A Professional View of Forest Issues: Oregon Society of American Foresters Position Statements

OSAF has about 1,000 members, including field foresters, researchers, administrators & educators who help manage & study public & private forests throughout Oregon. We work for federal, state or local governments; for universities; for small & large landowners; & for small businesses & large corporations. Our diverse viewpoints were carefully considered in developing these position statements. For more information, see www.forestry.org or call 503-224-8046.

Commercial Timber Harvest on Public Lands in Oregon

The Oregon Society of American Foresters supports commercial timber harvest as an appropriate objective and primary tool for healthy, sustainable forests on public lands in Oregon. Most of these lands are affected by laws that allow or mandate sustainable commercial harvest with resource management planning. Where fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, or recreation is a priority, commercial harvest can be compatible and even promote these values when carefully planned and supervised by professional foresters and other resource specialists. Commercial timber harvest provides important economic and social benefits that help sustain local communities, especially in rural areas. These benefits often extend more broadly than government payments in lieu of shared harvest revenues. Management and use of renewable, recyclable, biodegradable, and energy conserving forest products from public lands are imperative given increasing human needs and environmental sustainability concerns. The expanding scope and cost of addressing Oregon's forest health, wildfire and safety hazards add further urgency to the need for active management and restoration of public lands, including commercial harvest. (Adopted February 1, 2007)

Active Management to Achieve and Maintain Healthy Forests

The Oregon Society of American Foresters supports active forest management prescribed by professional foresters to achieve and maintain healthy forests, consistent with land management objectives. To accomplish this, a wide range of proven forest management strategies and tools should be available to professional foresters. These include carefully planned uses of forest thinning (sometimes removing trees over a wide range of sizes and ages), approved chemicals (e.g., fertilizers and pesticides), prescribed burning, salvage of designated dead and dying trees, regeneration harvest (e.g., clearcutting, shelterwood, selection) and mixed species planting. Efficient implementation of active forest management requires good access with forest roads and a minimum of inflexible, blanket restrictions. Many federal forests in Oregon now have an especially acute and long-term need for active management with diverse strategies and tools, including the access and administrative flexibility necessary to effectively expand and maintain such management. (Adopted September 19, 2003)

Salvage Harvesting

The Oregon Society of American Foresters supports the well planned, timely, and careful use of salvage harvesting after uncontrollable events have killed or damaged large numbers of trees in a forest. Salvage harvesting can mitigate economic losses due to the event, recover useful wood products, reduce fire and safety hazards and create the desired environmental conditions for successful reforestation. Application of scientific principles by professional foresters and other resource experts can ensure that economically viable salvage harvesting will be conducted with proper consideration of environmental and social concerns. (Adopted May 7, 2003)

Clearcutting

The Oregon Society of American Foresters supports the careful, scientifically based use of clearcutting as a tool for meeting diverse management objectives, including desired conditions for the regeneration and health of important forest types. Current laws include many measures to limit potential negative effects of clearcutting on Oregon's private and public lands. Guidance from professional foresters and other natural resource specialists can further ensure that clearcutting is applied with prudent consideration of environmental, economic, and social concerns.
(Adopted May 7, 2003)

Using Pesticides on Forest Lands

The Oregon Society of American Foresters supports the careful use of pesticides that are registered for forest use. Pesticides are an important tool in Integrated Pest Management to help meet forest management objectives by controlling harmful forest pests including unwanted, competing vegetation. (Adopted May 7, 2003)

Managing Mature and Old-Growth Forests

The Oregon Society of American Foresters recognizes the unique characteristics and values that mature and old-growth forests provide. Although there are many definitions for old-growth and none are exact, we describe old-growth as forests having: large snags and downed logs; some patchiness (openings, sometimes brushy and caused partly by loss of large, dead and dying trees); one or more canopy layers; and trees of various size and ages, with some relatively large, old trees. Not all forestlands had or will ever achieve this kind of condition. Exact amounts, tree sizes, and ages for development of each of these forest attributes vary depending on forest type, and some are naturally more uniform or younger (e.g., lodgepole pine and aspen forests) due to frequent natural disturbances such as fire and wind. Mature forests, the stage of stand development preceding old-growth forests, contain some attributes of old-growth forests (e.g., some large diameter trees) but lack other key old-growth characteristics. However, not all mature forests will become old-growth because of natural disturbance (e.g., fire).

A common perception is that actively managing old-growth is inappropriate or incompatible with other values, resulting in proposals to set aside mature and old-growth forests and prohibiting any form of management. ***However, even where non-timber values are primary, active management of mature and old-growth forests may be necessary to promote and/or sustain ecological values over time.*** This is especially true of forests in dry fire-prone landscapes. Old-growth management may include everything from preservation to some level of prescribed burning, thinning trees of various sizes (to reduce competition and preserve big trees from the effects of drought and climate change, insects or disease), salvaging, and planting. Such treatments would not be needed every year; in fact, there may be many decades of inactivity between periods when management actions are most effective.

Therefore, a "one-size-fits-all" management approach to every mature or old-growth forest will not address the range of unique and dynamic forest conditions that occur. ***Rather, site-specific plans will be much more effective in achieving and maintaining old-growth characteristics. These plans should carefully consider local ecological conditions and objectives, social concerns, and policy constraints of the owners or managers.*** (Adopted October 31, 2005)

Riparian Forest Management and Fish

The Oregon Society of American Foresters believes that most state and federal regulations that restrict forest practices in riparian areas in Oregon will benefit fish habitat over time. However, in some locations, forest thinnings and other active management of riparian areas could reduce natural risks (e.g., severe wildfires) or accelerate desired improvements in streamside conditions and fish habitat. Additionally, fish populations can be greatly affected by many human and natural factors other than forest practices and well beyond forest lands. Thus, proposals to further restrict forest practices should be based on credible scientific analyses of all major influences and a wide range of policy alternatives. To achieve this we believe that more extensive research is needed to help identify practices and policies for all primary land uses that are most cost-effective in improving aquatic habitat and fish populations. Furthermore, if public agencies determine that changes in management practices on private forest lands are necessary to achieve public benefits, policy approaches other than regulation (e.g., education, incentives) deserve serious consideration.
(Adopted April 13, 2005)

Landslides on Forest Lands

The Oregon Society of American Foresters (OSAF) recognizes that landslides on forest lands represent a complex scientific, land management and public policy issue. Although sometimes harmful to people or property, landslides often reflect natural processes that can have some ecological benefits.

The geology, terrain and climate of the Oregon Coast Range and western Cascades create significant landslide hazards in some locations. Land use practices, including forest management and construction of highways, homes and power lines can affect landslide occurrence in unstable terrain. Unfortunately, landslide hazards exist in such terrain whether or not such practices occur, and the exact location and timing of landslides cannot be accurately predicted. Identification of hazardous locations for people and property as well as approaches for reducing the presence of people and structures in unstable areas are important policy considerations. Given the local scale of existing hazards, a broad ban on forest management activities on steep slopes would impact many landowners and their important economic contributions, while offering limited benefits to the public.

OSAF supports 1) Carefully designed monitoring and research to further study landslide occurrence and both natural and human influences; 2) continued efforts by professionals with appropriate expertise to interpret current research and field experience and identify and implement management measures (e.g., silviculture and harvest systems, road location and design) that reduce landslides and their impacts, and 3) public policy efforts to reduce landslide impacts through diverse measures that address not only forest management, but also other practices on forest lands, hazard warnings and land use planning. (Adopted December 6, 2002)

Note: The 8 statements shown above are the "core" positions adopted by OSAF. Further discussion of these issues & supporting background material are included the complete position statements, which can be found at www.forestry.org