

Oregon Families & Their Forestlands: What's at Stake April 27-28, 2007 - Oregon State University

The following has been excerpted from the draft proceedings of the 2007 Family Forestlands Symposium for the Oregon Forest Trust Advisory Committee to give an indication of the amount of discussion of the symposium that related to ecosystem services.

The Committee for Family Forestlands (CFF) and the Oregon Board of Forestry co-sponsored a successful second family forestland symposium (the first was held in 2001) at the LaSells Stewart Center on the OSU campus in late April.

This year's symposium, "Oregon Families & Their Forestlands: What's at Stake," was designed to take some of the most important "survivability issues" for family forestlands and turn them into an action plan. This action plan will have elements for the Committee for Family Forestlands, Board of Forestry, OSWA, Extension Service, Department of Forestry, and others to work on in the coming years.

As a result of the hard work of symposium participants, a "Top 10 Solutions" list was developed. When you read through the list, some clear themes emerge: intergenerational land ownership and land management transfer; development of markets for traditional and non-traditional forest products (including something new called "ecosystem services"); better understanding and sharing of values between landowners and the non-landowning public; adapting to changing social and environmental climates. You will read much more about these themes as the various groups listed above grapple with them.

The symposium's general-session speakers and participants in the small group "breakout sessions" produced a number of ideas for positive action and examples of work that is already being done by both individuals and groups to address some of these challenges. It is not as if all landowners are waiting around for someone to solve their problems for them. One of the real take-home messages from this event was that we need to do a better job of ferreting out good ideas that are already showing promise and expand upon them.

The overall message arising from the two-day conversation was that, even with all its demands, most family forestland owners know they have a good life—good for themselves, good for their neighbors, good for society. There was a firm consensus that finding solutions to the challenges, even the really tough ones, is worth the time and effort.

The task faced by attendees of the Symposium was to consider the whole complement of family forest issues and then work to narrow and distill them into a few practical recommendations for the Committee for Family Forestlands and the Board of Forestry.

The agenda included four general sessions with intervening breakout sessions. Each attendee was assigned to one of 10 facilitated breakout groups, each with 15-20 members, and remained with that group for the duration of the symposium.

Breakout groups met for three long meetings. Members discussed the issues that emerged from five regional roundtables held through Oregon earlier this year and generated a few practical, workable solutions that could be incorporated into an Action Plan.

Breakout Group Results

For most symposium participants, **compensation for ecosystem services and other societal benefits** is clearly the most urgent problem. Five groups (#1, #2, #3, #9, and #10) addressed the problem in slightly different forms. A synthesized list of solutions from these groups includes:

- Develop financial incentives (cost-share programs, others) for maintaining and enhancing environmental values and services
- Reduce state inheritance taxes
- Develop and increase access to market for carbon sequestration
- Enact “hold harmless” agreements protecting landowners from trespasser liability lawsuits
- Enact tax credits for keeping land in forest
- Create a “green credit” forest fund to pay for conservation easements on family forestlands
- Develop a multi-level set of performance standards, with policy and market incentives for managing to stricter environmental standards than those in the Forest Practices Act
- Improve Oregon’s land-use planning process to increase private flexibility while retaining public value

The next most important need is to **solve the conflict of values and reach out to the wider community**. Two groups (#3 and #8) addressed this issue, generating these solutions:

- Develop more intensive public education on forestry and family landowner issues
- Organize more family forest tours for the public and school children
- Increase capacity of family forestland owners to engage the wider community and elected officials
- Partner with NGOs to find funding, provide training, and develop educational material
- Reach out to rural property owners with diverging views
- Promote work opportunities for older children

The third most important need is to take advantage of **opportunities presented by global climate change**. The group that addressed this problem (#5) looked past the financial incentives of carbon banking to make the point that the public alarm over global climate change offers an opportunity to align the interests of family forestland owners with those of the larger society. In this way, this group’s solutions also address conflicts of values and outreach to the community.

This group proposed that family forestland owners:

- Demonstrate how management practices align with societal values
- Create jobs and business opportunities that improve economic conditions and the environment

- Stimulate synergy between environmental groups, tree farmers, manufacturers, and consumers
- Reconnect urban and rural Oregonians through the marketplace

The fourth most important need is to **improve the delivery of stewardship information to family forestland owners**, targeting particularly those who are not now being reached. The solutions proposed by the group that addressed this need (#6) also echo concerns about conflicts of values and outreach to the community. Group #6 proposed the following solutions:

- Train foresters who interact with family forestland owners to talk to them about the Ties to the Land family succession program
- Use the Ties to the Land program to engage landowners who are not now being reached by any forestry stewardship programs
- Build new coalitions among public agencies, private citizens, and industry

The fifth most important need is to **develop markets for locally harvested forest products**. The group that addressed this issue (#7) proposed these solutions:

- Develop local farmer’s markets for wood products
- Build awareness of and pride in using locally grown wood and other products
- Improve marketing and public relations efforts on behalf of local wood products (the example given was “Get on Oregon Field Guide)

The General Sessions

Five of the symposium general session speakers included information related to ecosystem services in their comments.

Steve Hobbs, Chair, Board of Forestry
 “Public policy implications”

Family forestlands occupy an important niche in Oregon’s landscape, providing ecological benefits at lower elevations in the face of growing urbanization. The most urgent public policy issues affecting family forestlands are:

- Reduction in federal harvests and subsequent loss of manufacturing infrastructure
- Growing urban and suburban populations that are unaware and unappreciative of the value of forests for providing material and other needs
- Lack of funding for ecosystem services provided by family forests
- Lack of public investment in forestry research and education
- Conversion of forestlands out of forest use

Public attitudes are becoming more accepting of forestry. Global climate change provides opportunities for carbon banking as well as demand for local sources of energy. Opportunities exist to develop new markets.

Brent Davies, Ecotrust
“Strategies of Conservation-based Forestry”

Since the last Symposium, conservation-based strategies have emerged in Oregon to help sustain family forestlands. These include the Northwest Sustainable Timber Growers, whose members are FSC certified and who mill and market their logs in the United States. In addition, a carbon-credit market has emerged. Ecotrust Forests LLC is showing that active forest management can be both ecologically and economically feasible.

Martin Goebel, Sustainable Northwest
“Preserving Family Forests through New Market Opportunities”

More resources exist today for sustaining family forestland owners than there were 15-20 years ago. Markets are emerging for small woodland owners to add value to their products, to market them locally, and to gain income from nontraditional products. Members of Sustainable Northwest’s partnership Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities are seeking market-driven solutions for restoring forests and community vitality, and other non-profit groups are working toward the same goal. Active restorative forestry is becoming more socially acceptable. Such reinvestment in the land helps retain forest as forest.

Jim Brown, retired Oregon State Forester
“Shifting Context”

The current context of family forestland ownership is marked by these developments:

- A shift toward an urban population with little understanding of working landscapes
- Changes in industrial ownership forms, notably the shift from integrated forest-products companies to timber investment management organizations (TIMOs and real-estate investment trusts (REITs)
- Dwindling of state general-fund dollars to support natural resource agencies
- Legislative term limits, which have forced knowledgeable elected officials out and increased the power of unelected agency employees and lobbyists
- Increased reliance on computer models to make management decisions, rather than limiting their use to aiding and supporting human judgment
- The emergence of new conservation groups willing to move beyond the protection paradigm and embrace active management for conservation goals
- Regulations that have reached the limits of their effectiveness

Most of these trends will continue. State agencies are not likely to receive higher funding, cities and suburbs will keep growing, timberlands held for investment purposes are likely to be bought and sold faster than those held for resource-supply purposes, protecting public values on forestlands will become more important and more contentious, and regulations will be ineffective in meeting public expectations. Nontraditional conservation groups could be helpful in meeting these challenges, but those focused on preservation will not.

The key issue faced by the Board and the Department is: Does this state want a viable forest industry in the future? If the answer is yes, then policymakers should negotiate a discussion aimed at forging a new social contract with rural Oregon. This discussion should:

- Help the public understand what is at stake and why they should care
- Work with interested parties to develop new tools to keep strategic lands as forest
- Visit with community leaders and develop political capital
- Cultivate working relationships with new conservation groups and landowners who “get it”

Oregon is changing, as it always has. Natural change is never-ending, and human activity influences it. Conservation is about managing the rate of change.

John Bliss, Starker Chair for Family Forests, College of Forestry, OSU
“Closing Remarks”

Realizing the potential benefits of family forestry involves meeting several challenges:

1. Economies of scale are a reality. Especially in commodity markets, small-scale owners are at a disadvantage. Competing in tough markets, and creating new markets, may require cooperation and collaboration. And who got into forestry to collaborate?
2. Markets for many of the goods and services family forest owners produce—ecological services, carbon sequestration, habitat mitigation, certified forest products, special forest products, and recreation—are immature. Innovators and early adopters often find themselves on the “bleeding edge.”
3. Fear of change, mistrust of others (urbanites, enviros, and Californians, for Pete’s sake!), and a “circle the wagons” mentality will prevent many family forest owners from participating in emerging opportunities.

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