

**Oregon Department of Forestry
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Forest biomass meeting to focus on stewardship contracting

The Forest Biomass Working Group will explore the use of stewardship contracting as a means to implement forest health projects on federal forestlands when it meets Sept. 26 in Salem. A panel will kick off the meeting with an overview of how this approach is working on U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands.

In 2003, the U.S. Congress granted the Forest Service and BLM authority to use stewardship contracts to accomplish forest and rangeland restoration. In Oregon, stewardship contracting is seen as a potential tool to bring together local communities, the Oregon Department of Forestry and federal land managers to thin timber and remove brush on overgrown forests. Normally, private contractors would work directly with the federal agencies to carry out these contracts.

But the Department of Forestry and the federal agencies are exploring stewardship contracting as an option when local contractors do not bid on contracts. In such instances, the department might serve as the general contractor and subcontract out various elements of the work that needs to be done, in order to achieve the objectives to reduce fuel loading and improve forest conditions.

Working Group Co-chair Joe Misek described stewardship contracting as a “way to combine elements of existing contracting tools that makes it easier to meet ecological objectives in a more efficient and collaborative manner.”

In many of Oregon’s eastside forests, the long-term exclusion of fire has allowed a gradual buildup of forest fuel. This has triggered disease and insect outbreaks as well as uncharacteristically severe wildfires that damage soil and impair water quality.

At the meeting, a matrix of all the stewardship contracts currently operating in the state will be shared with the members. In an effort to better understand these contracts from an on-the-ground perspective, a report will be given on the Gerber Stew Project, a BLM case study in Klamath County that involves an array of vegetation treatments on forestlands, juniper woodlands and rangelands. The project will gauge the potential to restore watersheds, reduce wildfire risk, and improve range health through thinning and other management techniques.

Also on the 26th, the group will receive a progress report on a project to restore forest health in Lake County. The Lakeview Biomass Project, an Oregon Solutions project, aims to thin overstocked tree stands on the Fremont National Forest and produce electricity from the resulting wood waste. Supported by conservation groups, private industry, Oregon State University and federal and state government, the project would also help restore health to the overcrowded forest and reduce the risk of damaging wildfires. (Oregon Solutions is a public and private sector initiative to develop sustainable solutions to community-based problems that support economic, environmental, and community objectives.)

By employing a system known as CROP (Coordinated Resource Offering Protocol), forestry and energy experts hope to make the market for small-diameter timber in central Oregon more attractive to investors. CROP, through planning with public and private land managers, would seek to identify and inventory a steady, predictable flow of small trees suitable for conversion to biomass. The Working Group will receive a brief update on the progress of this initiative.

The 30-member Forest Biomass Working Group was formed by the Oregon Department of Forestry last fall to foster development of a viable biomass industry in the state using previously unmerchantable raw material from the forest that is a byproduct of thinning treatments. It was created in accordance with Senate Bill 1072, a law passed by the 2005 Oregon Legislature that directed the State Forester and the department to “take specific actions to increase the utilization of forest biomass, particularly from federal lands within the state, but also from tribal, state and private forests.”

The meeting will run from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in the Tillamook Room, Building C, at Oregon Department of Forestry headquarters, 2600 State St., in Salem. It is open to the public.

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