



AFRC’s Annual Meeting, “Fired Up for Change,” April 23-25

Registration is now open for [AFRC’s 2019 Annual Meeting](#) at beautiful Skamania Lodge! Our [agenda](#) features exciting speakers, engaging presentations, and ample time to network with colleagues, elected officials, and agency leaders.

The meeting begins on Tuesday, April 23 with the AFRC Open golf tournament. It’s a scramble format (use the group’s best shot), so grab three of your buddies and sign up as a team. Or, if your buddies are not going to help you win the coveted trophy, sign up as an individual and we will place you on a team. Mulligans will be available for \$20 a shot with proceeds going to AFRC’s local Habitat for Humanity project near Vancouver.

On Wednesday, April 24, you will hear from Congressman Kurt Schrader (OR-05) who will speak about forest policy, catastrophic wildfire, and smoke in a divided Congress. You will also hear from Washington’s Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz, who manages one of the largest public timber programs in the United States; an inspiring panel of community leaders that responded to Southwest Oregon’s catastrophic fires and smoke crisis with grassroots organization and a powerful message; and state department leads who will share successes and challenges of the Good Neighbor Authority in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.

IN THIS ISSUE

- AFRC Annual Meeting
- DC Update
- BLM 2019 Timber Sale Program
- Washington Legislative Update
- Lower Grave
- Inyo Resolution Meeting
- Regulatory Review
- Montana Forests in Focus 2.0
- Little Naches Watershed
- Member Profile: Hampton

As usual, we will host the “Public Forest Managers’ Breakouts” for Forest Service Regions 1, 4, 5, and 6, the Oregon Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR). These interactive sessions provide industry representatives with opportunities to engage directly with Forest Service Regional leadership and decision makers, learn more about current and future timber sale programs, and discuss both challenges and opportunities on national forests. On Wednesday night, AFRC will host its annual banquet. It’s a fun night of excellent food and drink in a beautiful location with great company.

On Thursday morning, April 25, participants will get an update on the activities of the U.S. Congress during the “The Bill and Heath Show” before hearing from AFRC’s

Legal Team about forestry victories in the courtroom. An abbreviated AFRC Board meeting for members, which will include the selection of new AFRC officers, will follow the Annual Meeting.

Please join us for this year's substantive, interesting, and timely "Fired Up for Change" AFRC Annual Meeting. If you have questions, please call Cindi Kaneshige at 503-222-9505.

Washington, D.C. Update

Fiscal Year 2019 Appropriations. On February 14, Congress passed Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Appropriations for the roughly half of the federal government that had been operating under a series of Continuing Resolutions and were subjected to a record 35-day partial government shutdown. Impacted departments included the Department of the Interior and U.S. Forest Service. The funding bill will provide the U.S. Forest Service with an *additional* \$108 million in wildfire suppression funding, bringing the total wildfire preparedness and suppression budget to over \$3 billion. The hazardous fuels reduction budget increased by \$5 million to \$435 million and the Forest Products budget was increased by \$2 million to \$368 million.

The Forest Service sold nearly 3.2 billion board feet of timber in FY18 – the highest level since the late 1990s. The agency set an initial target of 3.7 billion board feet for FY19, but it is unclear what impact the partial government shutdown will have on the ability to reach that volume target. Congress has also not reimbursed the Forest Service for \$700 million it was forced to "borrow" from other program accounts when it exhausted its wildfire suppression funding last summer, including from trust fund accounts that support the timber sale program. This reimbursement is necessary because the funding fix enacted in 2018 does not go into effect until FY20.

Funding for the management of the BLM's O&C lands in Western Oregon will remain flat at nearly \$107 million in FY19. The BLM has been directed to achieve a 278 million board feet (mmbf) timber program in FY19, which would be a significant increase over the FY18 target of 216 mmbf and the 175 mmbf the agency sold. AFRC remains concerned about the discrepancy between the timber volume the BLM is *funded to achieve* versus the amount of timber volume the BLM actually *sells and awards*. This month, AFRC led a Western Oregon industry [letter](#) to Interior Appropriators requesting increased funding and accountability for the BLM timber sale program.

Congress Passes LWCF and Public Lands Omnibus. As reported in both the [December AFRC News](#) and [January AFRC News](#), Congress has been considering a 362-page omnibus public lands package that would permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and includes dozens of public lands and sportsmen's bills, including components of the "Oregon Wildlands Act" introduced by Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR). Oregon Congressman Greg Walden's proposal to better protect Crooked River Ranch by modifying a Wilderness Study Area boundary (688 acres) is also included.

The Senate passed the legislation on February 12 by a 92-8 vote, and the House followed suit on February 26, passing the bill by a vote of 363-62. The legislation enjoys strong support among sportsmen's organizations and is expected to be signed into law by President Trump.

The 362-page omnibus public lands bill includes the following provisions from the Oregon Wildlands Act:

- Frank Moore Special Management Area (99k acres)
- Rogue Wild & Scenic (W&S) additions on 125 miles
- Devil’s Staircase wilderness (30k acres)
- Chetco W&S additions
- Molalla River W&S
- Elk River W&S
- Nestucca River W&S

However, the package does not include provisions from Wyden’s original Oregon Wildlands Act to expand the Rogue Wilderness area and establish new National Recreation Areas near the Rogue and Molalla Rivers.

AFRC and Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities have been working to educate Congress and the public about the need for active forest management to thin overstocked forests and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire – management activities that will be restricted or prohibited by Wilderness and Wild & Scenic designations. This message has been gaining traction in the debate surrounding the Oregon Wildlands Act as demonstrated by a [recent Eugene Register-Guard op-ed](#) by Curry County Commissioner Court Boice and a [bipartisan letter](#) sent this month from Oregon state legislators.

President Trump Nominates David Bernhardt. On February 4, President Donald Trump nominated David Bernhardt to serve as the Secretary of the Interior. Bernhardt, the current Deputy Interior Secretary, has been serving as the Acting Secretary since former Secretary Ryan Zinke left in early January. Bernhardt also served at the Department of the Interior during the George W. Bush Administration, including stints as the Interior Solicitor and the Director of Congressional and Legislative Affairs.

Growing up in rural Colorado, Bernhardt has a unique perspective on the connection between natural resources and rural economies and is also an avid hunter and angler. Bernhardt also worked on Capitol Hill for former Republican Colorado Congressman Scott McInnis, one of the original sponsors of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. During his time as Interior Solicitor and again as Deputy Secretary Bernhardt has also become familiar with the key legal and policy issues related to the BLM O&C lands in Western Oregon.

Senate confirmation hearings have not yet been scheduled. The Senate did vote 53-43 to confirm Bernhardt as Deputy Secretary in July 2017.

House Natural Resources Climate Change Hearing. On February 13, the House Natural Resources National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee held a hearing entitled “Climate Change and Public Lands: Examining Impacts and Considering Adaptation Opportunities.” This was the first hearing of the subcommittee under the new Democratic majority and came on the heels of the “Green New Deal” initiative championed by Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and other progressives in Congress.

As usual, the opening statements and questions by committee members largely followed party line messaging about carbon emissions and the impacts of climate change. One bright spot was the testimony of Dr. Elaine Oneil, a University of Washington research scientist, Director of Science and Sustainability at the Consortium for Research on Renewable Industrial Materials (CORRIM), and Executive Director of the Washington Farm Forestry Association. Dr. Oneil’s testimony highlighted the benefits of forest management to reduce the size and severity of catastrophic wildfire and the associated emissions, as well as the carbon sequestration benefits of actively managed forests and wood products, including their substitution for more carbon-intensive building products like concrete and steel.

The Committee’s [website](#) includes links to the written testimony of the witnesses and a webcast of the hearing (Dr. Oneil’s oral testimony begins at the 29:50 mark). /Heath Heikkila

BLM 2019 Timber Sale Program Elevated

In 2016, the Obama Administration finalized the controversial Resource Management Plans (RMPs) governing management of more than two million acres of the statutorily unique O&C Lands. The RMPs provide a plan for the management of both timber resources and forest habitat. If fully implemented, the plans could produce more timber volume than the Northwest Forest Plan, which set a harvest level of *less than 20 percent* of annual forest growth on the O&C Lands.

Under the RMPs, timber production will primarily come from land designated as Harvest Land Base (HLB). Timber volume is also expected as a “byproduct” generated from active management in lands designated as Late-Successional and Riparian Reserves. Based on the BLM’s modeling and calculations, the HLB is expected to produce 205 mmbf/year while thinning on the Reserve lands is estimated to produce 73 mmbf/year for a total of 278 mmbf/year. This volume target has not been achieved since the plans were finalized in 2016.

AFRC learned in February the BLM has been directed by DC leadership to accelerate its approach to fully implement the RMPs to achieve 278 mmbf. A District breakdown of this year’s timber program is available below.

District	Assigned Target
Salem	77
Eugene	73
Roseburg	42
Coos Bay	30
Medford	42
Lakeview	6
Total	270**

Achieving these higher targets is achievable if the BLM adheres to the management called for in the RMP. Previously, under the Northwest Forest Plan, the BLM largely deferred the regeneration harvest treatments required by that plan in favor of a thinning-only paradigm. So far, it seems that the BLM is trying to avoid a similar unsustainable path and instead follow the RMPs direction on sustained-yield timber management more

closely by implementing a mix of thinning and regeneration harvest. This approach, following the RMP models and maximizing treatment on all available acres, would help grow the program quicker than anticipated. Catching up on a 20-year backlog of regeneration harvest not only will

get their sustained-yield schedule back on track, but it will also generate more volume per acre harvested. /Andy Geissler

**The remaining 8 mmbf will likely be generated through “add-on” volume as active timber sales are harvested.

Washington Legislative Update

The Washington legislature recently passed the 40th day of the 2019 legislative session, which marks the first cut-off date for bills to be passed out of their respective policy committees. As reported in the [January AFRC News](#), identical legislation has been introduced in the House and Senate to require additional analysis of the impact of the Marbled Murrelet Long Term Conservation Strategy on harvest levels and revenue for beneficiaries, including Junior Taxing Districts.

The legislation ([SB5547/HB1546](#)) was amended to address concerns raised by DNR and other stakeholders and approved by the House and Senate policy committees. The substitute versions of the bills direct DNR to prepare the impact analysis rather than the Joint Legislative Review and Audit Committee (JLARC) and clarify the language seeking to restore management in acres currently constrained by Alternatives F&G. The bills now move forward to the fiscal committees in both chambers.

Community Forests. There has also been legislative interest in creating and funding a “Community Forest” program. Two bills have been introduced ([HB1946/SB5873](#)), and both seek to highlight the importance of forests to rural communities. HB 1946, sponsored by Rep. Mike Chapman (D-Port Angeles), included language to highlight the need to protect working forests from conversion to non-forest uses. It also seeks to protect the jobs these forests provide to rural communities in Washington. The forest products sector - particularly the milling infrastructure - is concerned with the loss of working forest lands and appreciates the intent of the legislation. However, questions and concerns have been raised about the pending community forest bills.

Stakeholders have raised concerns about the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing oversight of the program, economic viability, potential impacts to timber volume offered to the market, and the need for ongoing state funding of these community forests. AFRC is also concerned about potential competition for funds from the State Capital Budget, which also faces unmet requests to mitigate impacts on small forest landowners from the Forest and Fish Agreement. There will also be competition for scarce public dollars to mitigate for the loss of state trust land revenue to beneficiaries due to harvest restrictions under the Marbled Murrelet Long Term Conservation Strategy. DNR is spearheading a pilot project for \$28.3 million to purchase replacement lands in Pacific, Wahkiakum, and Skamania counties due to marbled murrelet and spotted owl restrictions.

AFRC and others testified on HB 1946 on February 13th in the House Rural Development, Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee. You can listen to the testimony of AFRC and the Washington Forest Protection Association [here](#). Many of the same comments and concerns were raised regarding SB 5873 before the Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources, & Parks Committee on February 19th. You can view the testimony [here](#).

Both bills have been amended with substitute bills, [SHB 1946](#) and [SSB 5873](#), in an attempt to address stakeholder concerns raised during the hearings. SHB 1946 passed out of the policy committee on a straight party-line vote. SSB 5873 has morphed into a pilot project that will fund the top three community forest proposals DNR identified last year as part of a report to the legislature: the Nason Ridge project in Chelan County, the Mount Adams Resource Stewards Outlet Creek Tract proposal in Klickitat County, and the Gold Hill Community Forest proposal outside of Chewelah.

Both bills are now before the fiscal committees. SSB 5873 is scheduled for a hearing on March 1st in Senate Ways and Means Committee. AFRC will continue to engage on this issue and work to assure working forest lands are maintained and provide a source of raw materials and jobs for our members and the communities they serve.

B&O Tax Extension. While AFRC doesn't typically engage in taxation issues, legislation (HB1348/HB1324) is pending in the Washington legislature to extend the preferential Business & Occupation (B&O) tax rate currently enjoyed by forests products manufacturers from 2024 to 2056. Making this change now would provide the industry additional long-term certainty and has important benefits under legislative fiscal scoring rules. AFRC recently sent a [letter](#) to legislative leaders expressing support for the legislation, which is being spearheaded by Rep. Mike Chapman (D-Port Angeles) and Jacquelin Maycumber (R-Colville). /*Matt Comisky and Heath Heikkila*

Oregon Magistrate Judge's Findings and Recommendation Remands the Lower Grave Project Back to the BLM

The Lower Grave Vegetation Management Project ("Lower Grave") occurs within the Grave Creek watershed in the Medford BLM District (Grants Pass Resource Area). The project only authorizes commercial treatment on just 582 acres, or 2.5%, out of the 22,841-acre planning area. Also, the project authorizes non-commercial hazardous fuel reduction treatment on 378 acres. There is an ecological need for "reducing stand density, retaining older trees with large crowns, favoring drought-tolerant species, providing structural complexity." The project occurs on land that is governed by the O&C Act, forestland reserved for permanent forest production. Eighty-six percent of the project's acreage is on Matrix lands, which was designated under the Northwest Forest Plan specifically for timber harvest and other silvicultural activities.

Environmental groups challenged the project, alleging that the BLM violated NEPA because it (1) failed to consider a reasonable range of alternatives; (2) failed to supplement NEPA in response to a newly established northern spotted owl nest site; and (3) failed to take a "hard look" at effects of the project on the northern spotted owl regarding an alleged pattern of "overharvest." AFRC filed an *amicus curiae* brief in support of the project and argued at the hearing in October 2018.

On February 20, Magistrate Judge Clarke issued a [Findings & Recommendation](#) to grant partial summary judgment in favor of environmental plaintiffs. First, the court concluded that BLM failed to consider a reasonable range of alternatives, where BLM only considered two alternatives: a no-action alternative and the proposed action. Here the court determined that the no-action alternative would not meet any of the stated goals and purposes of the project and,

therefore, was unfeasible. For that reason, the court found that BLM's consideration of the proposed action and an unreasonable no-action alternative did not satisfy NEPA's minimum requirements.

The court concluded that plaintiffs' preferred ecological forestry alternative should have been analyzed. Interestingly, in another case, *Oregon Wild v. BLM*, No. 6-14-cv-110-AA, 2015 WL 1190131 (D. Or. March 14, 2015), two of the plaintiffs here successfully argued that an EIS (rather than an EA) was required for BLM's White Castle Project in southern Oregon, where BLM applied "Ecological Forestry" to harvest 187 acres. The court, however, concluded that BLM was required to explain why the Ecological Forestry alternative would have been unfeasible by providing the public with information about the level of timber harvest necessary to make the project economically viable.

The court rejected plaintiffs' remaining claims but provided a conclusory statement about wildfires and the importance of collaboration:

"The Court is mindful of staying in its judicial 'lane,' and, in particular, not attempting to be a forestry expert. However, the Court cannot help but be aware of the economic and environmental destruction caused by recent severe wildfires in Southern Oregon. Everyone agrees immediate action is needed in the forests to reduce serious future risk to life, property, and the forests themselves. The stakeholders in environmental litigation like the present case have developed an unfortunate, but understandable, mistrust of each other over many years of doing battle in court. This Court, having handled these cases for many years, believes that all parties are acting in good faith. Although they have differing perspectives, they do have common goals, including improving forest health and increasing fire resiliency, and they share a sincere desire to manage forests in a sustainable and economically appropriate way for future generations.

The government, environmental groups, and timber interests have collaborated on successful forest management projects in recent years. It can be done. Each party has expertise that should be at the table in discussing and planning these public projects. Such collaboration has the promise to result in more transparency, improved outcomes, and fewer projects stuck in time-consuming litigation. As with most compromise in life, 'the perfect should not get in the way of the good.' This project fell short of that collaborative spirit."

The parties have an opportunity to object to Judge Clarke's Findings and Recommendation to district court judge Michael McShane. /*Sara Ghafouri*

Inyo Objection Resolution Meeting Progress

The Forest Service held its objection resolution meeting on the Land and Resource Management Plan on the Inyo National Forest in Bishop, CA from February 19 to 21. AFRC and the California Forestry Association (Calforests) jointly objected to certain aspects of the proposed plan in early October. The Inyo is the first plan in California to be developed under the 2012 Planning Rule, and the Sierra and Sequoia Plans are also under revision. Though the Inyo does not consistently produce commercial timber, there are occasional sales which are economical for transport to mills.

Among the issues, the Plan documents contain inconsistencies and unclear provisions. Although the proposed Plan contains exceptions to the planned 30” diameter harvest limit, it does not include sufficient flexibility to allow for achievement of desired conditions such as structural diversity and wildfire resilience. Our objection also asks the Forest to commit to a fixed list of species of conservation concern (SOCCs) rather than a website listing; to clarify that compliance with the Forest Plan direction is sufficient to meet any obligation toward SOCCs; and to use a monitoring program that is achievable. Finally, we called new science to the Forest Service’s attention which shows that management of California Spotted Owls should focus on 10-acre nest patches rather than 300-acre “protected area centers.”

At the resolution meeting, AFRC and Calforests achieved resolution of some of our objections, particularly those relating to Plan consistency and clarity. We also defended the proposed management direction recognizing the need to recover economic value from salvaged timber, and direction which would not require extensive forest-wide plant surveys similar to the Northwest Forest Plan Survey & Manage program. A wide variety of stakeholders attended the meeting, including motorized recreational users, environmental groups, the regional electric utility, hiking groups, and local governments.

We will continue to engage with other stakeholders to attempt to find resolution where possible and will continue to advocate to ensure the Inyo is available for active management. AFRC and Calforests appreciate the efforts of the Forest Service to conduct a focused and productive meeting. /*Lawson Fite*

Supreme Court to Decide on Regulatory Review Case

The Supreme Court ended 2018 with a bang in the *Weyerhaeuser* case finally imposing limits on critical habitat designations. An upcoming administrative law case could have similarly significant effects.

The case of [*Kisor v. Wilkie*](#) concerns the date that an injured veteran’s benefits will become effective, but sweeps much broader because it will address how courts should deal with agencies’ interpretations of their own regulations. Under current law, an agency’s interpretation of a regulation it issued is given “controlling weight” unless erroneous or inconsistent with the regulation. This is known as “*Auer* deference” or “*Seminole Rock* deference” after the two cases establishing the principle, [*Auer v. Robbins*](#) (1997) and [*Bowles v. Seminole Rock & Sand Co.*](#) (1945). The doctrine has come under scrutiny and criticism from many Justices. Justice Scalia wrote in the forest roads case that *Auer* had become a “dangerous permission slip” for agencies to rewrite their regulations without going through the proper comment procedures. Justice Gorsuch also roundly criticized the doctrine before being nominated to the Supreme Court. Practically speaking, this rule creates concerns about agencies being able to impose burdensome regulations on business in excess of their legal authority.

In the forest management context, deference to the agency’s regulations can be helpful. The Ninth Circuit treats forest plans or RMPs as the equivalent of regulation so that the Forest Service gets “controlling weight” when saying what its own plan means. Even if the Court decides to scrap *Auer*, however, it does not have any basis to undo the strong deference agencies get for technical terms and determinations under the Administrative Procedure Act. *Kisor* will

be argued March 27, 2019, and a decision is expected by the end of the Supreme Court term in June. */Lawson Fite*

Montana's Forests in Focus 2.0

In 2014, Montana Governor Steve Bullock launched the Forests in Focus Initiative to address overwhelming forest health and wildland fire risk issues across the state. Since its inception, Forests in Focus investments have helped support: the treatment of more than 300,000 acres of forest land, production of nearly 190 million board feet of timber, and retention of 3,000 jobs in the forest products sector.

[Forests in Focus 2.0](#) was published by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and is similar to the Shared Stewardship concept recently signed in Idaho. This new strategy charts a course for key stakeholders to collaboratively address Montana's most pressing needs in forest health and wildfire risk across Montana. Forests in Focus 2.0 brings partnering organizations together to propose one comprehensive plan for the state. It emphasizes better planning, a well-organized statewide collaborative effort, and scaling partnerships down to the local level.

This new effort was largely driven by the fact that over the past ten years, over half of Montana's forests have experienced insect and disease outbreaks of epidemic proportions. Of Montana's 23 million acres of forested land, nearly 11 million acres have been affected by forest pests such as the mountain pine beetle, Douglas-fir beetle, and spruce budworm. Another 3 million acres have been impacted by root diseases.

One specific action includes Montana DNRC launching a Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) Program to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and management on federal lands and across ownership boundaries. This authority allows the DNRC to serve as the "agent" of the Forest Service and use state contracting procedures to conduct forest restoration and management activities on the ground, complementing traditional strategies. The Montana GNA program will develop mutual and measurable annual objectives with Region 1 and each National Forest in the state.

AFRC looks forward to working with Montana DNRC and the seven individual National Forests in Montana to help implement Forests in Focus 2.0. */Tom Partin*

AFRC Helps Kickoff Little Naches Watershed Project

On February 21, the Little Naches Working Group (LNWG) met in Naches, Washington for the first of three workshops to kick off a new landscape planning area called the Little Naches Watershed Project on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. The LNWG was created in 2013 by stakeholders with interest in the Little Naches Watershed.

The Little Naches Planning area is part of the Tapash Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) that was initiated in 2010 by Congressional action. The Tapash CFLRP was one of the first seven CFLRP areas to be designated and funded.

Due to setbacks in getting forest assessment work completed, District Ranger Kelly Lawrence decided in 2015 to move forward with the Little Naches Planning Area, which had all of the assessments completed. That project, called Little Crow, is located on the south part of the Little Naches Planning Area. Timber sales from that project are now coming to the market with the Huck Project sold in FY17 and the Finn Project scheduled for sale in FY19.

Now, the LNWG is turning its attention back to the larger portion of the Little Naches Watershed. The meeting on February 21 included an opportunity for each stakeholder group to discuss their expectations as the project is developed. Two additional workshops scheduled for March 28 and April 25 will help to develop a timeline for the project, list potential projects, and continue to build consensus. Pre-scoping information for the Little Naches Watershed Project is anticipated by the end of 2019. AFRC supports the scale of this project and the need for restoration. The Little Naches Watershed Project is another key landscape project that should help the Okanogan-Wenatchee increase the pace and scale of management on that Forest to address forest health, riparian, recreation and other resource needs. / *Tom Partin*

Member Profile: Michelle Skjei, Hampton Lumber

Michelle Skjei doesn't take no for an answer. She turned a temporary job taken in July of 2005 to supplement her three boys' school clothes, into a permanent career that she loves. Michelle is currently an accomplished Journey-Level Lead Electrician for Hampton Lumber, and she admits the journey hasn't been easy.

“Coming into my apprenticeship, I was scared that I couldn't do the job physically or mentally. I was also afraid that the men in the field wouldn't take me seriously. However, I have had nothing but positive interactions with Hampton and my colleagues. We all respect each other and get the job at hand done daily. It was a very hard journey with three kids and a husband but one that I will never regret.”

Michelle's journey began in 2005 when she was assigned to Hampton through a temp agency. She enjoyed the job as she was being trained to work in different areas of the mill. Michelle stuck with it and was hired permanently in 2006 and found she loved the challenge. During this time, Hampton was taking on new electrical apprentices. She was nervous about applying, largely because she hadn't been at Hampton that long and at the time, there were no women in the maintenance department.

After speaking with her supervisor who encouraged her to apply, Michelle went through a panel interview process with about 15 other employees. There were only three spots open, and unfortunately, she was not one of the three chosen.

Michelle was disappointed. She knew she could do the job, and it would be a positive change for her family – she wanted a career she could grow with, not just a job.

However, a week later one of the three people chosen backed out. Michelle wasted no time, approached the electrical supervisor, and asked for a chance. Even with uncertainty about the number of positions and options, Michelle wasn't deterred. Daily she went in search of the electrical supervisor to plead her case of why she was the right person for the job.

Finally, her persistence paid off. Michelle interviewed for the third position along with two others and all were given a chance to come in and work with the electricians. Michelle was selected in 2007 and completed the journey-level status of Plant Journeyman in 2012 after passing the state exam and finishing four years of college.

Once she began her apprenticeship, giving up was not an option. Michelle loved the work but says it was also important to see it through as she had three young men watching her. Michelle wanted to demonstrate to her boys that hard work and persistence pay off and lead to major life accomplishments, personally and professionally.

With her unique set of accomplishments in the forest products industry, where does Michelle see an opportunity for more involvement by women? She says, "I believe it is a great opportunity for any woman to get into the wood/forestry industry. There are many jobs women can do in the mill. Advanced technology has made many jobs at the mill semi-automated, making the operation more streamlined than in the "old" days."

Michelle's goal in leaving her legacy at Hampton, and in her community, is simple: to show women not to be afraid to go outside of their comfort zones, to always push yourself to do better than you did yesterday, and to keep trying even after being told no. She says she's the prime example of that philosophy that's contagious in the forest products industry - never give up.

/Asha Aiello