



Washington DC Update

Government Shutdown. We have now reached day 37 of the federal government shutdown, the longest in U.S. history. On November 4, Senate Democrats again blocked a clean Continuing Resolution (CR) to extend current funding levels – for the 14th time since the House approved a CR on party-lines prior to the shutdown. However, there are some encouraging signs that an agreement may not be far off to secure the necessary 60 votes in the Senate. In fact, the latest reports indicate that a vote is possible on Friday, November 7.

Democrats are demanding a guarantee that COVID-era subsidies for Obamacare health insurance plans will be extended as part of any agreement to reopen the government. Democrats have also been emboldened by their recent wins in off-year election results in Virginia, New York, New Jersey, and California. It also appears that President Trump is growing tired of the shutdown.

President Trump and some Republicans have signaled an openness to extending the subsidies. A bipartisan agreement could also include votes for individual appropriations bills, which have been increasingly difficult to pass in recent years.

The Trump Administration has tried to exert additional pressure on Senate Democrats to reopen the government, first by attempting to layoff additional federal workers – a move that was blocked by a federal judge. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has also become a flashpoint.

A federal judge recently ordered the Trump Administration to use emergency funds at the US Department of Agriculture to at least partially fund the “food stamp” program in November. It is not clear when the Trump Administration will release those funds. Most recently, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced that the Federal Aviation Administration will reduce commercial flights by 10 percent at over 40 US airports to reduce the workload on unpaid air traffic control workers.

The U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have avoided disruptions to timber harvest operations, but future timber sales are likely to be impacted. This will make it more difficult for the agencies to accomplish their goals of increasing timber production from federal lands.

Fix Our Forests Act. On October 21, the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee marked up the Senate version of the Fix our Forests Act (FOFA), S. 1462. The bill passed out of committee by a bipartisan vote of 18-5, including six Democrats. The [amended version](#) of the bill now moves to the full Senate, although it is unclear if Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) will attempt to bring it up for a vote.

The Committee adopted several amendments to the legislation. AFRC is focused on the forest management provisions, which largely remain unchanged. The bill would require the Forest Service to

designate “Firesheds” where it would be required to use streamlined authorities to increase forest thinning and restoration activities. The bill increases the size of Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) Categorical Exclusions from 3,000 acres to 10,000 acres, although a technical fix is likely needed to clarify where these expanded authorities can be used.

The bill also removes the prohibition on doing needed road work as part of Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) projects and expands the full authority to counties and tribes. These are key changes that will help the Forest Service utilize partnerships to supplement their limited staffing capacity. It also includes a fix to the Ninth Circuit’s infamous Cottonwood decision. These are all important provisions sought by our industry.

Some Committee Democrats were critical of other litigation reform provisions, including reducing the statute of limitations for bringing a challenge to projects in designated Fireshed areas. The bill also seeks to codify current case law related to the factors courts weigh when considering Preliminary Injunction requests and encourages courts to remanding projects to the agency to address any deficiencies.

AFRC continues reviewing the bill, including any new requirements, mandates, and potential litigation risks that could be problematic for the Forest Service. We understand that House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR) and his staff are engaged with the Senate sponsors of FOFA in the hopes of crafting a bill that can pass both chambers and be signed into law.

Barred Owl Removal Strategy. On October 29, the U.S. Senate voted [72-25](#) to reject [S.J.Res.69](#), a Congressional Review Act (CRA) resolution by Senator John Kennedy (R-LA) that would nullify U.S. Fish and Wildlife’s Barred Owl Removal Strategy allowing lethal removal of invasive barred owls in the Pacific Northwest to help recover the Northern Spotted Owl.

Prior to the vote, Senator Kennedy gave a witty and impassioned [floor speech](#) lambasting the plan, its impacts on Barred Owls, and the use of taxpayer dollars. The CRA proposal brought together an intriguing political alliance between animal rights groups and some of the most conservative Republicans in Congress, while dividing the environmental community.

AFRC sent a [letter](#) raising concerns about the practical implications of legislatively eliminating the Barred Owl Removal Strategy. Namely, in the short-term, it would reduce and risk federal timber sales on BLM lands in western Oregon and undermine the goals of the Trump Administration’s timber Executive Order and H.R.1, the Big Beautiful Bill. AFRC’s letter, seconded by strongly supported letters from the Intertribal Timber Council and from sportsmen’s groups, greatly influenced the vote.

It’s important to note that the forest products industry doesn’t disagree with many of Senator Kennedy’s ideological points. But the practical impact – a decrease in timber outputs and legal risk to the BLM timber program in western Oregon – would have been disastrous and set a dangerous precedent.

National Historic Preservation Act Committee Hearing. Also on October 29, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee convened an [oversight hearing](#) to examine the Section 106 consultation process under the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The Committee heard from several witnesses, including Dr. Christopher W. Merritt, Utah’s State Historic Preservation Officer.

In his opening statement, Committee Chairman Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) highlighted how despite its noble intent, the NHPA Section 106 consultation process has become increasingly cumbersome, time

intensive, costly, and a barrier to critical government projects. Lee likened it to “a maze without a map” and said:

“We ought to protect the places that show where we came from and who we are. But over the years, a narrow procedural safeguard has evolved into a sprawling, unpredictable process that now delays some of the very projects our country needs to build and maintain.”

Chairman Lee provided numerous examples, including how Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) has spent millions of dollars of state funding on NHPA surveys to support federal forest management projects through the Good Neighbor Authority and ODF’s Planning Assistance and Categorical Exclusions program.

AFRC had identified NHPA consultation as a significant barrier to increasing active management of federal forests and is eager to identify additional examples that show the need for common sense reforms.
/Heath Heikkila

The AFRC Podcast



50 Episodes of The AFRC Podcast

Click here to listen to [Episode 50](#). Our podcast is also available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts

The [AFRC Podcast](#) is a monthly discussion examining key issues and news relating to forestry, forest products and public lands management.

This milestone 50th episode of The AFRC Podcast celebrates dozens of conversations that have highlighted the people, science, and stories behind sustainable forestry across the West. To mark the occasion, AFRC President and CEO Travis Joseph takes over as host to interview Nick Smith, the regular voice of The AFRC Podcast. Together, they reflect on memorable moments, discuss why communication matters in forestry, and share behind-the-scenes insights from producing the show.



BLM Proposes Rescission of the Conservation and Landscape Health Rule

The BLM has determined that the 2024 [Conservation and Landscape Health Rule](#) (Rule) is unnecessary and violates existing statutory requirements. In particular, the agency has determined that the Rule undermines the Federal Land Policy and Management Act’s (FLPMA) direction on multiple-use and sustained yield management while denying public participation regarding the management of the nearly 250 million acres of public land. The rulemaking process to rescind the 2024 Rule will apply the

Departmental Categorical Exclusion at [43 CFR 46.210\(i\)](#) to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Among other things, the 2024 Rule defined conservation as a “use,” established a mitigation and restoration leasing program, and restricted management of landscapes classified as “intact.” These and other provisions of the Rule were designed in manner that would preclude multiple-use management while also providing additional mechanisms for litigation aimed at slowing and halting such management. AFRC provided substantive comments during the truncated rulemaking process that highlighted the conflicts it would create with forest management on BLM lands, specifically the 2.5 million acres of timberlands in western Oregon that are governed by the O&C Act. Those comments also focused on the flawed economic analysis that distorted and mischaracterized the Rule’s impact on timber-dependent rural communities. Lastly, we identified the multiple legal flaws of the Rule and the process used to authorize it.

In July 2024, AFRC joined a broad national industry coalition and filed a [Complaint](#) in the U.S. District Court of Wyoming challenging the legality of the Rule in the context of the Administrative Procedure Act, FLPMA, and NEPA. The Coalition’s case was transferred and consolidated with similar challenges in the Utah District Court. The case has been stayed since February 2025 and will remain stayed while BLM takes steps to rescind the Rule.

The BLM is currently accepting public comments on the rescission until November 10. AFRC will submit comments on behalf of its members in support of the rescission. More information about how to submit comments can be found [here](#). /*Andy Geissler*

Colville and Okanogan Wenatchee Forests Move Quickly to Salvage Fire Areas

While much of the West avoided large wildfires this summer, the Colville and Okanogan Wenatchee National Forests experienced several significant fires. With direction from the Trump Administration to actively harvest fire killed timber, both forests are developing plans to complete salvage operations while the trees still have value. These efforts will also remove potential public hazards from falling dead trees and prepare sites for replanting new, healthy stands.

The Colville experienced two major fires, the Tacoma Creek Fire and the Katy Creek Fire. The Tacoma Creek Fire burned 3,961 acres west of the Pend Oreille River in the Tacoma Creek drainage. It affected portions of the Swamp Creek timber sale area. The Forest is proposing to salvage fire damaged trees, both live and dead, between 7 and 21 inches in diameter across approximately 475 acres within the Swamp Creek sale area. The project will be implemented under a Categorical Exclusion for USDA 13d NRCS Disaster Recovery, which allows certain actions to proceed without an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

The Katy Creek Fire burned roughly 4,700 acres in rugged terrain on the Three Rivers Ranger District. Field verification was used to assess fire severity and identify salvageable areas. During these assessments, staff also discovered bark beetle infestations among surviving trees. The District plans to use a USDA 36d USFS Salvage Categorical Exclusion, which authorizes removal of dead or dying trees on up to 250 acres, to salvage approximately 137 acres of affected timber.

Three major fires on the Okanogan Wenatchee, the Pomas, Labor Mountain, and Lower Sugarloaf fires, burned more than 85,000 acres. Emergency actions and salvage efforts are underway. Two log decks were created during fire suppression efforts, including the Pomas firewood decks and the 3.8 million board feet

Double Decker green decks. The latter resulted from secondary fireline construction along the Chiwawa Road, which enhanced and expanded the fuel break established during the 2015 Wolverine Fire.

The Forest is also analyzing the use of Categorical Exclusion 36d to salvage up to 250 acres within the 42,000 acre Lower Sugarloaf Fire, primarily on the Entiat District. Staff from the Colville and Fremont Winema forests are assisting to expedite implementation during the winter of 2025 and 2026. The Lower Sugarloaf Fire also burned about 6,000 acres of Late Successional Reserve in the Chumstick to LP planning area on the Wenatchee River District. The District is now considering dropping plans for an environmental assessment and instead proceeding with a series of categorical exclusions.

The Labor Mountain Fire burned across both the Wenatchee River and Cle Elum Districts in rugged terrain on both sides of U.S. Highway 97. The Forest is coordinating with the Washington Department of Transportation to address hazard trees that pose a risk to travelers along the highway corridor.

AFRC thanks both forests for their hard work this summer and fall, first in containing these fires and now for their rapid transition into salvage and recovery efforts. */Tom Partin*

Snowy Butte Draft EA Open for Public Comment

After several years of planning, the High Cascades Ranger District of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest has published a draft environmental assessment for the Snowy Butte Landscape Restoration Project. The project, if fully implemented, will treat 24,910 acres via commercial thinning, variable density thinning, and non-commercial fuels reduction with an expected yield of 60 million board feet for local purchasers.

Notably, the project encompasses the Big Butte Springs Watershed, which provides water for approximately 150,000 residents of the Rogue Valley. As a result of fire exclusion and deferred management, this watershed contains thousands of acres of forests well outside of their historic range of variability in terms of tree density and species composition. There is concern among stakeholders that if treatment is not completed quickly, then this critical watershed will be destroyed by fires, insects, or disease.

For their part, the Forest seems to be proposing a treatment intensity across this project which matches the need for ecosystem rehabilitation. Within their proposed action (there is only a single action alternative), the Forest is opting to treat stands over 80 years old and trees up to 30 inches in diameter to achieve the plan's objectives to improve resilience and restore resistance to stand-replacing events.

This is a welcome change from an agency where plantation thinning has become the de facto silvicultural prescription among federal land managers. While useful in many instances, plantation thinning alone cannot recreate the fire-adapted landscape which existed prior to the arrival of settlers to this landscape.

Despite a critical need for treatment in this landscape, we predict significant pushback from the anti-forestry community for the Snowy Butte Project. Readers should voice their support for active management in this vulnerable watershed. The Forest is accepting public comments for the Snowy Butte Project through November 20. [Comments can be submitted here](#). */Corey Bingaman*

Judge Christensen Rules that the Horsefly Project May Proceed

On November 4, Montana District Court Judge Christensen [lifted](#) the injunction that had been in place for over a year and allowed the Horsefly Vegetation Project on the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest

to proceed. Plaintiffs Alliance for the Wild Rockies and Native Ecosystems’ (collectively, AWR) originally challenged the Horsefly Project in 2021. *See All. for the Wild Rockies, et al. v. U.S. Forest Serv., et al.*, No. 9:21-cv-00051-DLC (D. Mont.). AFRC participated as a defendant-intervenor, and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation filed an *amicus curiae* brief in support of the Project.

The Horsefly Project is an important project that authorizes treatments intended to improve forest health and resistance to disease and insect infestation, reduce wildfire risk, and move conditions in the approximately 21,000-acre project area closer to those desired and more diverse. Seventy percent of the project area is designated as Wildland Urban Interface in Meagher County’s community wildfire protection plan. This Project is important to AFRC member Sun Mountain Lumber who was awarded three timber sales associated with the Project—Stud Horse, Lost Mine, and Pistol GNA.

In May 2023, Magistrate Judge DeSoto issued Findings and Recommendation (F&R) in favor of Federal Defendants and Intervenor except for AWR’s NEPA and National Forest Management Act (NFMA) claims related to goshawks. *See [AFRC July 2024 Newsletter](#)*. Shortly thereafter, and while objections to Judge DeSoto’s F&R were pending, the Forest Service notified the court that the agency had completed a new Goshawk Evaluation Report that evaluated nest success from 2007 to 2020, which would resolve the remaining claim. In his order adopting the F&R, Judge Christensen found that the Forest Service violated both NEPA and NFMA regarding the goshawk. Judge Christensen issued a narrow remand order and directive to “cure the NEPA violation through a supplemental EA or EIS” and “inform the public that the Forest Service has indeed considered concerns related to decline in goshawk nesting territory.” Judge Christensen enjoined the Horsefly Project until the Forest Service demonstrated compliance with NEPA.

In April 2025, Federal Defendants moved to dissolve the injunction because it completed a Supplemental EA in December 2024, which updated the effects of the Project on goshawks and determined that the Project would not have significant effects. The Supplemental EA explained that between 2017 and 2020, “the number of territories monitored compared to known territories dropped each subsequent year . . . due to the widespread tree mortality associated with the mountain pine beetle epidemic that created hazardous survey conditions.”

After four years of litigation, Judge Christensen held that the Supplemental EA properly addressed the Court’s remand order and warranted the dissolution of the injunction. Judge Christensen explained that to the extent Plaintiffs attempt to challenge the merits of the Supplemental EA, “Plaintiffs may file a new lawsuit seeking judicial review.” AFRC would like to thank outside counsel Mark Stermitz, from Crowley Fleck PLLP, for his representation in this matter. /*Sara Ghafouri*

Judge Christensen Finds Illegal Road Use Analysis Unlawful in the Knotty Pine Project

On October 27 after three years of litigation, Montana District Court Judge Christensen granted in part and denied in part summary judgment in favor of Plaintiffs (Center for Biological Diversity, Alliance for the Wild Rockies, Yaak Valley Forest Council, WildEarth Guardians, and Native Ecosystems Council) in the challenge to the Knotty Pine Project on the Kootenai National Forest. *Ctr. For Biological Diversity et al. v. USFS*, No. CV 22-91-M-DLC, 2025 WL 3006790 (D. Mont. Oct. 27, 2025). Notably, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho intervened as a defendant in support of the Project.

AFRC did not participate in this case, but the legal team has been tracking the matter due to the importance of the illegal road use issue to our members. Illegal road use has been an evolving and

growing issue within District Courts and the Ninth Circuit for more than a decade. The recurring dispute involves whether the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) properly account for known or anticipated illegal road use when conducting their environmental analyses and demonstrating compliance with the “Access Amendments” to national forest plans which address motorized road use impacts to grizzly bears. A summary of the history of the issue is important to understand the Knotty Pine decision.

- *Alliance for the Wild Rockies v. Bradford*, 856 F.3d 1238 (9th Cir. 2017). In a challenge to the Pilgrim Creek Timber Sale Project on the Kootenai National Forest, the Ninth Circuit upheld the Forest Service’s decision that roads closed to motorized access by berms or barriers do not count towards “linear miles of total roads” as defined by the Access Amendments. The court cautioned that “any closure that fails to effectively prevent motorized access” would fail to comply with the Access Amendments.
- *Alliance for the Wild Rockies v. Probert*, 412 F.Supp.3d 1188 (D. Mont. 2019). A subsequent challenge to the Pilgrim Project alleged that “ineffective closures have contributed to increases in linear road miles and potentially impacted grizzly bears in ways not previously considered.” The district court held that the illegal temporary road use may impact grizzly bears in ways the agency had not previously considered and remanded the matter for further agency analysis.
- *CBD v. USFS*, 687 F.Supp.3d 1053 (D. Mont. 2023). In a challenge to the Black Ram Project on the Kootenai National Forest, the district court held that the Forest Service intentionally ignored illegal, unauthorized road use in its road density calculations and failed to disclose its methodology for calculating its compliance with the Access Amendments. Additionally, the court highlighted that assuming road barriers effectively restrict the public, coupled with the uncertainty of the extent of ineffective closures, amounts to a NEPA violation.
- *CBD v. USFS*, No. 23-2882, 2025 WL 586358 (9th Cir. Feb. 24, 2025). The Ninth Circuit affirmed the district court’s Black Ram ruling. The court emphasized that the Access Amendments “do not differentiate between authorized and unauthorized road use” and held that the Forest Service “may not exclude categorically documented unauthorized road use” from its analyses.
- *Swan View Coal v. Haaland*, 2024 WL 3219206, at *11 (D. Mont. June 28, 2024). In a challenge to the Revised Flathead National Forest Plan concerning an amendment to remove impassable roads from the total motorized route density calculations, the district court stopped short of requiring unauthorized motorized use to be incorporated into those calculations but held that FWS “must decide *whether* to incorporate unauthorized motorized use into road density calculations and *support* its decision with the best available science.”

In the recent Knotty Pine Project, FWS issued an Amended Biological Opinion that contained a “qualitative analysis” which provided four reasons for declining to include calculations of illegal motorized road use: (1) there are no indications of specific, chronic illegal motorized access, (2) it is not likely that female grizzly bears and their young encounter illegal motorized use, (3) it is not possible to accurately capture and quantify necessary information related to extent, duration, and frequency of activity, and (4) illegal use is an unauthorized activity.

The District Court agreed with Plaintiffs that FWS’s analysis was unsupported, contrary to the best available science, and, therefore, its justifications to exclude illegal road use in its calculations were

arbitrary and capricious. The Court emphasized that illegal road use does not need to be chronic and site specific to be considered. Notably, the Court disregarded the difficulty to determine the extent of illegal use or the associated impacts as “excuses” that had already been rejected in other matters. The Court reasoned that excluding illegal road use from analyses amounts to an “unsupported assumption that illegal roads have no effect on grizzly bears” that fails to “err on the side of the bear.” For those reasons, the Court declined to afford FWS deference and held that the Biological Opinion violated the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The District Court also found that the Forest Service must reinitiate ESA consultation on the Kootenai National Forest Plan because the amount of take has been exceeded. Reinitiation of consultation is a time-consuming process and will have broad impacts to other projects on the Forest. Fortunately, the Court declined to vacate the Knotty Pine Project and remanded it back to the agency to comply with the Court’s order.

Ultimately, the Court was “unconvinced that anything short of a quantitative analysis would comply with the Access Amendments and Kootenai Forest Plan.” The Court acknowledged that this holding could constitute a “shift in direction” but explained that the Court’s view has “evolved to be in line with the Judges within this District and the Ninth Circuit.” This latest evolution increases the burden on the Forest Service and FWS to avoid additional legal challenges in future projects involving illegal road use. */Taylor Harwood*

Washington Court of Appeals Hears Argument on DNR’s Wishbone Timber Sale

On October 31, Division One of the Washington Court of Appeals held oral argument on the challenge to the Department of Natural Resources’ (DNR) Wishbone Timber Sale. *Center for Sustainable Economy et al. v. WA State Dept of Natural Resources et al.*, No. 86667-2. AFRC and the Washington Forest Protection Association (WFPA) filed a joint *amicus curiae* brief before the Court of Appeals in support of DNR.

The Wishbone Timber Sale is located in rural King County, approximately 30 miles outside of Seattle. On April 19, 2023, after DNR concluded its State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) analysis for the sale, DNR issued a determination of nonsignificance, meaning that additional analysis was unwarranted. The sale was then approved by the Board of Natural Resources on June 1, 2023.

The Center for Sustainable Economy, along with Save the Olympic Peninsula, and the Legacy Forest Defense Coalition (collectively, the Center), challenged the Wishbone Timber Sale on February 2, 2024 in the King County Superior Court. The Center brought two relevant claims. First, the Center alleged that DNR had conducted an insufficient analysis of the specific climate impacts from the Wishbone Timber Sale. DNR effectively relied on the climate analyses of two programmatic 2019 environmental impact statements which evaluated the decade’s sustainable harvest level calculation and the marbled murrelet long term conservation strategy.

Together, those analyses demonstrated that over the next decade and the next 50 years, planned DNR timber harvests (including associated activities) would result in more carbon sequestered than emitted. For the Wishbone Timber Sale, DNR concluded that the sale would result in “minor amounts of CO₂ emissions” and would likely emit 48,700 metric tons of CO₂ from the harvest of “variable retention harvesting” of approximately 68 acres of structurally complex stands. Second, the Center alleged that DNR violated SEPA’s statutory requirement to develop an alternatives analysis “in any proposal which involves unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.” According to the

Center, there is an unresolved conflict regarding whether the Wishbone Timber Sale area could provide for carbon storage or other uses in lieu of timber harvest.

On March 28, 2024, the Superior Court issued a decision agreeing with the Center on both issues. The Superior Court cited *Conservation Northwest v. Commission of Public Lands*, stating that DNR has broad discretion in how to manage DNR timberlands and including “earning revenues from carbon payments under Washington’s carbon market, or earning revenue by creating opportunities for scientific research or opening lands for sustainable foraging.” The Superior Court remanded the matter to DNR to assess site-specific climate change impacts and describe appropriate alternatives to the harvest activities proposed by DNR.

On appeal, AFRC and WFPA filed a joint *amicus curiae* brief in support of DNR and addressed both issues before the Court. With respect to the “unresolved conflicts” issue, the joint *amicus* brief emphasized DNR’s statutory obligation to provide timber harvests pursuant to the Sustainable Harvest Calculation.

During oral argument, the three-judge panel—Judge Linda W.Y. Coburn, Judge Lori K. Smith, and Judge J. Michael Diaz—was very active and asked frequent questions of both parties. Because AFRC and WFPA participated in an amicus capacity, outside counsel did not participate in oral argument. A video recording of the argument is available to watch online at this [link](#).

Overall, the Court appeared to press the Center more on the climate change issue and DNR on the unresolved conflicts issue. The Court questioned the source of authority for the Center’s argument that DNR needed to conduct a more specific climate analysis than was provided by the 2019 programmatic environmental impact statements. The Court also repeatedly asked DNR’s counsel to explain why the Wishbone Timber Sale area could not have been analyzed for uses other than timber harvest. While it is nearly impossible to gauge a potential ruling from an oral argument, the panel was engaged and understood the nuanced legal issues presented in this matter. The outcome of the appeal will have important ramifications because it will set a precedent on the issue of how DNR should manage its trust lands and the level of discretion DNR has to manage those lands under its Sustainable Harvest Calculation. We are hopeful for a positive ruling in favor of DNR. An opinion could be issued as early as the end of this year but may take until the first quarter of 2026. /Greg Hibbard

Emerging Leaders Program Alumni Gather in Spokane to Sharpen Skills and Strengthen Our Industry



AFRC welcomed more than 30 forestry professionals from across the West to Spokane, Washington, for the 7th Annual Emerging Leaders Program on October 9-10. Designed for past participants of AFRC’s past leadership programs, this year’s edition reinforced foundational skills and tackled current legal, communications, and policy challenges through interactive sessions and strategic dialogue.

The program began with “Forest Management in the Courtroom,” a session led by AFRC General Counsel Sara Ghafouri and attorney David Bechtold of Northwest Resource Law PLLC. The panel offered a behind-the-scenes look at how forestry-related litigation unfolds, from declarations to injunctions, and emphasized the importance of bringing community, industry, and scientific voices into the courtroom to defend active forest management.

Next, Melissa Luck, News Director at KXLY-TV in Spokane, provided practical media training tailored to forestry professionals. In her interactive session, participants learned how to prepare for interviews, stay on message, and communicate more effectively with the public and the press. These are essential skills for anyone working in a high-profile, high-stakes field like natural resource management.

AFRC’s Andy Geissler moderated a panel titled “Taking Partnerships to the Next Level,” where leaders from the Idaho Department of Lands, and Oregon Department of Forestry shared how tools like the Good Neighbor Authority are being used to expand forest restoration and support agency capacity. The discussion highlighted the importance of collaboration, shared stewardship, and policy innovation in scaling up active management on public lands.

Later in the day, AFRC President Travis Joseph led a powerful and personal session on “Leading with Intention.” Travis challenged participants to reflect on their individual leadership journeys and spheres of influence. The session explored AFRC’s multi-pronged strategy to shift the paradigm for forest management, from litigation and policy reform to cultural change within federal agencies and smarter use of administrative tools. Participants were asked to consider: What am I trying to do? How am I going to do it? Why am I doing it? with the goal of aligning personal purpose with industry-wide momentum.

A networking reception with AFRC’s Board of Directors capped off the event, giving Emerging Leaders the chance to connect with seasoned professionals, forge new relationships, and continue the conversations sparked during the day. AFRC extends our sincere thanks to all participants, speakers, and AFRC members who made this year’s program a success. /*Nick Smith*