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Background Brief on ...

Forestry

Oregon's Forests: An Overview

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

Oregon's forests are rich and diverse, and include some of the most productive forestlands on Earth. Forests are integral to the state's identity, economy and quality of life. They provide clean water, wildlife habitat, timber products, jobs, revenue for public services, recreational and tourism opportunities, biomass for energy generation, carbon storage that helps to buffer climate change – and more.

Oregon's forest resource also includes urban forests – trees in neighborhoods and other developed landscapes – with benefits including property value enhancement, wildlife habitat, and retention and filtering of stormwater runoff.

Oregon continues to lead the nation in lumber production. Although production and employment have dropped sharply since the Great Recession, the forest sector remains important, particularly in rural communities. The sector directly employs about 45,000 people, and supports jobs in other sectors, such as fishing and tourism.

Forests face significant challenges. On federal lands – some 60 percent of Oregon's forest landbase – these include poor forest health, vulnerability to catastrophic wildfire that threatens natural resources and neighboring land and communities, and lost economic opportunities.

Privately owned forests also experience challenges. While many states have seen substantial loss of forestland to development, agriculture, and other uses, Oregon has maintained its forestland base. However, rising costs of forest management and protection; difficult markets for logs; and increased value of forestland as real estate all exert pressure to sell or convert forestland.

Addressing these challenges involves action on many fronts, including federal forest policy, adequate public and private investment in forests, and active management – purposeful, science-based steps to achieve desired forest objectives. These measures can help restore and maintain Oregon’s forests and the diverse benefits they provide.

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 is 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 basic productivity. 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 and investment.

Challenges and Opportunities

Environmentally sound, active management of federal forestlands in Oregon can produce a sustainable flow of multiple forest benefits. However, concerns surrounding these lands have generated significant public debate. A policy of fire exclusion, combined with sharply reduced harvests and other management activity, has produced landscapes of dense stands that are vulnerable to insect and disease attack and to

uncharacteristically hot, damaging fires. These conditions have grown acute in the drier forests of eastern and interior southwestern Oregon. More broadly across the state, declines in federal forest harvest revenues have contributed to severe economic distress in counties with high proportions of federal land.

In recent years, collaborative groups have formed in several national forests, bringing together local conservation, forest industry and other interests. Working with the U.S. Forest Service and others, these groups have advanced projects to restore forest health, reduce fuels, and produce raw materials for mills. These projects, while increasing in size and number, remain well below landscape scale, and face obstacles such as limited funding and contraction in the milling infrastructure needed to process material removed from the forest.

Addressing federal forest challenges is among Governor Kitzhaber’s natural resources priorities. With a variety of partners, his office is working at the federal, state and local levels to address policy issues, work toward consensus, and strengthen and support the ongoing collaborative work. These activities are coordinated with a broad-based group of agencies and organizations working to implement the 2009 recommendations of an advisory committee formed by the Oregon Board of Forestry.

Private forestlands, too, present challenges as well as opportunities. The overriding challenge is keeping working forests healthy, intact and productive, as pressure grows to convert them to other uses. For instance, as is happening nationally, large, industrial tracts increasingly are owned by Timber Management Organizations or Real Estate Investment Trusts. These owners, like others, have an array of interests, which may include selling those portions of their holdings that have greater value as real estate.

Family forestland owners also face challenges, including generational changes in ownership, the development pressure that comes with nearness

to population centers, and a need for forestry expertise.

With forest tracts large and small, if managing for forest values doesn't remain economically viable, the use is likely to change. Economic considerations include demand for timber and other products, and costs of regulatory compliance and fire protection. Fire danger is increasing statewide in response to climate trends and other factors, and protection is particularly challenging for owners of lower-productivity forests.

When forestland is fragmented, fire protection becomes more costly and complex, vulnerability to invasive species increases, the likelihood of active management lessens, and forest values can be degraded or lost.

Opportunities emerge from these challenges. They include maintaining a streamlined, "one-stop shop" regulatory approach, exploring ways to generate revenue from forest attributes such as wildlife habitat and clean water, and enhancing capacity to put out wildfires while they are still small, thus avoiding major costs, public safety threats and resource damage.

In addition, 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.

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 privately owned forestlands, but also state-owned and

other public land, including west-side forests owned by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management;

- Administering the Forest Practices Act;
- Providing guidance and technical assistance to landowners;
- 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 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 the 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

During the 2011 and 2012 legislative sessions, bills were considered that addressed state forest management policy. These bills included proposals to manage the lands with an emphasis on timber harvest, and to change the definition of "greatest permanent value" or GPV. These bills did not pass.

In 2011, the Legislature adopted Senate Bill 862, highlighting existing state authority to enter into contracts to supply woody biomass from state forestlands to facilitate development of projects, including bioenergy projects.

The 2011 Legislature also authorized \$1.98 million in lottery-backed bonds to add about 5,800 acres to the Gilchrist State Forest south of Bend, bringing the forest's total acreage to about 49,000. Subject to future funding availability, opportunities exist for purchase of an additional 20,000 acres, all in a landscape where working forests are at risk of fragmentation.

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