

Forest Cluster Economic Development Strategy

Federal Forest Restoration

Strategy Recommendations

- Widely communicate Oregon forest health and forest cluster and rural community economic vitality as priorities of the Governor and the State of Oregon.
- Encourage and support local collaboration efforts, such as community wildfire protection plans and fully using Healthy Forest Restoration Act authority, to accomplish federal forest restoration work and provide wood fiber to local mills.
- Explore a role for the State of Oregon to directly participate in addressing federal forest/private forest interface issues with respect to fires, insects, and diseases.

Immediate Actions Needed

- Lobby Congress and the Administration to restore funding for the USDA Forest Service for forest management; to revise Forest Service wildland fire policy to increase emphasis on fuels treatment, initial attack, and fire suppression; and to fully implement and expand the federal biomass transportation credit.
- Craft a Memorandum of Understanding between the State of Oregon and the USDA Forest Service to provide state expertise and funding where appropriate to immediately implement timber sales, stewardship agreements, and other projects critical to forest restoration and maintaining forest industry infrastructure.

Why the actions are important

Federal forestlands are a resource intended to benefit the nation as a whole. These lands provide important ecosystem services like clean water and carbon storage, biodiversity, and habitat for a multitude of animal and plant species. They also provide a vast array of recreation opportunities and have historically been a source of raw material for valuable wood products. In Oregon, federal lands represent 60 percent of the total forestland in the state. The health and sound stewardship of these lands are critical to state's current and future well-being. Our state economy relies on these lands for family-wage jobs – particularly in our rural communities where good jobs are becoming increasingly scarce. Oregon has traditionally funded roads and schools from revenue that has been generated from our federal forests.

The health of federal forests has been recognized as one of the most important Oregon forestry issues. Improving forest resilience to drought, fires and insects through active management of federal forestlands has the potential to create economic and social opportunities while improving environmental conditions. The overall Oregon Board of Forestry Federal Forestlands Advisory Committee strategy is to focus on the problem of forest health. Issues of declining forest health (e.g., wildfire, insects and disease, reduced water quality and quantity, declining fish and wildlife habitat, reductions in biodiversity and ecosystem resiliency) are of immediate importance, but progress in solving these problems will by necessity mean that progress will also have to be achieved in solving related challenges (i.e., reduced timber harvesting and processing infrastructure, conflicting expectations for retention of older forests, lack of trust between industry and conservation organizations, and policy coordination).

These recommendations are consistent with the strong consensus reached at the 2007 Oregon Leadership Summit, with the recommendations emerging from the Oregon Board of Forestry's Federal Forestlands Advisory Committee, and with the recent successful interagency efforts regarding increasing active management on the Malheur National Forest. The recommendations will be supported by enhancing state government capacity to work on federal forest issues, as proposed through the Department of Forestry's 2009-11 Agency Request Budget.

Needed private sector actions

- Support the Oregon Board of Forestry's Federal Forestlands Advisory Committee's work and encourage action on their recommendations.
- Work with congressional leaders to increase US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management funding for high priority landscape forest restoration projects as an investment which will reduce future fire fighting costs, resource loss, and carbon emissions.
- Participate in local collaborative partnerships to facilitate agreements on forest health treatments on federal lands. Non-governmental organizations and the forest industry should work with local government to identify landscape scale areas (100,000+ acres) that need forest health treatments and people willing to collaborate on solutions. To be successful, local partnerships must be formed at the grass roots level.

Local partnerships should focus on accomplishing five key tasks essential to making progress toward solving the forest health problems on federal lands. These are large-scale assessments of forest condition, designing restoration projects, defining and making recommendations on older forests, building trust, and coordinating policy decisions across ownership boundaries.

1. Large scale assessments of forest conditions are needed to establish strategic goals, develop consensus on treatment options, and prioritize treatments across the landscape. Assessments should be collaborative, science-based and provide a framework for ecological, economic and social sustainability.
2. Local collaborative processes should help design projects that contribute to long-term stable, sustainable and quantifiable supplies of ecosystem benefits such as water filtration, carbon sequestration, wilderness, wildlife, fish habitat and fiber (i.e., timber, biomass/fuel) from federal lands.
3. Local collaborative processes should develop regional and forest-type specific definitions for older forests, develop goals for amounts of older forests, and identify opportunities for maintaining and adding older forests over time.
4. Consensus building processes should be used to help build trust and design projects that are accepted by a broad range of constituent groups.
5. Local partnerships should assess conditions across the landscape and look for opportunities to coordinate projects across public and private ownerships to meeting common goals.

Role for state government

- Encourage increased capacity of federal agencies to conduct land management activities through increased funding and streamlined processes.
- Ensure that restoring forest conditions and improving their resilience is identified as a priority in federal forest plans for management of these forests.
- Encourage increased thinning for fuels reduction under Healthy Forests Restoration Act using Categorical Exclusions, where applicable, and coordinating with Community Wildfire

Protection Plans to identify projects in the wildland urban interface that could make use of community forest protection funds.

- Explore using Oregon Solutions as a neutral forum to work directly with local partners in facilitating the formation of forest restoration plans and to build community support and acceptance for the proposed treatments.
- Participate in designing landscape-scale forest restoration Stewardship Contracts.
- Provide technical assistance to federal agencies in preparing the environmental analyses necessary to plan large Stewardship Contracts.
- Act as general contractor for a Stewardship Contract if no interest exists from private industry.
- Encourage use of Coordinated Resource Offering Protocol (CROP) to identify and communicate potential restoration and timber sale projects.
- Explore a role for the state of Oregon to directly implement federal plans, policies and projects, recognizing it is in the state's interest to address federal forest/private forest interface issues with respect to fires, insects, and diseases.

Agency assignments

- Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF):
 - Create and fund a Federal Forests Liaison Program within ODF charged with organizing and enabling the operation and success of local partnerships. The new ODF unit should make a tool set available for local partnerships to assess forest conditions and design projects, and assist federal agencies with planning, analysis and implementation of management projects when needed.
 - Semi-annually the State Forester will organize a meeting of the chief executives of the state and federal agencies with responsibilities for forestry research and forestland management, representatives of county and tribal governments, and private forestland owners. The purpose of these meetings should be to discuss and coordinate policies that affect forest health issues and the recommendations of the FFAC report.
 - Continue to support the Board of Forestry's Forest Vitality work plan and Federal Forests Advisory Committee Recommendations.
- Oregon Economic and Community Development:
 - Work to maintain the local forest industry and to attract any new specialized infrastructure needed to support forest health treatments (e.g., biomass facilities).
 - Help fund neutral, experienced, professional facilitators to work directly with the local partnerships, and help fund scientific assessment work.
 - Continue to support the Board of Forestry's Federal Forests Advisory Committee Recommendations.
- Oregon State University (OSU):
 - A comprehensive strategy is needed to invest in creating and then expanding successful large-scale pilot projects that address the scientific uncertainties of forest restoration practices. OSU should work with the state and federal agencies to systematically review the literature on controversial forest health management topics (e.g., thinning effects on wildlife) and help design methodologies to address the uncertainty.
 - Continue to support the Board of Forestry's Federal Forests Advisory Committee Recommendations.
- Oregon Forest Resources Institute
 - Sponsor conferences to explore the federal forest management issues and communicate the findings of pilot projects and other relevant research to forest managers and practitioners.

Milestones

- Initially, three pilot partnerships should be organized to develop administrative and procedural processes and to learn how best to make the partnerships successful.
- In subsequent years three additional partnerships should be organized each year with state support lasting for two years.

Additional resources needed

- To achieve the desired outcome state government should create a new administrative entity in ODF with adequate staff and funding to liaison with federal agencies and facilitate the development and success of local collaborative partnerships between state, local, and tribal governments, citizens, and federal managers at the landscape level.
- The new unit will need pass through money to hire neutral facilitators and commission assessment work and literature reviews on how to conduct large scale forest health treatments.
- Additional staff resources dedicated to federal forest issues may be needed in other state agencies, particularly the Departments of Fish and Wildlife and Environmental Quality.

Deliverables

- Completed projects on federal forestlands that improve forest health (e.g., wildfire, water quality and quantity, fish and wildlife habitat, biodiversity, ecosystem resiliency) with associated increased and sustainable economic benefits
- Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from wildfires and reductions in wildfire suppression costs
- Increased ecosystem benefits such as water filtration, carbon sequestration, wilderness, wildlife, fish habitat and fiber (i.e., timber, biomass/fuel)
- Increased employment in rural communities in forest restoration projects and fiber processing

Measures of success

- Measures of success should be developed in conjunction with local collaborative processes and coordinated by ODF to measure success across the state. Such outcome-based measures (e.g., reduced fire hazard, improved water quality) should track resource improvements instead of simply reporting work outputs.
- Applicable Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management:
 - Compliance with forestry regulations
 - Forest-related revenues supporting state and local government public services
 - Forest-related employment and wages
 - Forest ecosystem services contributions to society
 - Forest products sector vitality
 - Timber harvest trends compared to planned and projected harvest levels and the potential to grow wood
 - Tree death from insects, diseases, and other damaging agents
 - Forest fuel conditions and trends related to wildfire risks
 - Carbon stocks on forestlands and in forest products