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Washington, D.C. Update

The focus in Washington, D.C. is on the upcoming mid-term election to determine control of Congress. The House of Representatives adjourned on September 28 to allow its members to return to the campaign trail. The Senate followed suit on October 11 after reaching an agreement to confirm a dozen judicial and administration nominees, including Jeffrey Clark to serve as the Assistant Attorney General overseeing the Environment and Natural Resources Division.

In addition to grappling with the results of the mid-term election, Congress will have a long to-do list when it returns, including enacting appropriations for the many federal agencies currently operating under a Continuing Resolution (CR), which includes the Interior Department and the U.S. Forest Service. The leaders of the Agriculture Committee will also have to turn their attention back to reauthorizing the Farm Bill, which Congress failed to do before adjourning. AFRC and its allies remain focused on securing a handful of politically-viable forestry reforms in the forestry title of the Farm Bill.

Administration Personnel Moves. After serving in an interim role since March, Vicki Christiansen was sworn in as the 19th Chief of the Forest Service on October 11. Since taking the reins of the agency following the resignation of Chief Tony Tooke, Christiansen has largely kept the agency focused on the need to increase acreage treatments on USFS lands and increase timber outputs. As a former state forester for Washington State, Christiansen has also

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complemented Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue's desire to cooperate more closely with the states to increase timber management activities.

On October 22, President Trump announced the appointment of Aurelia Skipwith as Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Skipwith has been serving as a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks in the Department of the Interior – the office that oversees the USFWS. Prior to joining Interior, Skipwith spent about six years working at agriculture giant Monsanto in scientific and policy roles. She is a 2003 graduate of Howard University and received her law degree from the University of Kentucky. AFRC met with Ms. Skipwith in her role as Deputy Assistant Secretary and looks forward to working with her in her new role

as Director of the USFWS – a position that is subject to Senate confirmation.

On October 11, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced more changes to state director positions. Jamie Connell, who has served as the OR/WA State Director since the departure of Jerry Perez last year, was named the new BLM Colorado State Director. Connell has a strong professional and educational background in oil and gas issues, which will likely be a good fit in Colorado. BLM leadership indicated it is eager to find a new state director for OR/WA with a strong background in timber management given the importance of the BLM's O&C Lands in Western Oregon.

The BLM named Chris McAlear to serve as the Acting State Director in Oregon/Washington. McAlear is currently the Assistant Director of the BLM National Conservation Lands and is an Oregon State University graduate with a bachelor's degree in Forest Recreation Resources and a master's in Natural Resource Communication. He also holds a second master's degree in Management from Southern Oregon University. AFRC looks forward to meeting with Mr. McAlear and working together to implement Secretary Zinke's direction to increase Western Oregon timber outputs. /Heath Heikkila

Forest Products Modernization Update

The Forest Service recently facilitated a series of "Partner Feedback Sessions" across the country to gather feedback from interested stakeholders regarding the agency's ongoing Forest Products Modernization (FPM) effort. This effort is focused on streamlining the agency's business practices for delivering forest products. The primary goals of the FPM effort include:

- Aligning practices, policies, and guidance to be more agile, flexible, and adaptable to better meet current and future forest improvement goals.
- Improving forest conditions, meeting forest restoration needs, creating sustainable landscapes, and increasing the amount of forest products coming from National Forest System lands. This effort will help the agency become more efficient and be the strongest forest products program in the country.
- Identifying actions that make restoration harvest work easier and develop an aggressive schedule for their implementation over the short term.

AFRC is pleased to see the Forest Service embark on an effort that places an emphasis on "increasing the amount of forest products coming from National Forest System lands." It's also refreshing to read on the FPM [webpage](#) that the Forest Service views an effort to increase forest products outputs as "*consistent with USDA strategic goals and supports Forest Service National Priority #4: Improving the condition of forests and grasslands.*" AFRC agrees with the notion that the provision of an increased level of forest products is not mutually exclusive to the improvement of the condition of our National Forests.

One important facet of the FPM effort is sharing innovative ideas and practices that are working well across the country with the Forest Service so that they can learn from, and potentially replicate, best practices. During the Partner Feedback Session in Vancouver, WA, AFRC stressed the importance of the Forest Service considering how neighboring working forest managers (private landowners, state agencies, county governments, etc.) market and sell their

forest products. A level of consistency in how forest products are measured, utilized, and designated for removal among a multitude of forest product companies in any given region will make the delivery of these products more efficient. For example, AFRC urged the Forest Service to consider the timber-scaling practices of state and private sellers of timber in western Oregon and Washington to see how those practices differ considerably from those used by National Forests in the same region. We also urged the Forest Service to look internally at individual Forests that are successfully using innovative methods of designating trees for harvest without imposing the burdens and costs of having field staff individually mark every tree designated for harvest.

The Forest Service is compiling the feedback received at these Partner Feedback Sessions and developing a comprehensive strategy for implementation. The goal is to have a final strategy to share with the public early next spring. */Andy Geissler*

Study Confirms Important Role of Active Forest Management in Carbon Sequestration

A recent [paper](#), *Conclusions and caveats from studies of managed forest carbon budgets*, confirms the role that managed forests must play in carbon management. Published in *Forest Ecology and Management*, Dr. Eric D. Vance of the National Council for Air & Stream Improvement (NCASI), reviewed the literature surrounding carbon impacts from managed forests. He concluded there is strong evidence to support the long-term carbon benefits of actively managed forests compared to their unmanaged counterparts when harvested biomass is efficiently used for wood products and to replace fossil fuels. Dr. Vance points out that some have overlooked carbon benefits resulting from the role of active management in reducing susceptibility to wildfire, pests, and disease. Further, active management can provide economic incentives that can deter forest conversion to urban development and other land uses that have substantial and permanent impacts on carbon storage and emissions.

The numbers are striking. Carbon stored in forests *and forest products* is estimated to offset 10-20% of total U.S. carbon emissions. Studies in the Great Lakes region showed that increasing forest management intensity over 100 years increased the carbon sink of the forest, and optimized management could further increase carbon sequestration. Maximum carbon benefits, according to Swedish data, come from “high forest productivity, residue recovery, and efficient use of harvested biomass.” This highlights the deficiency of studies that ignore post-harvest sequestration in wood products and elsewhere, which erroneously conclude that carbon benefits come from decreasing harvest intensity. Active management also decreases the likelihood of extreme emission events such as wildfires. Vance notes that the data shows disturbances, including wildfire, have carbon effects exceeding any that result from management.

Moreover, because wood is much less carbon-intensive than other building materials, using wood to substitute for other materials can provide dramatic carbon benefits. A 2011 U.S. Forest Service [study](#) found that for every metric ton of wood products used, 2.1 tons of carbon is removed from the atmosphere—*over twice as much*. */Lawson Fite*

DNR Releases Updated Draft Marbled Murrelet Plan

There have been several recent developments on the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Marbled Murrelet Long Term Conservation Strategy (LTCS). In September, DNR and the USFWS [released](#) a Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement (RDEIS) and DNR's proposed amendment to its 1997 State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for a 60-day comment period that closes at 5 PM on November 6.

The RDEIS added two new alternatives, including DNR's new preferred alternative (Alt. H), which would set aside an additional 43,000 acres of state trust lands for conservation of the Marbled Murrelet (in addition to the 567,000 acres set aside for all species under the 1997 HCP). This is about 33,000 acres more than Alternative B and 10,000 acres more than the "Interim Strategy," which was originally intended to be overly restrictive when the HCP was adopted in 1997.

On October 11, AFRC sent a [letter](#) to DNR requesting that it release information outlining the economic and fiscal impacts of the different alternatives to local economies and trust beneficiaries, including school districts and other junior taxing districts. AFRC and beneficiaries expressed concern that the current RDEIS does not include an analysis of how the proposed murrelet set-asides will affect trust revenues to local beneficiaries that support local essential services – considerations specifically referenced in State Environmental Policy Act regulations. AFRC's letter included a request for an extension of the public comment period to allow beneficiaries and the public adequate time to review this information and provide meaningful comment.

On October 9, Rep. Jim Walsh (R-Aberdeen) sent a similar [letter](#) to Commissioner Franz expressing concern about the lack of fiscal and economic impact data and the need for additional time for public comment. Other beneficiaries, including the City of Forks and the Port of Port Angeles, have sent similar letters.

Short Term Impacts of Alternatives F & G

AFRC is also concerned about the short-term impact Alternatives F and G are having on DNR's ability to maintain its timber sale program. AFRC sent letters and testified before the Board of Natural Resources (BNR) on numerous occasions to request that Alternatives F and G be removed from the range of alternatives since they clearly conflict with DNR's trust mandate and shouldn't be considered reasonable alternatives. Unfortunately, these alternatives were retained in the RDEIS and present potential short-term encumbrances on at least 100,000 acres of state trust lands.

DNR recently [responded](#) to AFRC's letter and a related letter from the Washington Forest Law Center, indicating it was the USFWS that determined the appropriate range of alternatives, but that DNR was currently managing in accordance with the Interim Strategy, rather than any of the proposed alternatives. Unfortunately, we continue hearing that proposed timber sales are being modified or delayed due to the inclusion of Alternatives F and G in the RDEIS.

Public Comments

AFRC staff attended the four public meetings on the LTCS – October 9 in Forks, October 11 in Cathlamet, October 15 in Seattle, and October 17 in Burlington. The format of those meetings wasn't conducive to public comment but rather asking individual DNR staff questions at topic area “stations.”

AFRC is working to analyze DNR's maps and datasets for the stands being proposed for set aside, including spending numerous days in the woods to ground truth DNR's maps and gather pictures of the young and intermediate age stands being proposed for inclusion in the LTCS – stands that do not contain the habitat elements required by murrelets.

AFRC is in the final stages of preparing its comments. We are hopeful that DNR will grant an extension to the comment period to provide the public, and affected beneficiaries, additional time. /Heath Heikkila

High Court Hears Oral Argument on Important Critical Habitat Questions in Gopher Frog Case

On October 1, the Supreme Court heard oral argument in a [case](#) regarding the designation of critical habitat for the Mississippi gopher frog. The case raises issues relating to the extent of unoccupied critical habitat designations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). AFRC had previously joined with the National Association of Home Builders to file *amicus* briefs both at the [petition stage](#) and on the [merits](#).

The Mississippi gopher frog was listed as an endangered species in 2001. The species currently can only be found in Mississippi but the USFWS designated privately-owned timber land in Louisiana as unoccupied critical habitat based upon their previous presence in the area in 1965. This land cannot currently, or anytime in the future, be occupied by the species without significant modification.

USFWS determined that this designation would result in a \$33.9 million economic impact over 20 years to private landowners. Still, it declined to exclude the Louisiana land from critical habitat despite statutory authority to do so. Weyerhaeuser, which holds a long-term timber lease, joined the landowner in suing. The district court and Fifth Circuit both ruled in favor of the government. The Supreme Court agreed to address two [questions](#) in the case: whether the ESA permits designation of unoccupiable critical habitat like the Louisiana parcel, and whether a decision *not* to exclude areas from critical habitat is subject to judicial review. During [oral argument](#), the Court focused nearly all of its attention on the first issue—whether the ESA prohibits designating critical habitat on private lands that are currently uninhabited by the species, are not currently habitat for the species, and may never be suitable habitat. The ESA allows for designation of both “occupied” and “unoccupied” critical habitat.

At oral argument, USFWS proposed to the Court that such private lands may be designated as unoccupied critical habitat if only “reasonable efforts” were required to make the land habitable to the species. Counsel and the justices struggled to delineate what “reasonable efforts” entailed. Justice Kagan, perhaps the most active of the liberal leaning justices in the argument, framed the case as whether the ESA prefers extinction of a species over designating private lands as critical

habitat which could support the species after reasonable improvements. Justice Alito, one of the more conservative justices, pushed back on this framework, discussing that although the case will be spun as a decision on whether to allow the gopher frog to become extinct, the true issue is who should pay for the preservation of the species. Justice Alito highlighted that big corporations may not always be on the other end of a critical habitat designation and that a similar designation could be overly burdensome on a family farm. Chief Justice Roberts also pushed to find a limit for “reasonable efforts” by questioning if building giant greenhouses in Alaska would be reasonable to preserve the gopher frog. The government refused to identify a bright line rule and instead highlighted that it deemed only reasonable efforts would be needed to make the land in question suitable for the gopher frog.

The second issue in the case is whether courts may review the agency decision not to exclude critical habitat due to economic effects. Outside a brief discussion by Weyerhaeuser’s attorney, and a question from Justice Gorsuch, this issue was relatively absent from the argument. Overall, the justices appeared to split along ideological lines. Justice Thomas, who generally remains silent during oral arguments, was the only justice that did not ask multiple questions. Perhaps foreshadowing his approach, Justice Breyer discussed writing the opinion as a typical case of agency deference.

At the time of the argument, the Court consisted of only eight justices because Justice Kavanaugh had yet to be confirmed. It is typical practice of the Court to permit only justices that sat for oral argument to vote on the decision. Although a ruling is not expected until as late as next June, when Justice Kavanaugh will have been on the Court for a matter of months, he is unlikely to take part in the decision.

For now, it is a real possibility, if not a probability, that the case will result in a split decision. In the event of a 4-4 split opinion, the Fifth Circuit ruling will be upheld as “affirmed by an equally divided Court.” Such a decision would not be binding outside the Fifth Circuit. At that point, the petitioners could ask for rehearing. A similar request was submitted in the 2016 case of [*Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*](#), where a 4-4 Court affirmed the Ninth Circuit’s ruling on a public sector “union shop” rule. The Court denied the request in *Friedrichs*, later deciding the same issue in 2018’s [*Janus v. AFSCME*](#). If rehearing were granted, the case would likely be re-argued to the nine-member Court. /Greg Hibbard

Challengers Give Up Suit Against Quartz Project

Environmental groups have dropped their challenge to the Quartz Project on the Umpqua National Forest after failing to obtain an injunction against the project in federal court. On October 11, United States District Court Judge Michael McShane denied the groups’ motion for a preliminary injunction. On October 18, one week after Judge McShane’s denial of the motion for injunctive relief, the parties stipulated to voluntarily dismiss the lawsuit with prejudice. This is a significant victory for active forest management on a landscape badly in need of restoration.

AFRC intervened in the case on behalf of its members Rosboro Company and Swanson Group, the purchasers of two separate timber sale contracts to implement the project. The Quartz Project is designed to improve forest stand growth, health, and diversity on the Umpqua National Forest

and reduce the risk of wildfire. The 517-acre project authorizes the commercial harvest of stands that occur on “matrix” lands, which are specifically designated for timber harvest.

In his decision denying the injunction, Judge McShane determined that the public interest and balance of interest favored the project. The court found that “there are substantial public and private vested interests in the form of signed contracts, jobs, and tax revenue, among other things, that will be negatively and definitely impacted if the preliminary injunction were to issue[.]” The court also recognized the public interest in reducing wildfire risk in the area. Judge McShane noted that “[w]hile the risk of fire is certainly speculative as to the specific area in question, the raging (and massive) months-long fires in Oregon and Northern California the past few summers demonstrate the threat is real.”

Judge McShane also rejected the group’s legal arguments. Plaintiffs alleged that the project violates NEPA because the Forest Service identified nine new red tree vole nest sites after the public comment period and objection process were completed and failed to take public comment on its classifications of those nine new sites. The district court rejected plaintiffs’ NEPA argument and determined that, because the survey process was ongoing, in part, based on public comments, if the Forest Service was required to open up public comment for the confirmation of every additional nest site, it would likely result in a “never-ending process of supplements and further comment.” Plaintiffs also argued that the Forest Service was required to supplement the Environmental Assessment to analyze the effects of the BLM’s change in its governing plan, the 2016 Resource Management Plan (RMP), which provided revisions to the non-high priority site designations for the red tree vole on BLM lands in the Row River Watershed. The district court found that the Forest Service’s efforts both sufficiently informed the public about the project and analyzed the effect of the BLM’s RMP.

AFRC is pleased that Judge McShane expressly [acknowledged](#) the substantial public and private vested interests regarding the implementation of the timber sales. /Sara Ghafouri

Timber Salvage on O&C Lands

The 2016 RMPs direct the BLM to “implement timber salvage harvest after disturbance events to recover economic value and to minimize commercial loss or deterioration of damaged trees where the BLM determines that removal is economically viable.” This direction is specific to lands designated as Harvest Land Base (HLB) as allocated by the RMPs. The HLB are the only lands where sustained-yield timber management, as directed by the O&C Act, is permitted to occur. This type of management is prohibited on approximately 80% of BLM lands that the RMPs allocated as “reserves.”

Timber salvage, as described above for the HLB, is also prohibited on these reserves. However, simply because the BLM’s management plan directs them to conduct timber salvage, does not mean that they have the capability to do so effectively. The BLM must still comply with NEPA, adhere to other provisions in their RMPs, and consult with regulatory agencies all while attempting to implement these sales before wood-boring insects spoil the value of the wood fiber. The wildfires of 2017 presented the first opportunity for the BLM to determine if these hurdles prohibited them from implementing their HLB RMP direction in a timely manner so that salvage sales were viable.

The results were mixed. The Coos Bay District was able to expedite the implementation of their HLB salvage effort by complying with NEPA using a Categorical Exclusion (CE). This CE, which permits salvage up to 250-acres, allowed the BLM's analysis to be excluded from a detailed environmental analysis (EA) as the project was determined not to have a significant effect on the human environment. The ensuing salvage sale sold in May.

The Roseburg District, on the other hand, determined that they needed to conduct *over* 250-acres of salvage on their HLB to be consistent with their RMPs. Therefore, they could not utilize the CE used by Coos Bay and instead completed a full EA. They offered their salvage sale at the end of September, four months after Coos Bay's salvage sale, and it did not sell. Most potential purchasers indicated that wood deterioration was the main reason for this no-bid sale. It appears, based on Roseburg's experience, that the BLM simply does not have the tools necessary to implement their new RMP's direction on salvage for the size of wildfires that often burn. If they did, then those sales would have been offered for sale in a timeframe where economic recovery was feasible. Instead those acres of burnt timber will be left standing.

One other nuance is worth noting. The BLM's current policy is for each District to *offer* their assigned timber target. In other words, the BLM does not have to actually sell sales to receive "credit," but only must offer them for sale. This nuance may explain why the Roseburg District is moving forward with offering another salvage sale in November from the same 2017 fire that produced the September sale that received no bids. AFRC's members rely on BLM timber sales that contain valuable timber products that are economically viable. Non-viable sales that are simply offered, while contributing to the BLM's assigned target, do nothing for the timber products industry in western Oregon (nor for the taxpayer, or for forest reforestation). This fact is relevant now as the BLM O&C lands were once again affected by wildfire in 2018, this time on the Medford District. The District has estimated that over 6,000 acres of lands designated as HLB are within fire-perimeters from this summer's wildfires—well over the allowable salvage acreage permitted by the agency's CE. The District has also indicated that a percentage of their Fiscal Year 2019 assigned target of 42 million board feet (MMBF) will consist of salvage on these acres. AFRC's concern is whether, given the tools they have, this salvage volume will be economically viable when the District is able to offer it for sale. /*Andy Geissler*

Colville Forest Plan Revision ROD Released

The Colville National Forest issued the Draft Record of Decision for the Revised Colville Land Management Plan on September 7. The Draft Plan analyzed six alternatives including:

- 1) The Preferred Alternative P implements a landscape approach to managing forest structures by using active management to improve adaptability and resilience and move the landscape toward the Historic Range of Variability (HRV). Under this alternative, timber harvest could be conducted on 801,750 acres of the 1.1 million-acre Colville National Forest. The annual projected wood sale quantity (PWSQ) would be 62 MMBF.
- 2) The Proposed Action (PA) from the 2016 draft is similar to Alternative P but includes 40,000 more acres for wilderness.
- 3) Alternative B incorporates feedback from the Northeast Washington Forest Coalition and emphasizes active management zones and passive restoration areas.

- 4) Alternative O emphasizes two management areas, late forest structure areas and active management areas.
- 5) Alternative R would implement a plan of late forest structure and contains high levels of wilderness.
- 6) The No Action Alternative would continue the 1988 land management plan with the overlays of the existing Eastside Screens which include a 21” diameter at breast height (dbh) maximum diameter for tree harvest, wildlife connective corridors, and the PACFISH and INFISH stream buffers.

Under the six alternatives, both Alternative P and the Proposed Action have the highest PWSQ at 62 MMBF. AFRC has concerns regarding how this maximum PWSQ was calculated since it uses the current budget allocated to the Colville (\$17 million) and does not analyze an unconstrained model which would have allowed for more treatments.

Another concern is that while Alternative P replaces the Eastside Screens with a series of HRV conditions and a guideline for large tree retention, it will limit tree removal to 20” dbh unless it can be shown that cutting larger trees will get the stands more quickly to HRV. This means a smaller diameter limit than the 21” dbh currently found in the Eastside Screens.

AFRC doesn’t believe the road density limits laid out in the plan are achievable. Alternative P’s recommended road density limits for Focused Restoration Management areas is one mile of road per section of land. For General Restoration management areas road densities are recommended to be two miles per square mile. Given the steep terrain on parts of the Colville and the number of drainages, AFRC believes these road density levels are arbitrary and capricious, and non-attainable.

AFRC believes the plan is flawed because it sets proposed PWSQ targets in line with current budgets rather than setting timber targets to achieve needed forest health treatments with an unconstrained budget. In other words, the targets are based on restricted funding, not on what the forest needs. Further, the Forest should depart from a non-declining even flow of timber in the short-term to bring the Forest into a long-term sustained yield condition where the Forest is producing the most volume on a continuous basis. Using current budget numbers, it will take the Forest over 30 years to achieve its maximum long-term sustained yield stand conditions.

The comment period closes November 7. /Tom Partin

New Judge Brings Public Lands Experience to Ninth Circuit; Other Nominees in the Pipeline

On October 11, the Senate [voted](#) 51-44 to confirm [Ryan Nelson](#) as a new Ninth Circuit judge. Of the Senators voting, Nelson received the support of all the Republicans plus Democratic Senator Doug Jones of Alabama. Nelson was nominated by the President in May and fills the slot of N. Randy Smith, who has taken senior status and maintains chambers in Pocatello. Nelson is expected to have his chambers in Idaho and was supported by both Idaho Senators. Nelson was originally nominated for Solicitor of the Department of the Interior but withdrew in favor for the Ninth Circuit. Nelson [said](#) that he has “used federal land in Idaho and most of the states to run, hike, climb, ski, cross-country ski, boat, canoe, waterski, swim, mountain bike, road

bike, camp, hunt and fish, ride horses, snowmobile, snowshoe, and ride ATVs.” He also earned many of his “Boy Scout merit badges on federal lands on my way to becoming an Eagle Scout.”

Prior to his appointment to the bench, Nelson worked as general counsel of Melaleuca, Inc., a vitamin supplement company based in Idaho Falls. He also served as a deputy assistant attorney general in the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice from 2006 to 2008, supervising many of the federal attorneys who work on natural resource and public lands issues. This experience is likely to be useful on the bench given the frequent appearance of public lands issues before the Court of Appeals. He also worked on environmental and natural resource issues at the Office of Management and Budget.

Nelson is the President’s second confirmed judge on the Ninth Circuit. [Mark Bennett](#) was confirmed in July to a Hawaii based seat by a vote of 72-27. Bennett previously served for several years as the attorney general of Hawaii. All 27 no votes came from Republicans [concerned](#) about Bennett’s views on gun rights, based on an [amicus brief](#) in [District of Columbia v. Heller](#) (2008), the case holding that the Second Amendment provides an individual right to firearm ownership.

In July, the President [nominated Eric Miller](#), a Seattle attorney, to a Seattle based seat on the court left open by Judge Richard Tallman. Miller is one of the leaders of appellate practice at the Perkins Coie law firm. He previously worked in the Office of the Solicitor General and has argued 16 Supreme Court cases and was a clerk for Justice Clarence Thomas.

Additionally, Arizona Magistrate Judge Bridget Bade was [nominated](#) to the Ninth Circuit in August. Bade previously worked as an Assistant U.S. Attorney and has substantial experience in environmental tort litigation.

Hearings on Miller’s and Bade’s nominations occurred on October 25. Confirmation could occur before the end of the year. */Lawson Fite*

Deschutes National Forest Pine Thinning

In recent years, the Deschutes National Forest focused on thinning younger stands of ponderosa pine to reduce the risk of wildfire, enhance residual tree growth, and prevent insect and disease attacks. The West Bend Project near Bend, Oregon and the Jedi Project near Sunriver, Oregon have received strong community support even though the work is largely in recreation areas. The West Bend Project received the Chief’s Award for collaborative stewardship from the Forest Service’s Washington Office.

The reason for this support is the recognition that wildfires are a real threat to the Wildland Urban Interface in Bend and surrounding communities. There is high recreation usage in these areas including hiking, hunting, birding, and fishing and the treatments were sensitive to the increased use. The thinned stands remain visually pleasing while also providing early seral forage for deer and elk.

AFRC members and staff, along with Forest Service personnel, recently toured the Jedi Project. Discussion centered around the tree thinning, marking and designation, as well as developing

more efficient and economic designation. The units visited were marked using Designation by Description (DXD) where a description of spacing and tree sizes was used to establish reserve trees. Clumps of trees were also left by designating a pilot tree and leaving all trees within 20 feet of that tree.

The group discussion also included Designation by Prescription (DXP), a prescription of what trees would be taken and what trees should remain. The tree designation in this case is done by the purchaser and does not necessarily require using paint for designating the leave trees. While the results of both DXD and DXP should be similar, there are differences in how the projects are sold. When the Forest sells a project DXD, there is confidence that both the Forest Service and purchaser have a good understanding of what the number and size of trees are that will be taken. These sales can, and are, being sold as lump sum. When DXP is used, there is more flexibility in tree spacing, sizes of take trees, and use of clumps. Thus, predictability of volume and tree size is less accurate. Sales sold using this method are often sold on a scaled basis using weight scale.

Both methods of tree designation have pros and cons. The purchasers of the Jedi sale stated that using DXD takes more time to designate and paint the leave trees. While the trees are designated prior to harvest, the Forest Service can't approve the work until after trees are cut. The use of DXP requires less painting prior to harvest but puts more burden on the person running the timber processor who makes the decision on what trees to cut. DXD puts more time and money into painting leave trees while DXP slows the equipment operator to make sure they are making the right decision.

The group decided that both DXD and DXP have their merits and both will be used on the Deschutes, but the decision may rest on the conditions of the stands including tree size, uniformity, species mix and other factors that dictate which method is used where. The pictures below indicate that good results of the Jedi Project, which used DXD.



AFRC would like to commend the Deschutes for the good thinning work they have accomplished. /Tom Partin, Irene Jerome

Society of American Foresters National Convention

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) National Convention took place at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland October 3-7. The theme was “Forest Policy and Science

Management Interactions.” The convention had three plenary sessions, two days of scientific and technical sessions, with tours and field trips on two days. SAF President Dave Lewis, and new CEO Terry Baker, opened the convention by welcoming the participants. Their main message was the importance of knowledge building and always increasing the skills foresters have through conferences, workshops, accreditation, etc.

There was a great selection of speakers and hosted discussions. Peter Daugherty, Oregon State Forester, discussed the successes on Oregon’s state and private lands under the Oregon Forest Practices Act where science helped inform the policy and continues to amend it when new science is available. Bob Lackey, Oregon State University Professor, gave a heartfelt speech about bias in science and the importance to report findings and not make recommendations or generalities from the science. He discussed Normative versus Advocacy science and suggested that science should be policy relevant but not policy driven. He urged scientist to stay away from words such as “natural,” “degraded,” and “healthy” due to their inherent lack of unbiased definition. These words, he said, should be left for the policy advocates.

Jim Hubbard, USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resource and Environment, and Vicki Christiansen, newly appointed Chief of the US Forest Service, also gave remarks. Jim Hubbard explained his vision where the Forest Service should not just be focusing on timber volume and acres of fire reduction, but also on other outcomes such as restoration, stewardship, and the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA). He believes collaboration is extremely important and that the “Shared Stewardship Approach” is the stepping stone to increased management and accomplishments in the woods. Chief Christiansen laid out the top five goals of the Forest Service with a large emphasis on creating a safe workplace and diversity. She also touched on GNA, accountability with money (fire and elsewhere), the Environmental Analysis and Decision Making (EADM) effort, and the Forest Products Modernization (FPM) effort. Both agreed that leveraging partnerships is key to the success of the Forest Service where The Nature Conservancy, American Forest Foundation, local collaboratives, and others are vital partners in the “state scale” approach they see as the solution.

The convention brings old friends, colleagues, and classmates together every year while new connections and networking opportunities abound. This year was no exception. The theme rung true throughout the plenary sessions. Science can and should help inform public policy, but it must be considered in context with other economic, social, and political realities. /*Amanda Astor*

Member Profile: Starfire Lumber

Starfire Lumber was founded in 1983 when Francis D. Engle purchased an old cedar mill in Cottage Grove, OR. With over \$10 million spent on overhauled equipment, upgrades and remodeling, Starfire was born and is now one of the most innovative mills in the world.

Sean Smith, CEO, shares some insight on that innovation. The areas of innovation mainly lie in cutting tolerances, quality control and customer service. They manage a very diverse range of products yet get orders out on time and on grade. They are not the most efficient or productive mill, as old-school cutting mills are limited when it comes to what can be automated or sped up, but they have mastered their niche and don’t cut corners.

Over 35 years, there have been achievements and downturns just like in any business. The timber industry struggles with dependence on national forests for timber harvest. In fact, when Starfire started, they were running 90-95% federal wood and wood from the Elliot State Forest through their mill. Now, it's less than 5%.

Starfire's secret to thriving? Close knit culture and niche. As a small, family owned mill – there are many family members working there, and in many instances have long tenures. Smith says he makes it a point to know his people, relate well to them and interact often. He believes it's one of those intangibles that cultivates a very loyal workforce that can be counted on to go the extra mile for you. You must treat your people like they're important, because they are important. They're the only real asset any company has.

A thriving company is important, but Smith's opinion on his biggest achievement this far was, "Getting through 2009-2013. It was an education I really couldn't have gotten any other way, as getting through those dismal markets and spending close to four years in pure, panicked survival mode hammered home some very powerful lessons on how to keep the company from being vulnerable to similar downturns when they inevitably revisit the industry. It also taught me to keep problems in perspective and not to treat temporary challenges as full-blown crises."

A particular point of pride for Starfire is their support for Family Relief Nurseries both in Cottage Grove and Douglas County (they are right on the Douglas/Lane border and support both areas). Family Relief Nurseries helps the most vulnerable members of these communities and where the need is greatest. They prefer to make investments in projects and organizations they feel work toward the long-term interests of the timber industry. That's why volunteer time and financial support of AFRC, Oregon Forest and Industries Council, Douglas Timber Operators and the Western Resources Legal Center are all very important to the company.

Starfire is led by Sean Smith, Francis D. Engle's grandson. He says the biggest lesson he has learned as a business owner in the industry is that there's nothing more fulfilling and rewarding than fighting for your tribe. Starfire is his tribe - it's something larger and vastly more important than he is. He says, "When I look at all of these hard-working, devoted, loyal people, it gives me purpose. My job is to protect their jobs—period. Professionally, nothing else matters to me."

Smith didn't originally plan to continue the family business. He was an attorney for five years, decided it wasn't what he hoped and was going to start building houses with a friend. His grandfather asked him to come run the mill and at the time, Smith had no idea he had been holding out hope for a family member to take over.

"I told him that sounded like a swell idea, but for the fact that I knew absolutely nothing about sawmills. He offered to pay me a salary to learn, and I decided to give it a shot. I figured the homebuilding option could remain a viable back-up plan. Six or so months in to my executive training program, which I started around April of 2002, I was somewhat surprised at just how much I loved the business and the people I was getting to know. So, I never looked back, and now can't imagine doing anything else."

AFRC is proud to represent Starfire as a member and partner as we work to provide sustainability from our national forestlands. /Asha Aiello