



A Fork in the Road: Have We Learned Any Lessons in 30 years?

For more than three decades, the Northern Spotted Owl has shaped forest policy across the Pacific Northwest. Following its listing under the Endangered Species Act in the 1990s, federal timber harvests fell by roughly 90 percent. Millions of acres were designated as critical habitat, and forest management across the region was fundamentally reorganized around protecting a single species.

The consequences were profound. Thousands of family-wage jobs disappeared, hundreds of mills closed, and rural communities lost billions of dollars that once supported local economies, schools, and essential public services.

Americans were told these sacrifices were necessary to save the owl. Yet after more than 30 years, the species continues to disappear.

A 2026 [study](#) by researchers from Oregon State University and the U.S. Forest Service found Northern Spotted Owl populations are approaching, or have already reached, functional extinction across large portions of their historic range. Researchers detected no Northern Spotted owls in parts of the Washington Cascades north of Seattle, and identified the Oregon Coast and much of Washington as areas of critical concern.



A tributary of the Little North Fork of the Feather River on the Plumas National Forest following the North Complex Fire. The area, adjacent to an inventoried roadless area, once provided habitat for the northern spotted owl. Photo: Jake Blaufuss, AFRC

Meanwhile, researchers documented 279,439 Barred Owl detections compared to just 34,341 owl detections while analyzing more than 2.1 million hours of recordings across nearly 38,000 square miles of federally managed habitat. These findings should force a serious reassessment of federal forest policy.

The primary threat to the Northern Spotted Owl today is not a lack of protected habitat. It is competition from the Barred Owl, a larger and more adaptable species that now occupies much of the same range.

Even federal wildlife officials acknowledge Barred Owl competition is the leading driver of Northern Spotted Owl declines.

That reality raises an uncomfortable question: If the principal threat to the species is Barred Owl competition, why has federal policy spent three decades focusing almost exclusively on habitat restrictions?

The latest science does not suggest that habitat is irrelevant. It is. But the record clearly shows that habitat protections alone have not halted, much less reversed, the owl's decline.

Today, federal wildlife officials are proposing the lethal removal of more than 450,000 Barred Owls over the next 30 years in an effort to prevent the Northern Spotted Owl from disappearing altogether. Whether one supports or opposes that strategy, the proposal itself is a remarkable admission: after decades of habitat protection and land-use restrictions, policymakers are now confronting a problem those measures were never designed to solve.

The Northern Spotted Owl was never intended to become the organizing principle for managing millions of acres of public forest. Yet over time, forest policy increasingly prioritized a single species over broader ecosystem objectives.

America's forests must provide wildlife habitat, clean water, carbon storage, recreation opportunities, wildfire resilience, sustainable wood products, and economic opportunity for rural communities. Achieving those goals requires active, science-based stewardship focused on healthy and resilient ecosystems.

The Northern Spotted Owl story should be a case study in humility. We dramatically curtailed timber harvest, designated millions of acres of critical habitat, and reorganized federal forest policy around protecting one species. Yet the latest science suggests that species is already functionally extinct across large portions of its historic range.

The question is no longer whether the Northern Spotted Owl strategy achieved its intended outcome. It did not. The question now is whether we are willing to learn from that experiment and experience.

Over the coming months, federal agencies are expected to announce significant changes to the Northwest Forest Plan and management plans for the O&C Lands in western Oregon. Those decisions will help determine whether federal land managers continue down the same path of single-species management or embrace a new approach centered on active forest management, ecological resilience, wildfire risk reduction, and healthy rural communities.

Thirty years ago, policymakers made a choice that reshaped forests and communities across the Pacific Northwest. Today, they face another choice. The lessons of the past should not be ignored. */Travis Joseph*

Federal Timber Sales Reach 3.3 Billion Board Feet, Highest Since 1997

The U.S. Forest Service concluded Fiscal Year 2026 with timber sales totaling 3.3 billion board feet nationwide, the agency's highest level since 1997 and 103 million board feet above its annual target. The accomplishment reflects a renewed emphasis on domestic timber production and the agency's ability to deliver results despite planning requirements, litigation risks, and workforce challenges.

In an October 6 [letter](#) to President Trump and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, AFRC President Travis Joseph congratulated the Administration and Forest Service for achieving this milestone. The letter emphasized the importance of a strong and predictable federal timber program to sustain family-wage jobs, rural communities, and the forest products infrastructure needed to manage our national forests.

The economic benefits are substantial. According to estimates cited in AFRC's letter, the FY2026 timber volume represents enough lumber to build nearly 200,000 single-family homes and supported more than 36,000 direct jobs and 115,000 total jobs. Active forest management also improves forest health, reduces hazardous fuel loads, and helps protect communities and watersheds from severe wildfire.

Forest Service Regions 1, 5, and 6 were assigned approximately 45% of the agency's 3.2 billion board foot target. Collectively, the three western regions exceeded their assignments by approximately 35 million board feet.

The following tables summarize FY2026 timber sale accomplishments by national forest. Contributions from personal use permits, primarily firewood, and Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) are identified separately as percentages of total reported outputs.

USFS - Region 1 - FY26			
Target - 434 MMBF			
Forest	Target (MMBF)	Sold	% Accomplishment
Idaho Panhandle	124.0	111.0	90%
Nez-Clear	79.0	78.4	99%
Kootenai	58.0	60.9	105%
Lolo	60.0	60.6	101%
Flathead	36.0	45.1	125%
Bitterroot	32.0	18.3	57%
B-D	15.0	21.0	140%
Helena-Lewis & Clark	20.0	26.7	134%
Custer-Gallatin	11.0	10.0	91%
Total	435.0	432	100%
	Personal use permits	48.4	11%
	GNA	127.7	30%

USFS - Region 5 - FY26			
Target - 393 MMBF			
Forest	Target (MMBF)	Sold	% Accomplishment
Eldorado	18.0	16.2	90%
Plumas	45.0	47.0	104%
Lake Tahoe Basin	9.0	11.1	123%
Tahoe	69.0	58.2	84%
Klamath	40.0	45.2	113%

Lassen	52.0	60.9	117%
Shasta-Trinity	48.0	41.8	87%
Mendocino	2.0	1.9	95%
Modoc	25.0	26.8	107%
Six Rivers	15.0	13.9	93%
Sequoia	9.0	14.3	159%
Sierra	20.0	26.5	133%
Stanislaus	38.0	37.7	99%
Inyo	3.0	10.2	340%
LP, SB, CLE		1.3	
Total	393	413	105%
	Personal Use Permits	27.5	7%

USFS - Region 6 - FY26			
Target - 622 MMBF			
Forest	Target (MMBF)	Sold	% Accomplishment
Colville	131.0	131.9	101%
Deschutes	24.0	27.2	113%
Fremont-Winema	102.0	106.5	104%
Gifford Pinchot	36.0	36.2	101%
Malheur	16.0	13.0	81%
Mt Baker-Snoqualmie	11.0	12.3	112%
Mt Hood	26.0	27.2	105%
Ochoco	10.0	6.8	68%
Okanogan-Wenatchee	30.0	28.0	93%
Olympic	16.0	13.0	81%
Rogue River-Siskiyou	29.0	30.6	106%
Siuslaw	46.0	51.1	111%
Umatilla	35.0	38.6	110%
Umpqua	30.0	33.0	110%
Wallowa Whitman	20.0	16.0	80%
Willamette	60.0	67.2	112%
Total	622.0	638.6	103%
	Personal Use Permits	40.8	6%
	GNA	60.1	9%

Looking ahead, federal law requires the Forest Service to increase timber outputs by at least 250 million board feet (MMBF) annually, establishing a minimum nationwide target of 3.55 billion board feet in

FY2027. National forests in Regions 1, 5, and 6 are developing plans to reach approximately 450 MMBF, 450 MMBF, and 745 MMBF, respectively.

AFRC's letter emphasized that continued progress will require sustained leadership, policy improvements, and investment in the workforce and infrastructure needed to manage federal forests. "This accomplishment should be viewed as a foundation, not a finish line," Travis wrote. AFRC looks forward to working with the Administration and Forest Service leadership to build on this progress, strengthen America's domestic wood supply, and expand the active management needed to keep our national forests healthy and productive. /*Andy Geissler and Nick Smith*

Committee Leaders Release Bipartisan Senate Permitting Reform Deal

The Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee recently released a long-awaited permitting reform proposal. The 417-page bill, the so-called [Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act](#), is the result of over a year of bipartisan negotiations seeking to speed permitting for new energy projects and transmission and energy infrastructure.

The proposal includes substantive reforms, including changes to permitting timelines, the National Environmental Policy Act, judicial review, and Endangered Species Act (ESA) compliance. While we are still reviewing the bill, it does appear that some of its provisions would apply to federal land management activities, including defining best available science and data under the ESA and reinforcing the Supreme Court's 2025 decision in [Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County](#).

Whether or not all of the provisions apply to federal forest management activities, the bill would set a number of important new precedents for greater reliance on state and tribal environmental reviews in lieu of NEPA, allowing states to be delegated Section 7 consultation responsibilities under the ESA, and by limiting the remedies available to courts so a NEPA violation alone would no longer stop a project.

While some of the largest national environmental groups have largely remained silent on the bill thus far, more radical groups are working to stop the legislation from advancing. An official with the Center for Biological Diversity called the bill "an act of sabotage" and dozens of environmental groups, including notorious anti-forestry litigants like Cascade-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, WildEarth Guardians, and the Cottonwood Environmental Law Center, signed an October 6 letter to the Democratic sponsors and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer in opposition to the bill. The bipartisan sponsors hope the Senate will take up the bill after the November midterm elections when Congress returns for a lame duck session. /*Heath Heikkila*

Western Oregon BLM FY2026 Accomplishments and Look Ahead to FY2027

As the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) begins a new fiscal year, we take stock of the agency's Western Oregon timber sale performance in 2026 and the outlook for 2027. In 2026 the BLM awarded 42 timber sales for a total of 266 MMBF. Two sales went no-bid in 2026 for a total of 6.2 MMBF. Sales offered were competitively bid across the state. Awarded sales were *appraised* at \$49.4 Million, while total bid value was \$75.3 Million.

Northwest Oregon, Coos Bay, and Lakeview were successful in offering and awarding their stated targets in 2026.

The Medford District came close to offering their initial target of 60 MMBF by offering 53 MMBF, although that number is somewhat inflated as 11 MMBF came from an FY2025 timber sale which was awarded in 2026. The District focused heavily in 2026 on treating areas impacted by the Douglas-fir engraver beetle. That effort will continue into 2027.

Roseburg missed their 32 MMBF target due in large part to delays from the numerous legal challenges impacting the District. The District's 3.6 MMBF Slater Tree timber sale received no bids in 2026 and currently remains on-the-shelf.

While we are disappointed that the Agency missed their stated target of 290 MMBF, we are encouraged by the trajectory of the BLM's timber program. At this time last year, the Agency had offered 236 MMBF and awarded 220 MMBF in FY2025– accomplishments that we celebrated after a dismal FY2024.

Apart from volume offered, we have also noticed several improvements over the past year which may not represent immediate volume increases, but nonetheless, make strides towards a better program for AFRC purchasers in the long run. For instance, we have noticed several Districts offering greater flexibility for purchasers to operate during the wet season, and more willingness to entertain emerging harvest technology, like tethered assist equipment, into new and existing planning areas. The turnaround time for planning has also noticeably improved.

Values Listed in MMBF						
District SYU	Timber Target	2026 Awarded Volume To-Date	Total Volume Offered	Planned ASQ Contribution	ASQ Volume Offered	% Minimum ASQ
Eugene	76	68	72	59	60	189%
Salem	84	86	91	85	87	223%
Medford	60	50	53	32	28	126%
Roseburg	35	25	31	21	20	104%
Coos Bay	32	32	35	9	9	128%
Kfalls	4	5	4	5	4	111%
Total	291	266	286	212	208	91%

District	2026 Sale Plan		BLM 2027 Sale Plan				RMP ASQ Requirements		
	Total Offered	ASQ Offered	Total Planned Volume	Change	ASQ Contribution	Change	ASQ	Min ASQ	Max ASQ
								%40 Variance	
Eugene	68.4	68.4	76.5	+8.1	58.0	-10.4	53	31.8	74.2
Salem	85.9	85.9	87.5	+1.6	86.9	+1.0	65	39	91
Medford	52.6	52.6	58.3	+5.8	44.0	-8.6	37	22.2	51.8
Roseburg	28.6	28.6	36.7	+8.1	34.7	+6.1	32	19.2	44.8
Coos Bay	31.3	31.3	32.7	+1.4	8.8	-22.5	12	7.2	16.8
Kfalls	5.0	5.0	6.0	+1.0	6.0	+1.0	6	3.6	8.4
Total	271.8	271.8	297.6	+25.9	238.4	-33.4	205.0	123.0	287.0

As we look ahead to 2027, we are also encouraged by the posted sales plans from each District, which show a statewide target of 298 MMBF, including a target ASQ of 238 MMBF. /Corey Bingaman

Ninth Circuit Allows Critical BLM Siuslaw HLB Plan to Move Forward After Four Years in Court

On September 17, the Ninth Circuit issued an unpublished [memorandum decision](#) reversing and remanding Judge Kasubhai's decision and allowing the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Siuslaw HLB Plan (Plan) to move forward. *Cascadia Wildlands v. Adcock*, No. 25-4161, 2026 WL 2772092 (9th

Cir. Sept. 17, 2026). AFRC submitted an [amicus curiae brief](#) before the Ninth Circuit. See [March 2026 Newsletter](#).

The Siuslaw HLB Plan was designed to cover 13,225 acres of Harvest Land Base (HLB) lands and harvest 1,404–2,305 acres per decade. The Siuslaw HLB Plan is a multi-decade strategy to contribute an upwards of 7 million board feet from the HLB each year towards its harvest obligations under the O&C Act, representing a substantial share (approximately 13 percent) of the Eugene Sustained Yield Unit’s annual allowable sale quantity. The BLM issued an environmental assessment (EA) and tiered its analysis to the 2016 Final Environmental Impact Statement supporting the BLM’s Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan (2016 RMP/FEIS).

In September 2022, Cascadia Wildlands and Oregon Wild (Plaintiffs) challenged the Plan on a purely procedural basis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Plaintiffs alleged that the BLM’s decision to conduct an EA rather than an environmental impact statement (EIS) violated NEPA because the BLM failed to take a hard look at multiple environmental impacts. Namely, Plaintiffs alleged that more analysis was required pertaining to soil disturbances, invasive weeds, sensitive species, and cumulative impacts. In April 2025, Oregon District Court Judge Kasubhai granted summary judgment to Plaintiffs, vacated the Plan, and ordered the BLM to conduct an EIS on remand.

The Federal Government appealed that order to the Ninth Circuit. AFRC’s brief highlighted two primary reasons to reverse the District Court’s decision on appeal. First, AFRC identified the detailed analysis in the 2016 RMP/FEIS, which provides a sufficient basis for the BLM to tier to in support of subsequent decisions like the Plan. Second, AFRC identified caselaw following the District Court’s decision that demanded a different result. Roughly one month after the District Court issued its decision, the United States Supreme Court issued its seminal opinion on NEPA that provided a “course correction” for how lower courts were required to afford deference under NEPA. *Seven Cnty. Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle Cnty., Colo.*, 605 U.S. 168 (2025) (*Seven County*). Three months later, the Ninth Circuit applied the reasoning and teachings from *Seven County* to uphold the Big Weekly Project, where the BLM issued an EA that also tiered to the 2016 RMP/FEIS to support the agency’s NEPA analysis. *Cascadia Wildlands v. U.S. Bureau of Land Mgmt.*, 153 F.4th 869 (9th Cir. 2025).

After the parties completely briefed the merits of the appeal, the Ninth Circuit unanimously elected to decide the appeal on the briefs without hearing oral argument. Notably, that panel consisted of three judges appointed by Democratic presidents: Judge Friedland (appointed by President Obama in 2014); Judge de Alba (appointed by President Biden in 2023); and Senior Judge Lasnik from the Western District Court of Washington sitting by designation (appointed by President Clinton in 1998).

The Ninth Circuit reversed the District Court for three primary reasons. First, the panel emphasized that the Plan “does not authorize any actions at the harvest unit area scale” but provides that the BLM will later select parcels for harvest within the 13,225-acre Plan area. Therefore, the Ninth Circuit concluded that it was permissible for the BLM to leave analysis of impacts to specific parcels, including potential mitigation measures, to a later date when authorizing harvest of specific parcels.

Second, the Ninth Circuit rejected Plaintiffs’ arguments challenging the BLM’s methodology or degree of analysis in support of the agency’s conclusions, including with respect to cumulative impacts. The Court explained that *Seven County* and *Cascadia Wildlands* demonstrate that the BLM should have tiered to the 2016 RMP/FEIS in this instance and the level of detail of an agency’s analysis must be afforded deference without being “excessively second-guessed by a court.”

Finally, the Ninth Circuit determined that Plaintiffs were incorrect to suggest that the Plan would allow the BLM to select parcels for harvest in the future without adequate NEPA review. The Ninth Circuit acknowledged that the BLM has committed to completing either a tiered EA, categorical exclusion review, or a Determination of NEPA Adequacy before taking such future action. Additionally, the Ninth Circuit noted that the BLM has committed to opening a 30-day public comment period for any future timber sale decision under the Plan.

AFRC is grateful for the Federal Government's commitment to pursue this appeal and is eager to see the important work under the Siuslaw HLB Plan move forward after such a lengthy delay. AFRC members that purchase sales from the Eugene Sustained Yield Unit should greatly benefit from this decision. AFRC is also encouraged by the fact that the Ninth Circuit is consistently applying *Seven County* and *Cascadia Wildlands*. AFRC looks forward to continuing to ensure that critical caselaw is given the appropriate weight in courts throughout the West. /Greg Hibbard

AFRC and AOCC Move to Intervene in Challenge to the BLM's Northwestern and Coastal Oregon RMP

On September 18, AFRC and the Association of O&C Counties (AOCC) jointly [moved to intervene](#) as a defendant in Plaintiff Cascadia Wildlands' challenge to the BLM's Aloha Trout Forest Management Project and the 2016 Northwestern and Coastal Oregon Resource Management Plan (NCO RMP). *Cascadia Wildlands v. Burgum et al.*, Case No. 6:26-CV-1262 (D. Or.). In June, Plaintiff filed its lawsuit challenging the Aloha Trout Project as a means to collaterally attack the validity of the NCO RMP under the Congressional Review Act of 1996 (CRA). See [July 2026 Newsletter](#).

AFRC joined forces with AOCC to not only protect the interests associated with the Aloha Trout Project (AFRC members Hull Oakes and Hampton Tree Farms, LLC have both purchased sales under the Project), but the NCO RMP itself, which covers 1.3 million acres. Plaintiff seeks to throw out this Obama-era resource management plan, disrupting numerous timber sales, hazardous fuels treatments, wildlife habitat projects, road maintenance and other authorized forestry work under the plan. Plaintiff asks the Court to vacate the NCO RMP because the BLM purportedly violated the CRA by failing to submit the plan to Congress before it took legal effect. This lawsuit comes after Congress voted in 2025 to invalidate certain land use plans across Alaska, Montana, North Dakota, and Wyoming under the CRA. Until recently, agencies have issued well over 100 resource management plans without ever submitting them to Congress.

Along with the motion to intervene, AFRC and AOCC filed a proposed [Motion to Dismiss](#). AFRC and AOCC argue that the lawsuit should be dismissed for three primary reasons: (1) the CRA does not allow judicial review; (2) the statute of limitations to challenge the 2016 NCO RMP has expired; and (3) Plaintiff should be barred from presenting arguments that it should have raised in its prior challenge to the 2016 RMPs. The Government filed a [similar motion](#) in response to Plaintiff's Amended Complaint.

Plaintiff has yet to respond to the motion to intervene and there is no deadline for the court to rule on the motion once it has been briefed. In the meantime, Magistrate Judge Potter has adopted a stipulated briefing schedule that was presented by the parties and calls for Plaintiff to respond to both motions to dismiss. The schedule provides that briefing on the motions to dismiss will be completed by December 18. /Greg Hibbard

The AFRC Podcast



Episode 61: Travis Joseph and Chris Edwards- "That's Wild!"



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

In this special crossover episode of The AFRC Podcast and Oregon Forest Industry Council's Forestry Smart Policy Podcast, AFRC President Travis Joseph joins OFIC President Chris Edwards for a wide ranging conversation about forestry and politics. They discuss the growing cost of wildfire, forest loss on federal lands, and how anti-forestry litigation delays collaborative forest management. The conversation examines the Grasshopper Fire, public frustration with wildfire and smoke, and the role Democrats should play in advancing active forest management and challenging groups that oppose it.

Click here to listen to [Episode 61](#). Our podcast is also available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts

AFRC Submits Comments on Multiple Forest Service Actions

September was a busy month for the Forest Service as it included important junctures for several key agency actions. First, a Notice of Intent (NOI) was released that outlined revisions to the agency's travel management regulations. The current Rule was finalized in 2005 and favored an overall reduction in the National Forest System (NFS) road network that, in part, resulted in a reduction of approximately 18,000 miles of roads from that network over the past 20 years. Last month's NOI indicated a course correction from the 2005 Rule by favoring an increased level of public access, requirements to consider new road construction, and a higher level of scrutiny on road closures. AFRC submitted [comments](#) that expressed support for the revision while offering additional ideas to improve the NFS road network.

Second, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was released that analyzed the impacts of revising the Blue Mountains Forest Plans. The DEIS included multiple Plan Components that would govern management of the Malheur, Wallowa-Whitman, and Umatilla National Forests. Most notably, the Proposed Action would eliminate the Eastside Screens (including the "21-inch rule"), as well as connect desired forest conditions on the Natural Range of Variability and assume rescission of the Roadless Rule. Probable Timber Sale Quantities (PTSQ) would increase under both action alternatives analyzed in the DEIS. AFRC's [comments](#) expressed strong support for the Proposed Action while offering additional Plan Components to strengthen the revised Plans and give more flexibility to local land managers.

Finally, a DEIS was released that analyzed the impacts of rescinding the 2001 Roadless Rule. The Proposed Action, a full rescission of the Rule, would remove Inventoried Road Area (IRA) designation from 44.7 million acres of NFS land. The DEIS also considered an alternative that would retain the Rule while reducing IRAs by 17.9 million acres outside of the Tongass National Forest. AFRC submitted [comments](#) expressing support for the Proposed Action. Our comments emphasized the Rule's relation to the Wilderness Act and how its application circumvents congressional responsibilities (emphasis ours):

The origin of the Roadless Rule is rooted in the Wilderness Act of 1964. Following passage of the Act, the Forest Service conducted a review of areas suitable for wilderness designation, known as the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE). Roughly 111 million acres of wilderness have been designated since enactment of the Act, partly as a result of the RARE process. However, only Congress is authorized to designate Wilderness areas, and many of the areas identified in the RARE process did not receive congressional designation. The Roadless Rule was a mechanism designed to afford those areas protections similar to those afforded to wilderness areas while circumventing the congressional designation process. In essence, IRAs are de facto-wilderness areas that don't require an act of Congress to be established. In this sense, the Roadless Rule was unilateral and undemocratic and should be rescinded to restore the balance of power between government branches enshrined in the Constitution.

AFRC will continue to track these three actions and provide substantive feedback when necessary. /Andy Geissler

Colville National Forest Moves Quickly on Sinlahekin Fire Recovery

The Colville National Forest is moving quickly to recover timber damaged by the Sinlahekin Fire, using new federal procedures designed to expedite post-fire recovery. The fire burned approximately 166,000 acres, including 20,000 acres of National Forest land. The Forest Service determined that roughly 6,000 acres on the Tonasket Ranger District experienced high-severity fire and has identified 3,306 acres for salvage harvest.

The project qualifies for expedited treatment under the new National Post-Fire Recovery Environmental Analysis (PFREA), which allows national forests to respond more quickly to wildfire damage. Planned activities include removing hazardous trees that threaten public safety and infrastructure, reducing fuel loads, and recovering fire-killed and damaged timber before it loses its economic value. The project also includes reforestation and other treatments intended to improve forest conditions and support wildlife habitat.

The Forest Service is also using an Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) to accelerate implementation. This authority allows the agency to respond to immediate threats to public safety and natural resources following wildfire. Authorized activities can include removing dead and dying trees, addressing insect and disease risks, replanting burned areas, and reducing hazardous fuels along roads and trails.

To move the project forward, the Forest Service opened a seven-day scoping period beginning September 22. The ESD also allows the project to proceed without an administrative objection period. A Finding of No Significant Impact was issued October 7, clearing the way for implementation. The first contingency fireline deck sales are scheduled for October 13, with the first salvage timber sale expected to be advertised during the third week of October.

AFRC appreciates the Colville National Forest's efforts to move quickly on this important recovery project. Recovering fire-damaged timber before it deteriorates helps preserve its economic value while supporting reforestation and reducing future wildfire hazards. The Colville joins the Sawtooth, Deschutes, and Fremont-Winema National Forests in using the new PFREA to expedite post-fire recovery. /*Tom Partin*

Upthegrove Shrinks Preservation Goal, Seeks Funding to Address Fiscal Crisis

On September 24, Washington Commissioner of Public Lands Dave Upthegrove held a press conference to announce that a fiscal crisis facing the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was forcing him to scale back his proposed 77,000-acre set aside of DNR state trust lands and seek revenues elsewhere, including allowing DNR to increase the management fee it levies against the revenues it generates to fund its own operations.

Commissioner Upthegrove is requesting that the Board of Natural Resources increase management fees from 25% to 27% for state forest transfer lands (county trust lands) managed under the Forest Development Account and from 31% to 32% for federal grant lands managed under the Resource Management Cost Account – the maximum amounts currently allowed under legislative budget provisos. This change would increase the funding to DNR's management accounts, which are both projected to reach zero balances, while reducing the funds going to state and local beneficiaries by an equal amount.

In his speech, Upthegrove lamented that DNR state trust lands are primarily managed for their timber value and pledged to once again ask the legislature to authorize DNR to remove lands from harvest in favor of far less valuable carbon offset markets, while also providing more funding for programs like Trust Land Transfer that take lands out of trust management. These will be very difficult requests at a time when the state and local governments face large budget shortfalls.

Upthegrove also announced that he would now seek to set aside 55,000 acres of “legacy forests” on DNR state trust lands, rather than the 77,000-acre goal he adopted during his 2024 election campaign. He attributed the difference to “mapping errors” and the need to release some acres for harvest over the next five years to keep DNR's management accounts in the black. Upthegrove warned that without the legislative reforms he is seeking DNR may need to start releasing some of the 55,000 acres for harvest as soon as 2030.

Setting aside 55,000 acres of mature DNR state trust lands would cost the state, local beneficiaries, and DNR approximately \$1.4 billion in revenue over the next 10 to 15 years. It would likely lead to layoffs at DNR and significant reductions in revenues for the state, largely distributed through the capitol budget, and for trust beneficiaries. In the short term, it is highly unlikely that DNR can increase timber sale levels while Upthegrove has withdrawn, at least temporally, 55,000 acres from the harvestable land base.

In fact, since Upthegrove assumed office DNR has fallen far short of meeting its timber sale objectives and the level outlined in the most recent Sustainable Harvest Calculation (SHC). In Fiscal Year 2026, DNR sold 338.3 million board feet (MMBF) in western Washington, well below the 460 MMBF SHC level and nearly a 26-year low. DNR also received \$298.29 MBF for the timber it sold statewide in FY 26 -- 23.5% lower than the average of the previous four years of \$389.79. Under Upthegrove, DNR is selling less timber, and it is selling less valuable timber, driving DNR closer to a fiscal cliff. If DNR had simply sold 460 MMBF and received the four-year average stumpage of \$389.79, it could have generated over \$50 million more for trust land beneficiaries and \$20 million more for its own management accounts – far, far more than DNR will receive under his proposal to increase management fees.

It will be interesting to see how the beneficiaries respond to Upthegrove's proposal to increase management fees, which means less money in their pockets and more money in the Department's. It will be even more interesting to see how legislators feel about Upthegrove actively working to make the state's budget crisis worse through reduced state trust land timber revenues while also asking for increased funding to bail him out of the unrealistic promises made on the campaign trail. /Heath Heikkila

AFRC Helps Host Tour of Washington's Capitol State Forest

On September 23, AFRC helped host a tour of the Capitol State Forest for legislators and agency officials. Participants started the day with a tour of the Weyerhaeuser tree nursery in Rochester to see the science and care that goes into growing the seedlings that will become the next generation of forests in western Washington.

The group then received a lunch presentation about Department of Natural Resources (DNR) State Trust Lands and the unique history of the 110,000-acre Capitol State Forest, much of which was purchased by the State of Washington after being heavily logged and burned in the 1900's. DNR manages the Capitol State Forest to generate revenue for various beneficiaries, the state General Fund, and to repay purchase costs.



Photo: Sierra Pacific Industries' Matt Liese describes some of the stand characteristics and other aspects of the Misty Timber Sale.

Representatives from AFRC member companies Sierra Pacific Industries, Willis Enterprises, Cascade Hardwood, and Stella-Jones served as tour guides as the group loaded into vehicles to the first stop on the Capitol State Forest, the Misty Timber Sale. Logging operations had just commenced on this 116-acre timber sale, which will ultimately generate \$3.3 million for Grays Harbor County and other beneficiaries, the state, and DNR's management accounts, while also funding needed road work and culvert abandonment and improvements to benefit salmon and other aquatic species.

Participants learned about how DNR timber sales are developed under some of the strongest forest practices in the world after extensive reviews by agency foresters and scientists. The tour also highlighted the economic benefits of Misty, where logs are expected to flow to eight different nearby mills employing nearly 500 people producing a wide diversity of carbon-friendly wood products.

Like many other DNR timber sales containing mature forests, this sale was litigated by the anti-forestry group Legacy Forest Defense Coalition (LFDC), a serial litigant that has unsuccessfully challenged dozens of DNR timber sales. Western Timber, the purchaser of the sale, intervened to help defend the sale and secured a win in Superior Court. LFDC has filed an appeal to the Court of Appeals.

The second stop of the tour provided an overlook of the Capitol State Forest to see the diverse age classes across the landscape, riparian area protections, and the well-maintained road system that is funded by

timber purchasers and supports public access and recreation. The participants discussed some of the challenges currently facing the forest products sector, including reductions in harvest volumes from private and state lands, as well as the loss of markets for residuals.

In addition to Weyerhaeuser, which graciously hosted the nursery visit and lunch briefing, the tour was also hosted by representatives from the Washington Forest Protection Association and the American Wood Council. /Heath Heikkila

AFRC Leadership Forum Brings Forest Industry Professionals Together in Reno



Forest products industry professionals from across the West gathered in Reno, Nevada, on September 30 for AFRC's 2026 Leadership Forum. Held at the Peppermill Resort Spa Casino, the event provided opportunities to connect with industry peers, engage with AFRC staff and invited speakers, and learn how changes at the U.S. Forest Service, federal litigation and regulatory reforms could affect timber sales and active forest management.

The day began with a discussion about working effectively with the U.S. Forest Service as the agency undergoes significant organizational changes. Eli Ilano and Jonathan Fisher of the Forest

Service joined AFRC Director of Forest Policy and Monitoring Andy Geissler and California State Manager Jake Blaufuss to discuss how the restructuring could affect timber sale planning, decision making and industry engagement.

Geissler outlined plans to replace regional offices with state offices, relocate the agency's headquarters to Salt Lake City and consolidate administrative functions. The discussion emphasized the importance of maintaining relationships with local Forest Service personnel as these changes take shape.

AFRC General Counsel Sara Ghafouri and veteran attorney Jamie Rosen of Forest Counsel led a session on federal forest litigation. They walked participants through the litigation process and discussed how legal challenges can delay forest management projects. The session also highlighted the importance of timber purchasers and other stakeholders participating in the defense of Forest Service decisions.

AFRC President Travis Joseph led an afternoon discussion on the principles of leadership, federal regulatory reforms and the changing political landscape in Washington, D.C. He addressed opportunities to improve forest management through federal policy changes and the importance of advancing reforms that can endure changes in political leadership.

The afternoon program also featured interactive media training led by AFRC Public Affairs Director Nick Smith. Participants practiced developing clear messages, responding to difficult questions and connecting industry priorities to issues that matter to the public, including: forest health, wildfire prevention, and the benefits of a strong forest products industry.

The final session featured Josh Law of We The Forest discussing the growing role of artificial intelligence in forest industry communications. Law introduced an AI powered information tool being developed by

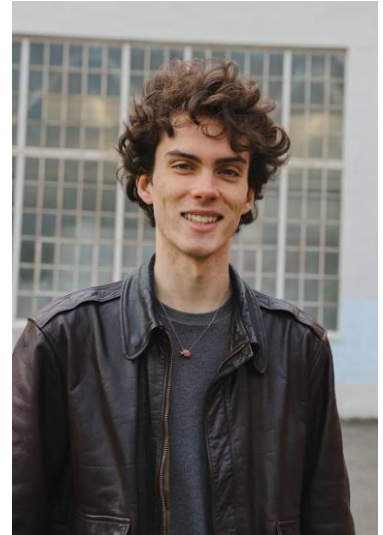
AFRC and We The Forest to provide credible, accessible answers and research about forest management and the forest products industry. Participants were invited to test the technology and provide feedback.

Networking was a central part of the Leadership Forum, with opportunities throughout the day to exchange ideas and build relationships. The event concluded with an evening reception with AFRC's Board of Directors. AFRC thanks the industry professionals, Forest Service representatives and guest speakers who participated in this year's Leadership Forum and helped make the event a success. /*Nick Smith*

AFRC Welcomes Fall Intern Laif Kvarsten

Born and raised in Portland, Laif Kvarsten is currently in his fourth year at the University of Oregon in the School of Planning, Public Policy and Management. His academic areas of focus include public administration, housing policy, and historic preservation. After completing his undergraduate degree, he plans to pursue graduate studies.

Laif learned the importance of natural resource management at a young age, having grown up frequently visiting his family's small tree farm outside Salem. This experience, combined with climbing trips to the Three Sisters Wilderness Area and Mount Hood National Forest, instilled in Laif a deep sense of reverence for Oregon's forests and a fascination with why they are the way they are. At the University of Oregon, Laif took several courses that explored the history of the timber industry in the Pacific Northwest, and how lost timber receipts impact rural communities and working families.



Laif is excited to join AFRC to continue learning about the trajectory of the industry, how it is adapting to changing political and economic realities, and how it can best support the livelihoods of Oregonians. /*Laif Kvarsten*

AFRC in the News

- AFRC and OFIC published a joint opinion in the [Oregon Capital Chronicle](#) by Travis Joseph and Chris Edwards regarding wildfires and anti-forestry litigation.
- Travis Joseph was interviewed by Penny Rosenberg of [Willamette Week/Oregon Journalism Project](#) for a story anti-forestry litigation and the Grasshopper Fire.
- AFRC, HFHC, and the Washington Communities and Schools Network teamed up with We the Forest to launch a new [video series](#) of shorts highlighting the importance of timber revenue from DNR state trust lands to local communities.