

The Oregon Family Forestlands and Federal Forests Connection (3/10/08 letter to Federal Forestland Advisory Committee)

The Committee for Family Forestlands (CFF) is a standing committee commissioned by the Oregon legislature to advise the Oregon State Forester and the Oregon Board of Forestry on issues of importance to family forestland owners -- some 40,000 Oregonians, each managing between 10 and 5,000 acres of Oregon forestland. Our committee is made up of family forestland owners from different areas of the state, environmental organization and forest industry representatives, a citizen-at-large and ex-officio members representing the Department of Forestry, Extension Service, Oregon Forest Resources Institute and logging or forestry consulting interests.

A large number of the 40,000 landowners we represent before the State Forester and Board of Forestry have a nexus with federal forestlands in Oregon be it through shared access roads, ownership boundaries, fish and wildlife that migrate back and forth, timber markets, etc. The nexus results in a sense of shared fate where the values, services and products forests provide are a result of joint enterprise, i.e. technical service availability, or interdependence, i.e. stream quality, bio-fuel markets, or slope stability. Many of the family forestlands are in urban interface areas and in the landscape where Oregonians live, work and play.

We know well that family forestland owners hold a range of purposes and a diversity of values related to their lands. Still, the fact remains that managing Oregon's forest landscape is a joint responsibility. Federal forests dominate in scale in many areas and therefore in effect in a number of critical areas like forest health, timber economies, stream quality, and (by law) endangered species management. In these areas federal forest management decisions impact all forest landowner classes – state lands, industrial lands and family forestlands. Beyond generally shared concerns, family forestland owners have several specific concerns that deserve your attention.

First, family forest neighbors of the federal lands have growing concerns over what they see happening on the landscape level. They see an increasing risk of wildfire, insects, diseases and invasive species spreading onto their ownerships from federal forests. There are also growing challenges for maintaining cooperative access across land ownerships for purposes of forest management and fire prevention. Fire protection costs and in some instances resource losses due to wildfires moving onto private lands have been rising in parallel to these growing challenges. These concerns are commonly shared by family forestland owners around the state. Improving federal forest management so as to reduce the risks to your neighbors is important to all family forestland owners.

Second and greater yet are concerns of the family forestland owners located in central, eastern and southern Oregon regarding federal land management. Federal ownership truly dominates the forested landscape in these areas of the state. In these regions private

forestland owners are losing critical markets for their wood products, due to federal withdrawals from the timber base. The public in testimony and Federal Forest Advisory Committee members have described the impact that such withdrawals have had on mill closures and related loss of other forestry infrastructure. In these regions private forest management has reached a “tipping point” regarding critical infrastructure for forest industry. The continued economic viability of these lands as working forests is in question. Family forestlands have traditionally been a reservoir of timber flowing on to the markets in peak demand periods and subsiding at other times. But base flows to support industry and infrastructure depend on larger land owner classes and in these regions that means federal lands. These impacts are now critical and the need for solutions is now for central, eastern and southern Oregon family forestland owners!

Our committee appreciates your work on tough federal forest issues. We share these concerns because of the importance of your mission to the some 40,000 family forestland owners in the state. We believe these issues are also important to the sustainability of all of Oregon’s forests and therefore important to Oregon. We encourage you to find as much common ground among yourselves as possible, and to complete your mission on time, but also to find a way to answer the Governor’s call to be bold in your recommendations about future federal forest management.

Oregon needs healthy forests and Oregon’s family forestland owners need confidence that federal partners understand the significant impact they have on the well-being of family forests. We encourage you to focus on recommendations that can be broadly supported and forwarded to congress and the Bush administration directly. We don’t need another federal forest planning effort that produces a report gathering dust on a shelf. Something much more is needed from your efforts. Certainly Oregon’s family forestland owners need much more than that. What is needed is a call to action!

Thank you for listening to the concerns of the Committee for Family Forestlands. Please call on us if we can be of service to you.

Sincerely,

Gary Springer, Vice Chair
For the Committee for Family Forestlands

Attachments: CFF charter, CFF contact list