



June 2010

## Inside this Brief

- **Oregon's Forest Practices Act**
- **Oregon's Forest Policy**
- **Challenges and Opportunities**
- **Oregon Department of Forestry Overview**
- **Oregon Board of Forestry**
- **Recent Legislation**
- **Staff and Agency Contacts**

Legislative Committee Services  
State Capitol Building  
Salem, Oregon 97301  
(503) 986-1813

Background Brief on ...

# Forestry

Oregon's forests cover about 30.47 million acres, almost half of the state's land base.

These forest resources are rich and diverse and include some of the most productive forests on earth. Forests are integral to the state's identity, its economy, and its quality of life, providing clean water, wildlife habitat, timber products, jobs, revenue for public services, recreational and tourism opportunities, and more. Oregon's forests also are important in addressing climate change. Forests have a role in mitigating global warming because of their capacity to store carbon. In addition, changing climate affects forests in many ways, such as increasing vulnerability to fire and insect attack.

While many states have experienced substantial conversion of forestland to development, agriculture, and other uses, Oregon has maintained its forestland base. However, given Oregon's growth and changes in forestland ownership patterns, fragmentation or loss of working forestland is a growing concern. As more forestland is owned for investment purposes rather than for ongoing forest management, smaller, high-value parcels increasingly are sold off, resulting in fragmentation. As parcelization occurs and more homes are scattered through the forest, management for the full range for forest benefits decreases, invasive species problems may rise, and fire protection becomes more challenging and expensive.

Oregon's forest resource includes urban forests, trees in neighborhoods and other developed landscapes that have benefits including property value enhancement, wildlife habitat, and retention of storm runoff.

Oregon historically has led the nation in lumber production. Although harvests have dropped sharply on federal lands and jobs and industry infrastructure have been reduced, the forest sector remains important, particularly in rural communities. The forest sector directly employs 59,000 workers, according to the

Oregon Employment Department. Other forestry workers include the self-employed, contractors, and forest industry workers in the transportation, business services and other sectors.

### **Oregon's Forest Practices Act**

Oregon Revised Statutes 527.610 to 527.770, 527.990(1), and 527.992 make up the Oregon Forest Practices Act. The Act provides for sustainable timber harvest consistent with environmentally sound management of water, soil, air quality, fish, wildlife, and scenic resources. The Act's requirements include leaving streamside buffers and reforestation after harvest.

### **Oregon's Forest Policy**

As expressed in the Board of Forestry's *Forestry Program for Oregon*, state policy holds that keeping forests sustainable requires balancing economic, social, and environmental values. These values have often been thought of as conflicting, but are in fact interdependent.

Maintaining environmental values protects the forest's health and productivity, which is the basis of providing all benefits. Economic benefits of forest ownership are necessary to retain forest use in the face of growing pressure to convert to other uses, and to pay to protect and enhance forest resources and productivity. Social values, such as recreation, outdoor education and timber revenues for public services, help to engage the public and build support for sound forest management.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

As Oregon continues to grow, there is an increasing need for forestry services relevant to urban and suburban residents. Issues include an orderly, environmentally sound transition where forestland has been zoned for development, and addressing concerns that may arise among neighbors or local entities when commercial forestry is practiced near homes and built-up areas. These services also are important in maintaining urban Oregonians' connection with

forestry and support for sustainable forest management in all landscapes.

Large expanses of forests, primarily federally owned land in eastern and southern Oregon, are in poor health and vulnerable to large, unusually severe fires. Reducing fuels and restoring health across millions of acres of these forests is a challenge.

However, the condition of these forests does pose an opportunity: use of woody biomass to restore forest health, provide a renewable energy source, and stimulate local economies that have suffered as federal timber harvests have diminished in recent years.

Recognizing the importance of federal lands, Governor Kulongoski directed the Oregon Board of Forestry and the Department of Forestry to increase their involvement in federal forest policy, planning and management. The Board convened a broad-based Federal Forestland Advisory Committee, which outlined a vision that included collaborative projects that would improve forest health – by thinning overstocked stands, for instance – while also providing economic activity in rural communities. Although a group with multiple stakeholders is seeking opportunities to implement this vision, funding and policy challenges remain significant.

Private forestlands are vital to Oregon's landscape, but keeping these lands in forest use is increasingly challenging. Carbon credits and conservation easements are among many tools that may encourage private landowners to keep their forests as forests.

Residential development in forests, climate trends, and other factors have contributed to escalating costs and challenges of protecting forests from fire. Landowners share protection costs on private lands with the state to a greater extent than in other states. The best means of preventing large, costly fires is increased investment in adequate prevention and fire suppression readiness, so that fires can be put out before they escape to become large, costly incidents. These large fires, only a small

percentage of the total on state-protected lands, account for most of the costs.

## **Oregon Department of Forestry Overview**

The Oregon Department of Forestry was established in 1911. The agency's major activities include:

- Providing fire protection on approximately 16 million acres – primarily Oregon's privately owned forestlands, but also state-owned forests and a limited amount of other publicly owned land;
- Administering the Forest Practices Act;
- Providing guidance and technical assistance to landowners;
- Research and monitoring;
- Managing 848,000 acres of state-owned forestland for a mix of environmental, economic and social benefits (Oregon has six state-owned forests: the Tillamook, Clatsop, Santiam, Elliott, Sun Pass, and Gilchrist, as well as other scattered state-owned holdings); and
- Helping cities, community groups and other entities to manage urban forests.

## **Oregon Board of Forestry**

The seven members of the Board of Forestry are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. The Board appoints the State Forester and oversees the Department and general forest policy of the state. The *Forestry Program for Oregon*, the Board's overarching policy document, is based on internationally recognized indicators of sustainable forest management.

## **Recent Legislation**

The Board of Forestry had an opportunity to acquire about 95,000 acres of forestland near the town of Gilchrist in Klamath County. The landowner had indicated that unless there was a single buyer for the tract, the land would likely be divided and sold in many separate pieces. The last purchase of a state forest was Sun Pass State Forest, located 40 miles north of Klamath Falls, in 1943. In 2009 the Legislature passed House Bill 2216 which updated the Board's land acquisition statutes and authorized the use of lottery bond proceeds for land purchase. The

Board's bonding authorities required updating to make acquisitions such as the Gilchrist property feasible. On February 10, 2010, the Oregon Board of Forestry approved the purchase of 43,000 acres of forestland in central Oregon as a first step in a long-range effort to acquire the entire 95,000 acres.

Other bills approved in the 2009 session set in motion processes that eventually could lead to several means of keeping forest land in forest use. These include encouraging the use of markets in which forest landowners could sell carbon storage or other environmental services (Senate Bill 513), and transfer of development rights from forestland to other lands (Senate Bill 763).

## **Staff and Agency Contacts:**

Marvin Brown

[Department of Forestry](#)

State Forester

503-945-7211

Dan Postrel

[Department of Forestry](#)

503-945-7420

Beth Herzog

[Legislative Committee Services](#)

503-986-1755

*The Department of Forestry assisted with the development of this document.*