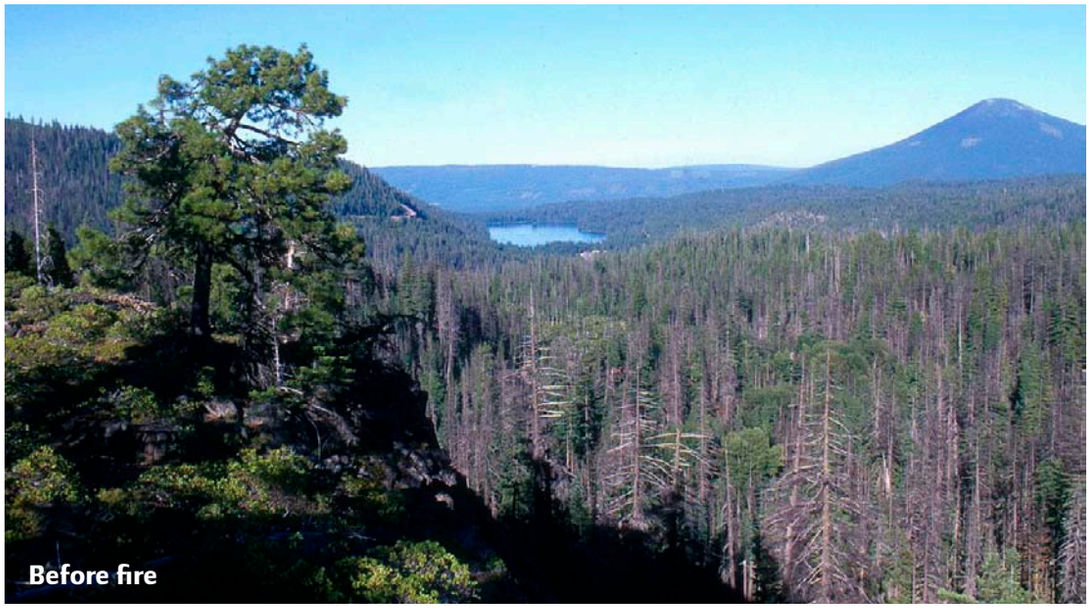
Perhaps Deputy Regional Forester Joyner best summed up the current situation. "We came to work for the Forest Service because we wanted to be part of something bigger than ourselves. What we found was a family of people who really care about what they do. That continues today and brings regional knowledge to the harvest and restoration work.

"As with many families, there's a desire to pass a legacy on to future generations, and you go through transition periods where the family tries to figure out what to do with its treasures. We seem to be in the middle of one of those periods. We want the public to know we're listening. We want them to know that we believe we can lead the American people toward a future where their forests are sustainable for all of the resource values we want to draw from them."

Recognizing The Need For Change

Forests are always changing. Plants grow, plants die, and animals come and go in accord with habitat conditions and other factors.

The rate and direction of



change in federal forests is the concern of our time. We are witness to unprecedented mortality in dry side federal forests, from climate-induced droughts, insect outbreaks and fire. As well, solutions to restore economic sustainability to wet side federal forests are exceedingly elusive. Communities that once depended on federal forests for sustainable jobs and wealth creation suffer the state's highest unemployment rates. They depend on an unstable yearly welfare check from Congress for schools and roads. Taxpayers from counties through all of America pay increasingly higher bills for fighting big wildfires. The skilled workforce and infrastructure needed for forest restoration and active management of a remarkable and renewable natural resource is disappearing. These conditions are unsustainable. Something must change to restore federal forests as assets to society.

Oregon's Congressional members clearly get this. What is uncertain is whether American citizens will empower them to change federal forest policies and governance processes to enable the return of these forests to their long-standing multiple-use mission. We need to find a way to make our forests environmentally, economically and socially sustainable. Oregon is not alone in this need but it can show the way to a better, healthier forest future. New management practices, recognition of ecosystem dynamics, and emergence of new, more collaborative modes of decision making are all part of a richer future for our federal forests and the people who cherish and depend on them for their quality of life.

Whether these initiatives will be sufficient, or come soon enough, to conserve our forests and our communities, especially in the fire-prone forests of eastern and interior southwest Oregon, remains uncertain at best. More certain is the growing consensus that doing nothing is not an option. ■

The Risks of Passive Management

The risks of passive management in the dry and mixed conifer forests of eastern and southern Oregon, such as these before and after wildfire pictures at Mollies Rock (B&B Complex Fire, 2003, Deschutes National Forest), is that when fire inevitably strikes, its severity will be much greater than normal fires in those regions. Under normal conditions in these forest types, smaller and more frequent fires kept the understories relatively clear and larger trees survived. Without restoration measures like thinning and controlled burning, these uncharacteristically intense fires will destroy large areas. Most national forests in these regions of Oregon are in this condition and at high risk of wildfire.

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