

# Policy Corner

By Paul W. Adams, Chair, OSAF Policy & Legislation Committee

It's been a busy past few months for forest policy issues and our OSAF Policy Committee, with activities dealing with both public and private forest land management:

## OSAF Sends Updated Position on Riparian Forests to Board of Forestry

OSAF sent its newly updated position statement on "Managing Riparian Forests" (see <http://www.forestry.org/oregon/policy/position/>) to the Oregon Board of Forestry just prior to its meeting on July 23, where it had been expected to make some key decisions about new rules for riparian forests along small and medium fish-bearing streams. Although the Board deferred those decisions, the OSAF cover letter to the Board and position statement made important points about the need and value of active management of riparian forests, as well as the lack of evidence that greater restrictions in other states are cost-effective in providing desirable resource conditions. Specific points stressed in the letter included:

- *Like all forests, riparian areas are locally unique, dynamic and ever-changing. Highly precautionary and restrictive policies (e.g., large "no-touch" zones) for riparian forests have not consistently produced desirable environmental results and do not effectively address changing environmental conditions.*
- *Current research shows few or no persistent, wide-scale impacts to fish populations and general water quality when contemporary practices and Oregon's Forest Practice Rules are applied. Conversely, there is little or no evidence that highly restricted management in riparian forests is a cost-effective approach for achieving desirable resource conditions.*
- *Active management can maintain or improve riparian forest benefits through carefully applied professional forestry, fisheries, and hydrology expertise and experience. There is growing need to encourage active management of many of Oregon's riparian forests, with updated policies and direction to promote research, education and incentives that effectively support desirable resource conditions.*

The updated position statement is expected to be similarly useful as OSAF weighs in on current issues on federal lands (see below), as will the forthcoming update of another key position ("Managing Mature and Old-growth Forests") that expires late this year. OSAF members are encouraged to use its position statements to articulate a professional perspective on forestry issues to decision makers and the interested public.

## OSAF Submits Comments to USFS and BLM on New Management Plans.

In May OSAF submitted responses to the US Forest Service (USFS) about its process for updating management plans for National Forests (NFs) that have followed the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) since 1994. The USFS invited citizens to a series of "Listening Sessions" where attendees were asked for comments about: 1) key concerns in revising the plans, 2) how science should be used, and 3) how the public should be engaged. The agency did not provide a clear alternative for receiving feedback from citizens who did not attend one of the sessions.

The OSAF response stressed the importance of: a) historic laws for NFs, b) full analysis of NWFP results, including litigation and community health, c) the high productivity of many NFs and their role in supplying green products, d) the high compatibility of active management with ecosystem services and values, e) management for forest resilience, and f) a dynamic approach to management versus inflexible land allocations. On the use of science, OSAF stressed the need for: a) technical knowledge and local professional experience, b) more socio-economic and applied research, c) improved standards for reviewing and applying science, and d) avoiding bias and micromanagement by groups that lack on-the-ground management experience. On public involvement, OSAF emphasized: a) routinely highlighting the multiple-use mandate for NFs, b) considering citizens who are unable or unwilling to attend public meetings and/or do not submit comments, and c) input from natural resources professionals independent of their employer interests.

In August, OSAF submitted comments to the BLM on the Draft EIS of its updated Resource Management Plans (RMPs) for its Western Oregon lands. The comments included:

- *As a general principle, Oregon SAF supports legislation, policies and plans that allow and promote active management of most of the O&C land base by knowledgeable and experienced forestry professionals. Included in such management is, very importantly, vegetation management such as tree harvesting for both ecological and economic benefits. We believe that active management is critical to the development of forests that are resilient in the face of climate change, wildfire, insect/disease infestation and other perturbations. Given broad goals, the expertise and experience of local forestry professionals can be used to make informed management decisions to effectively meet those goals. In addition, directives for “no-touch” reserves and other broad and inflexible restrictions are not supported by current science and management experience.*
- *We believe that, to the greatest extent possible, management plans need to clearly define broad goals and then allow local resource managers to use their professional expertise and experience to meet these goals. We believe in the integrity and abilities of agency resource specialists and specialists and that, given clear goals, they can plan and oversee effective actions to meet multiple and diverse forest resource goals. Consequently, we disagree with RMP directives that are overly prescriptive, unnecessarily limit the use of expertise and experience of local resource specialists, and do not adequately address site-specific conditions.*

In addition, the cover letter stressed that, for BLM and other federal forest lands in Oregon:

- *A significant increase in active management of federal forest lands can substantially improve forest resource and community health, diversity and sustainability. Active management, including outputs of commercial forest products, represents an opportunity rather than a threat to achieving and maintaining forest health and ecological diversity. Forest products are arguably among the greenest of the natural resources needed to sustain society. From the basis of both existing federal law and a visionary approach to meeting future human needs, federal forest lands have a key role in providing a significant source of these products. With relatively few exceptions, management that includes outputs of commercial forest products is highly compatible with the maintenance or enhancement of environmental values.*