

STAFF REPORT

Agenda Item No.:	15
Work Plan:	Forest Resources Division
Topic:	Board of Forestry Updates
Presentation Title:	Committee for Family Forestlands Annual Report
Date of Presentation:	September 05, 2024
Contact Information:	Wendy Gerlach CFF Chair wendy@wgerlachlaw.com Mike Kroon, Forest Resources Deputy Chief 503-400-4815 mike.e.kroon@odf.oregon.gov

SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda item is to provide a report on the Committee for Family Forestlands (CFF), discuss progress on key issues, and make recommendations on policy topics affecting family forestland.

CONTEXT

The CFF, a standing committee of the Oregon Board of Forestry, provides advice to the Board of Forestry and the State Forester on methods to help improve the vitality of family forestlands, including improving owners' ability to manage and market their timber and other forest products. The Committee for Family Forestlands continues to evaluate the impact of policy and regulatory changes on family forestland owners.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Over the past year, the Committee focused on the objectives/issues identified in their 2023-2024 work plan. The annual report informs the Board of the committee's progress in addressing issues affecting family forestland (Attachment 1).

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee for Family Forestland recommends the Board accept the CFF annual report.

ATTACHMENT

- (1) Committee for Family Forestlands Annual Report to the Board Fiscal Year 2023-2024

Committee for Family Forestlands Annual Report to the Board Fiscal Year 2023-2024



*Annual Report presented to the Board of Forestry September 4th, 2024
By Wendy Gerlach, Chair, Committee for Family Forestlands*

The Committee for Family Forestlands (“CFF”) is a standing committee established by the Oregon Board of Forestry to assist and advise the State Forester and the Board on issues relevant to Oregon’s ~70,000 family forestland owners, including advice on the formulation of policy and potential effects of changes in forest policy on those lands.

The CFF’s activities over the past year (July 2023– July 2024) have included advising on technical guidance to new Private Forest Accord-related rules, providing informal as well as written comments on the Board of Forestry’s strategic Vision for Oregon’s Forests, and engaging in discussions and presentations on numerous issues important to small forestland owners. The CFF has also, in perhaps its most important role, provided outreach to communities across the state and acted as a liaison between those communities and the Oregon Department of Forestry (“ODF”).

The CFF has received many helpful briefings on key topics from ODF staff, and thanks those staff and Mike Kroon and Heather Hendersen in particular for outstanding support of the CFF. The CFF expresses its thanks to the Board for its commitment to Oregon forests, with special thanks to Ben Deumling for joining many meetings of the CFF and acting as liaison to the Board.

The CFF hopes that the Board will continue to utilize the CFF as a resource to the Board and ODF in their work, and looks forward to continued work together.

CFF 2023-2024 voting members:

Wendy Gerlach, Chair (Citizen at Large)
David Bugni (Northwest Oregon Family Forestland Owner)
Gary Jensen (Southern Oregon Family Forestland Owner)
Maurizio Valerio (Eastern Oregon Family Forestland Owner)
Kate McMichael (Landowner at Large)
Kaola Swanson, Vice-Chair (Conservation Community Representative)
Eric Kranzush (Industry Representative)

CFF 2023-2024 ex-officio members:

The CFF benefits from the time and expertise of the CFF ex-officio members, and thanks them for their input. They are:

- Amanda Sullivan-Astor for Associated Oregon Loggers (AOL)
- Rick Zenn for Oregon Small Woodlands Association (OSWA)
- Glenn Ahrens for Oregon State University (OSU) College of Forestry, OSU Extension Forestry and Natural Resources Program
- Julie Woodward for Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI)

CFF 2023-2024 ODF staff support; Board support:

CFF members acknowledge the support and reports received from ODF and the Board generally, and specifically from:

- Forest Resources Division staff
- Protection from Fire Division staff
- Planning Branch staff
- State Forester Mukumoto
- Board Chair Kelly
- Board Members

2023-2024 Priority Issues

Issues important to small forest landowners remain largely the same over the years. The CFF’s key priorities are briefly stated below. These are consistent with the priorities in last year’s report. On the next page of this report, we add new material (speaking to the contributions of small forestland owners to the Board’s strategic priorities).

- Private Forest Accord. Implementation of the Private Forest Accord, and attention to associated changes to the Forest Practices Act, is a priority for the CFF. It is important to develop an effective Small Forestland Owner Office and strong landowner incentive programs (including Small Forestland Investment in Stream Habitat (‘SFISH’) program funding, and the tax credit for riparian management zones beyond minimum option). The CFF notes the importance of incentive programs being fiscally and logistically viable for landowners. To the extent there may be a tax disincentive to receiving SFISH grants, the Committee urges the Board to seek a solution to that problem. Finally, the CFF urges more bridge-building with small forestland owners—not having been directly included in initial Accord discussions, but now being subject to changing rules, small landowners deserve attention to their concerns. (Although OSWA participated in Accord negotiations, not all small forestland owners are OSWA members. Direct communication with small forest landowners is important.)
- ODF Communications and Technical Assistance. Effective small forestland owner outreach and communications, including timely, direct, and accessible ODF communications about forest practices, ODF programs, and incentives, are critical to small landowner success. Technical assistance is a key part of that support. Committee members consistently say this: ODF stewardship forester presence in local communities is essential on a technical and community level. The ODF website has great resources on a range of topics—these could be talked up more. It is equally important that small forestland owners are aware of and can access financial incentives and assistance through state funded programs like the Landscape Resiliency Program and through Federal funding sources like the Forest Stewardship Program and Forest Legacy Program. We encourage ODF to fully utilize these important programs in support of forestland management, avoided conversion, and conservation.
- Avoiding Conversion of Lands from Forest Uses. Small forestland owners play a key role in keeping forestland as forestland. Programs and policies that are consistent in application, comprehensible, and supportive of strong small landowner communities allow them to continue to manage healthy and productive forests, pushing back against conversion pressures.
- Forest Management Infrastructure. Diminishing infrastructure to serve small forestland owners, especially closing of mills, is a high-level concern of small forestland owners who rely on this infrastructure for long-term forest management.
- Fire. Wildfire prevention, recovery, funding, and reforestation is an ongoing key issue for small forestland owners, who face special challenges as to workforce, equipment, and replanting. Simply put, post-fire restoration is a struggle for small forestland owners, and they need the Board’s and ODF’s support with this.
- Seedling availability: Small landowners have particular need for access to diverse seedlings in the marketplace and through other distribution programs. ODF is giving a presentation at its seed orchard about these issues, and particularly about producing seedling strains that are better suited to climate change. Programs like these should be publicized and encouraged.
- Workforce issues: Small landowners are especially vulnerable to labor shortages. Programs for workforce expansion and training are a necessary investment of the state in helping with this.
- Eastern Oregon specific needs: The above issues, especially fire, reforestation, seedlings, and workforce, have specific aspects unique to eastside forests.
- Climate change: Climate change broadly impacts forest management, reforestation, and forest practices. Tools for successful resilience and adaptation are critical (forest management alternatives, water retention practices, seedling type etc.).

Small Forestland Owners and the Vision for Oregon’s Forests

Small forestland owners own approximately 12% of Oregon’s forests and own an even higher percentage of lands in the wildland urban interface (“WUI”). A high percentage of small forestlands include riparian areas low in watersheds, which makes small forestland owners sensitive to rules regulating riparian management and which also makes their stewardship of their lands a key component of watershed and forest health. The contributions of small forestland owners to riparian,

watershed, and overall forest health are essential to the Board's priorities as set out in Board's draft Vision for Oregon Forests. The CFF offers the following thoughts on the Board's priorities and how they relate to small forestland owners across the state. The contributions of small forestland owners are many, and the CFF asks that, as the Board expands its Vision to include metrics and objectives, the Board recognize and support this community.

Resilient Forests

The Vision: Enabling landowner decisions that "improve resilience and adaptive capacity of their lands."

To quote one of our CFF members, "The stewardship of our lands comes with an unwritten contract of reciprocity.... an intangible bond of gratitude, work, and commitment." Small forestland owners—including CFF members—are appreciative of incentives supporting stewardship. The CFF notes the success of the SB 762 landscape resilience grant program, which was well-utilized, and urges the continuation of that program. Incentives, grants, and assistance are critical to small forestland owners in managing resilience, post-fire recovery and reforestation, and fish and wildlife habitat.

Resilient Communities

The Vision: Policy and management decisions so that "forests support resilient human communities through social, economic, and ecological change."

The CFF, like the Board, recognizes the importance of local communities and place-based management. Small forestland owners are at the center of forest communities and local economies. They are critical to the Board's and ODF's success in supporting healthy and productive Oregon forests. To quote from a CFF discussion, "there are people and communities attached to these lands."

CFF discussion has also noted the many benefits provided by small landowners: "Small forestland owners provide benefits to the public, such as carbon sequestration, for which they are not paid." Similarly, the CFF recognizes the role of small forestland owners in educating communities about natural resources and what forestlands contribute, such as by welcoming legislators and neighbors on forest tours.

At the same time, as acknowledged at a CFF meeting: "Small forestland owners feel a loss of ability to exercise control over their own lands.... There's a need for understanding and respect for small landowners."

Small forestland owners participate in and benefit from many partnerships. The CFF notes, particularly, partnerships with watershed councils, OSU extension programs, and nonprofits. These relationships are a critical part of how small landowners contribute to their communities, and the CFF urges the Board to look to these partnerships in enacting its Vision.

The Wildfire Crisis

The Vision: "Prevent, suppress, and mitigate wildfire to protect communities and expedite forest restoration activities that promote the adaptive capacity of Oregon's forests."

Small forestland owners are on the front line of the wildfire crisis. They are likely to live in the wildland urban interface, subject to high fire potential, or in rural areas where fire suppression and control face unique challenges.

Small forestland owners, especially those managing eastside oak and pine forests, are often open to using prescribed fire to control undergrowth and reduce fuel loads, but face challenges in aggregating their acreages to make prescribed burning feasible. Support in overcoming that challenge is needed. The CFF appreciates initiatives such as the certified burn manager program that help make prescribed fire, including pile burning, an accessible management tool.

Adequate funding of wildfire prevention, suppression, and mitigation is an essential need of small forestland owners, who rely, in particular, on protection services but have only intermittent financial return from forestlands. Any solution to the wildfire funding crisis must include input from the small forestland owner community.

Climate Leadership

The Vision: “The Board and Department will build capacity for climate-smart leadership ... [and] implement the adopted Climate Change and Carbon Plan.”

The CFF observes that most small forestland owners are local owners. They live among forests in flux due to climate change. They tend to manage for a variety of goals that overlap with those of the Vision, including use of a variety of management techniques and a focus on diverse and resilient forests. Climate-smart forestry, as described in the Vision, includes approaches such as alternative slash treatments and increased carbon sequestration. Small forestland owners need alternative, accessible ways to engage in climate-smart forestry. The ODF “Climate Smart Forestry” award recognizes small forestland owner achievements in this area, and a CFF member will be receiving the 2024 award at the Board’s September, 2024, meeting. These programs, and climate-smart practices, should be encouraged and publicized.

The CFF has been briefed on the Climate Change and Carbon Plan, and expects continued discussions on topics like carbon credit project access and biochar opportunities for small landowners. As the Board develops policies, the CFF asks for the opportunity to contribute to that development, and for the small forestland owner community to be informed and included.

Organizational Excellence

The Vision: “Trust and confidence in ODF’s ability to ... accomplish its mission and provide excellent service.”

The CFF knows firsthand the capability of the leadership and staff at ODF. This report focuses on the ways in which ODF can work with small forestland owners to accomplish its mission, including the priorities of the CFF as stated at the start of the report, and the priorities of the Board Vision.

The Small Forestland Owner Office is a critical part of the Private Forest Accord, and its implementation should be an organizational priority for ODF. CFF would welcome an ongoing relationship with the SFO Office and Family Forestland Coordinator, and hopes that the Office will share with it (and the small landowner community) data about programs, rules, implementation, and challenges. Communications are important—where information is lacking, unhelpful rumors take root.

Finally, local ODF foresters are the base upon which the ODF and landowner relationship is built. Funding and staffing those positions is critical for both ODF mission and service excellence.

Conclusion

The CFF’s chartered goal is to advise on topics including “maintenance and enhancement of the positive contributions that family forestland owners make to Oregon’s vitality, including timber availability and the protection and enhancement of watersheds and fish and wildlife habitat.” In reviewing the Board’s Vision and its priorities, the CFF has focused on small landowner contributions and how the Board can achieve its Vision together with this community. The CFF thanks the Board for its attention to this report, and for CFF’s opportunities to engage with ODF staff over the past year. We look forward to further collaboration with the Board and ODF, and thank the Board, its members, State Forester, and ODF staff for the privilege of being able to do so.