

Note from the President: The Election Is Over. Now Congress Must Deliver Bipartisan Forest Management Reforms

Elections expose the issues that divide Americans. Governing requires leaders to find the common ground that can bring us back together.

With the midterm election behind us, Congress has an opportunity to show that responsible stewardship of America's federal forests does not have to be a partisan issue.

Republicans and Democrats may disagree on many questions, but they should be able to agree that healthier forests, safer communities, cleaner air and water, thriving wildlife habitat, and strong rural economies are goals worth pursuing together.

The need for action is urgent. Millions of acres of federal forests face growing threats from overcrowded conditions, insects, disease, and catastrophic wildfire. Communities across the West are living with the consequences, including dangerous smoke, damaged watersheds, lost recreational opportunities, destroyed habitat, and increasing wildfire suppression and recovery costs.

Addressing this crisis requires a significant and sustained increase in active forest management. Federal agencies must be able to thin overcrowded forests, reduce hazardous fuels, remove hazard trees, restore watersheds, recover fire-damaged timber, and promptly reforest burned landscapes.

The forest products industry is essential to accomplishing that work. Mills, contractors, loggers, truckdrivers, workers, markets, and equipment provide the infrastructure and expertise federal land managers need to turn forest management plans into results on the ground. They also supply the renewable wood products Americans use every day.

Congress has provided important funding and new authorities to the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management over the last Congresses. But funding alone cannot overcome the environmental reviews, consultations, permitting requirements, and litigation that can delay urgently needed work for years.

Without targeted legislative reforms, federal agencies will continue to struggle to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration. At the same time, forest-products businesses will lack the certainty needed to retain the mills, contractors, workers, and markets that make this work possible.

Congress has already identified substantial areas of bipartisan agreement.

During the 119th Congress, bipartisan forest management and permitting proposals advanced through the House Natural Resources Committee, Senate Agriculture Committee, House Agriculture Committee,

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. Collectively, these proposals provide a foundation for meaningful reform.

Members of both parties have supported common sense ideas such as:

- Expanding and improving authorities under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act so agencies can complete landscape-scale treatments more efficiently.
- Streamlining hazard-tree removal, utility right-of-way maintenance, post-fire restoration, and reforestation.
- Improving Good Neighbor Authority so states, Tribes, counties, and other partners can more effectively assist with federal forest-management projects.
- Resolving procedural obstacles created by the Cottonwood decision that can require agencies to repeat consultation without improving environmental outcomes.
- Establishing clearer timelines and more focused requirements for reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Historic Preservation Act.
- Accelerating judicial review and agency remands so priority forest-health projects are not stalled for years over procedural disputes.
- Supporting existing and emerging markets for timber, woody biomass, and mill residuals so restoration work is more economically viable and less costly to taxpayers.

These reforms would not eliminate environmental safeguards or public involvement. They would make the federal decision-making process more efficient, predictable, and accountable while helping agencies complete urgently needed work before forests and communities are lost to catastrophic wildfire.

No legislative package will give every member of Congress everything they want. That cannot become an excuse for continued inaction. Complete agreement is not the standard for governing, and it should not be the standard for protecting forests and communities. The election offered Americans a chance to voice their differences. The coming months offer Congress a chance to demonstrate that those differences do not have to prevent progress.

Lawmakers should focus on the provisions that have already earned bipartisan support, resolve the remaining technical differences, and assemble a forest-management and permitting reform package capable of passing both chambers. Doing so would send an important message: Washington can still solve problems, Republicans and Democrats can still work together, and stewardship of our shared public lands can still unite the country.

America's federal forests, rural communities, forest-sector infrastructure, and public safety cannot afford another cycle of delay and gridlock. This is Congress's opportunity to turn bipartisan agreement into durable reform and deliver meaningful results for the American people. The campaign is over. Now it is time to govern. /*Travis Joseph*

Washington DC Update

Congress returns for lame duck session. Democrats will enjoy historic Congressional majorities in the Senate and House following their landslide midterm election victory, including in races where late votes continue trending their way. It is not clear how much incentive Democrats will have to work with Republicans to pass major legislation in the upcoming lame duck session, including federal forest management and permitting reform proposals that have enjoyed bipartisan support.

The current Continuing Resolution (CR) that funds federal agencies will expire on December 11., Congress will need to pass another CR or forge consensus on an Omnibus appropriations bill to take one item off the plate of the new Democrat Congress. It seems far less likely that Congress will take up reauthorizations of the Farm Bill or the Surface Transportation Bill during a lame duck session.

The business community, industry groups, and renewable energy advocates are ramping up their campaign in support of the Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act, which was recently introduced by the Republican and Democrat leaders from the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. The bipartisan Senators remain fully committed to the legislation despite the tectonic election results.

The Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act provides an opportunity for Congress to show angry voters that it is taking action to address the rising cost of energy, which ripples throughout the economy. The bipartisan proposal includes common sense reforms to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), important laws that nonetheless have increasingly resulted in significant delays and uncertainty for a wide range of federal projects.

The bill also includes important provisions to accelerate legal challenges to a limited suite of federal permits and projects, including federal forest health treatments conducted pursuant to the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. While Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM), the lead Democrat on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee supports the proposal, his counterpart in the House, Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA) strongly opposes the measure and is urging Democrats to write their own bill next year. The Senate is expected to take a first test vote on the permitting reform measure on November 9.

Early predictions on committee leadership changes. In the House, Rep. Jared Huffman, who once worked as a senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, will Chair the House Natural Resources Committee. Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN), a former police officer and college hockey player, announced a run to lead committee Republicans and is viewed as a strong candidate. Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR) hasn't announced whether he will seek a term limits waiver to continue leading Republicans on the committee.

Rep. G.T. Thompson (R-PA), who represents a forested district, currently chairs the House Agriculture Committee and will seek a waiver to continue leading Republicans in the next Congress. Thompson could face a challenge from Rep. Austin Scott (R-GA). Rep. Angie Craig (D-MN) currently serves as the ranking Democrat but is leaving Congress. Leading contenders to replace her include Rep. Shontel Brown (D-OH), a vocal advocate for the federal food stamp program, and Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA), a senior moderate from California's Central Valley who unsuccessfully ran to lead Democrats in the current Congress.

Senator Martin Heinrich will assume the chairmanship of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Senator Mike Lee (R-UT), the current Republican Chair, is expected to instead lead Republicans on the Judiciary Committee. Senator John Barrasso (R-WY) could return from his current position in Senate Republican leadership to serve as the Ranking Member.

With Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) leaving to serve as Governor of Minnesota, the Agriculture Committee may be led by returning Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) following his comeback win in the midterms. Senator John Boozman (R-AR) will continue leading Republicans on the committee. Here in the Northwest, Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) will chair the Appropriations Committee, Senator Ron

Wyden (D-OR) will return to chair the Finance Committee, and Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) is expected to chair the Environment and Public Works Committee.

Blue tsunami also felt in the Northwest. Democrats made gains in state houses in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana. In Washington, Democrats are currently on track to pick up nine seats in the House to achieve a super majority and one additional seat in the Senate. In Oregon, what was supposed to be a close governor's race turned into a nearly seven percentage point victory for Governor Tina Kotek over Republican State Senator Christine Drazan.

In federal races, Democrat Sam Forstag has won the race for western Montana's 1st Congressional District (CD), which was left open by the retirement of Republican Representative and former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke. Former U.S. Attorney Kurt Alme (R-MT) helped Republicans hold onto the seat of Senator Steve Daines (R-MT). Alme was greatly aided when a Democrat and Democrat turned Independent split the Democrat vote.

In eastern Washington's 5th CD, freshman Rep. Michael Baumgartner (R-WA) currently leads Democrat Carmela Conroy by just one percentage point after beating her by 20 percentage points in 2024. In Washington's swing 3rd CD, Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez won re-election by nearly 10 points over Republican State Senator John Braun. /*Heath Heikkila*



Federal Timber Purchasers Coalition (FTPC) meets in Rapid City



The FTPC met with Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) leadership in Rapid City, South Dakota last month. The meeting brought together over 70 leaders from the federal land management agencies, forest products industry, state forestry partners, and NGOs to discuss the status and trajectory of the federal timber program.

The meeting started on Tuesday with a field trip to an active timber sale on the Bearlodge District of the Black Hills National Forest in Wyoming. The sale was analyzed in the Fort Forest Management EA, which was designed to provide wood fiber, increase variety of understory species where shrub oak dominates, reduce conifer competition in aspen and meadows, improve tree form and vigor in old pine plantations, and reduce fire hazard.

The project area is located southeast of Neiman's sawmill in Hulett—one of Neiman's three remaining mills following the announcement to close their mill in Montrose, Colorado. The group also visited the North Sand project south of Beulah, Wyoming on the South Dakota border. The field trip highlighted the role of partner organizations, NGOs, state Good Neighbor Authority programs, and public-private partnerships to deliver positive results on the ground.

After the field tour, the industry and agencies met separately on Wednesday and then met collectively on Thursday to discuss obstacles to expanding the federal timber program, ideas on how to build capacity, and suggestions on how to improve the feedback loop between purchasers/operators and federal land managers.

Specifically, the group discussed how to build upon the successful 2026 program and what actions should be prioritized to enable the Forest Service and BLM to meet the legal requirement from H.R.1 to increase annual timber outputs by 250 million board feet (MMBF) and 20 MMBF, respectively, through 2034. Among other things, the group generally agreed that there is a need to continue to leverage outside partners and industry, prioritize post-fire timber salvage, and leverage existing NEPA efficiencies to attain the mandated program increases.

The FTPC is currently planning its next meeting for spring 2027. To get involved, attend a meeting, or become an FTPC member, please contact FTPC Chair, Travis Joseph (tjoseph@amforest.org)/ *Andy Geissler*

Oregon Forests Engage Purchasers Quickly Following Salvage

As the Oregon Department of Forestry removes fire restrictions across the State, we can now officially declare the 2026 fire season over. Unfortunately, Oregon experienced yet another record-breaking summer in terms of acres burned. In total, 2.5 million acres burned in 2026, eclipsing the previous record of 1.9 million acres in 2024.



Photo: Potential salvage unit on the Ochoco NF.

While there is little reason to celebrate such a disastrous fire season, AFRC has been impressed with the shift in attitude from federal land managers about what their next steps should be to begin the process of recovering from a wildfire. We have spent the past decade urging leaders at USDI and USDA to begin salvage operations as quickly as possible following a fire in order to remove the dead trees while they retain some commercial value. From our perspective, rehabilitation cannot begin in earnest until overhead hazards are removed from the landscape. We are pleased to report that the agencies have received the message.

The Deschutes, Ochoco, Fremont-Winema, Mt. Hood, and Malheur National Forests were each severely impacted by wildfires in 2026. Each Forest began the process of engaging local purchasers quickly following containment – in some cases while fires were still active – to observe and discuss their plans for salvage logging as a first step towards recovering their landscapes.

The Ochoco National Forest was among the most impacted in the Region. The Rowe Creek Complex started on July 15 and by the time the fire was contained in September, the fire had burned 373,927 acres. Unfortunately, the Rowe Creek Complex burned into several planning areas where management had not yet begun. Last month, the Ochoco invited AFRC and purchasers into the fire footprint to discuss their plan for salvage.

During the meeting, the Forest Supervisor emphasized that the Forest must "double down on active management" in order to begin rehabilitation and to prepare for future fires. To this end, the Ochoco is proposing to offer salvage as an *optional* component of conventional green tree thinning sales. Given the Forest's remote location and uncertainty in being able to quickly salvage while the dead trees retain their value, we think this may be a sound strategy and could offer flexibility in the event delayed mortality presents additional salvage. Additionally, we appreciate the prioritization for treating those unburned areas in the same operation.

The Forest has already completed a post fire assessment for the Mill Creek EA to account for the changed condition resulting from the fire. The Forest is also considering utilizing the recently-approved BLM salvage CE to treat areas outside of the Mill Creek EA.



Photo: Potential salvage unit, adjacent to a proposed green tree thinning unit on the Ochoco NF.



Photo: Potential salvage unit in the Grasshopper Fire.

Similar to the Ochoco, the Mt. Hood acted quickly to bring purchasers into the Grasshopper Fire footprint once the fire was contained enough for safe travel. The field trip was very well attended with frank discussions between purchasers and Forest staff about their plans to recover the landscape.

The Mt. Hood will not rely on existing NEPA to plan for salvage operations. Rather, they are utilizing the recently-approved National Post-Fire Recovery EA to encompass much of the burned area. Once the EA is prepared, the Forest will issue a decision that targets those high priority areas which experienced high mortality in the Matrix LUA and along public roads impacted by fire. If the Forest issues another decision from this EA, it will encompass areas which experience delayed mortality over the coming months. The first decision is expected in January and any additional decision would be expected after the spring.

AFRC is very pleased to see Forests in Oregon take salvage seriously and quickly engaging and communicating with local purchasers. This is a welcome course correction following the past decade of wildfires in which Forests have been generally slow to plan for salvage, with predictable results. We are hopeful that this effort will provide a reliable roadmap for Forests to begin the process of rehabilitation immediately following wildfires. /*Corey Bingaman*

Plans Underway for Restoration of Little Giant Fire Area

The Little Giant Fire burned approximately 170,000 acres across more than 270 square miles in Chelan County, Washington, making it the largest wildfire in the county's history. The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is now moving forward with an ambitious restoration effort to address immediate safety concerns, recover fire-damaged timber, and begin the long-term rehabilitation of the burned landscape.

On October 21, AFRC and its members met with Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest staff, including Chelan-Entiat District Ranger Holly Krake, who provided an encouraging update on the Forest's plans for post-fire recovery. The Forest is pursuing a two-phase approach that prioritizes time-sensitive work this winter while preparing for broader restoration activities beginning in spring 2027.

Phase I focuses on removing hazardous trees, recovering fire-killed timber, reducing fuels, and restoring safe access to roads and public recreation areas. Winter operations will take advantage of snow and frozen ground to help protect soils and streams while work is underway. The proposed project includes timber harvest on up to 6,083 acres and hazard tree removal along approximately 325 miles of roads. Firefighters constructed more than 150 miles of dozer line during suppression of the Little Giant Fire, and the Forest plans to maintain fire control lines to support future wildfire response.

To accelerate this work, the Forest is using the National Post-Fire Recovery EA and an expedited planning process known as a Determination of Analysis Reliance Review. This allows the Forest to

proceed with activities already analyzed under the national framework, provided the proposed actions and associated design criteria remain consistent with that analysis. The Forest Service is also incorporating technologies such as lidar cruising and geofencing to improve planning and implementation.

Phase II, anticipated to begin in spring 2027, will address longer-term restoration needs across the burned landscape. Planned activities include replanting trees, improving aquatic and wildlife habitat, repairing trails and roads, and further reducing future wildfire risks. This phase will provide additional opportunities for public involvement as the Forest works with local communities to guide recovery efforts.

The Forest is targeting November 13 for a Phase I decision, with timber sales expected to be advertised shortly afterward in the Entiat Valley and Chiwawa areas of Central Washington.

AFRC appreciates the leadership and hard work of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest staff in moving quickly to advance post-fire recovery. Timely implementation of these projects will help recover economic value from fire-killed timber, support local forest products infrastructure, and begin the important work of restoring the burned landscape. /*Tom Partin*

AFRC Legal Team Presents at MFCN and Montana-DNRC Webinar on Engaging in Federal Litigation

On October 14, the Montana Forest Collaborative Network (MFCN) and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (Montana-DNRC) hosted a webinar on how collaborative groups and counties can engage in litigation involving federal forest projects in Montana. AFRC's legal team (Sara Ghafouri and Greg Hibbard), Jeff Beelaert (a partner at Dorsey & Whitney LLP), and Joe Cohenour (the group leader of the Big Elk Divide Restoration Committee and Elkhorn Working Group) presented on how a third-party can participate in federal litigation. The webinar received strong support, with a total of 60 registrants from all over the state.

Montana is home to the greatest number of Forest Service projects under litigation, even though many of these projects are collaboratively developed and supported. Given that there is broad support for federal projects aimed at improving forest health and reducing catastrophic wildfire events, third-party groups and government entities are consistently engaging in litigation now more than ever, including AFRC, Montana-DNRC, counties, and tribal governments.

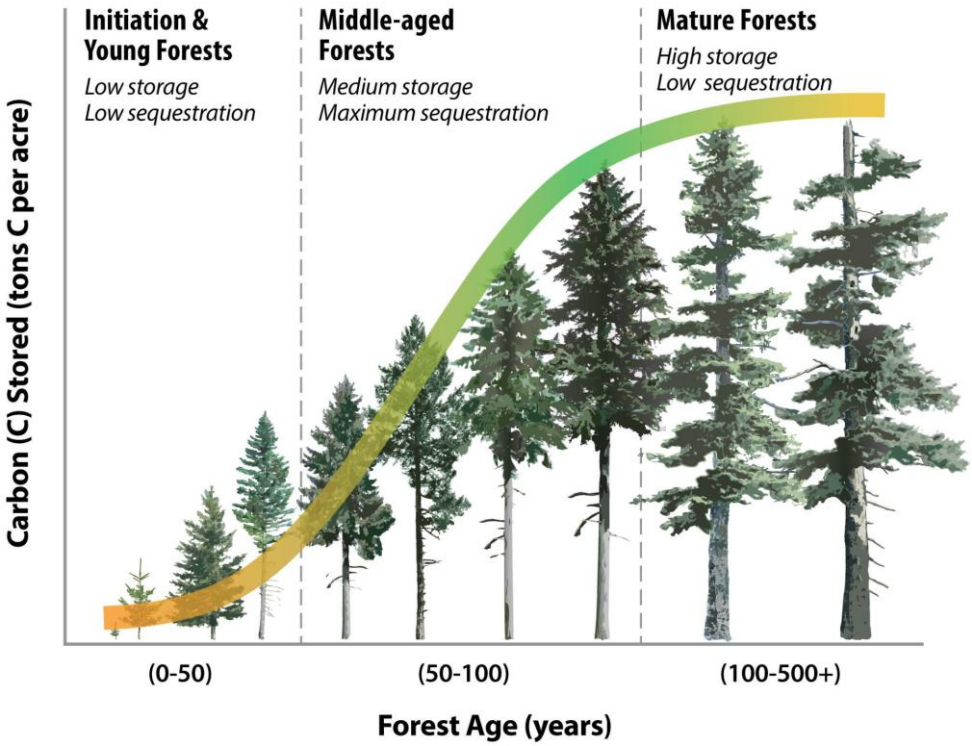
The purpose of the webinar was to better inform collaborative groups and counties on the federal litigation process, clarify the differences between intervenor and *amicus curiae* participation, explain the pros and cons between the types of participation, and provide examples of previous collaborative involvement in litigation.

Collaborative group participation in federal litigation can be extremely valuable as those diverse stakeholders can educate judges about the importance of the project, any investments made by local stakeholders, the benefits of the project to the local community, the risks of project delay, as well as providing expertise on legal or technical issues. Thank you to MFNC and Montana-DNRC for hosting the webinar. /*Sara Ghafouri*

Science We're Reading: New Study Links Timber Harvesting with Increased Carbon Sequestration

A study published in the journal National Science Review concluded that timber harvesting targeted on forests nearing the end of their productive growth periods can simultaneously increase forest carbon stocks and increase timber production. Conversely, the study indicates that low-intensity harvesting reduces carbon sequestration potential by promoting forest aging and mortality. The study's findings ultimately challenge the widely held assumption that minimizing harvesting maximizes carbon sequestration.

These conclusions are based on the fact that forests sequester carbon at higher levels during their most vigorous growth periods. In western conifer forests, those periods tend to occur at younger and middle-ages and begin to decline as forests reach maturity. Harvesting trees at the beginning of the mature phase allows land managers to capture stored carbon in long-lasting wood products and reforest harvested acres with young trees capable of maximizing carbon sequestration again. The graph below illustrates this concept well:



The study echoes the concept illustrated in the image above by concluding that maintaining forests in more productive age classes, reducing mortality losses, and transferring carbon into long-lived wood products, delivers a net climate mitigation benefit.

It also builds on this forest growth concept and stresses that forest aging and associated mortality represents a critical but often overlooked driver of carbon loss and challenges the notion that increased harvesting leads to greater atmospheric carbon release. Instead, timber harvesting can enhance the retention of carbon loss across both living biomass and wood-product pools. /*Andy Geissler*

AFRC Files *Amicus Curiae* Brief in Support of Washington DNR's Chai Timber Sale

On October 30, AFRC, along with AFRC members Lewis County and Pacific County, filed a joint *amicus curiae* brief with the Thurston County Superior Court in support of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Chai Timber Sale.

The Washington Board of Natural Resources approved the Chai Timber Sale on March 16, 2026. Plaintiffs Legacy Forest Defense Coalition and Center for Sustainable Economy filed their challenge in the Thurston County Superior Court on April 14, 2026. AFRC member Merrill and Ring Forest Products, L.P. intervened in defense of the timber sale.

Plaintiffs allege that DNR did not adequately consider the environmental impacts of the sale under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) when it issued a determination of non-significance in lieu of an environmental impact statement. The claims differ in this challenge to those put forth in the previous slew of challenges to DNR timber sales in recent years.

In particular, Plaintiffs bring two primary claims that are based on the April 2026 opinion from the Washington Court of Appeals, remanding the Wishbone Timber Sale back to DNR for more analysis under SEPA. *Ctr. for Sustainable Econ., Legacy Forest Def. Coal. v. Washington State Dep't of Nat. Res., Bd. of Nat. Res.*, 36 Wash. App. 2d 722, 587 P.3d 449 (2026). In that appeal, the Court of Appeals upheld DNR's climate analysis for the Wishbone Timber Sale but remanded the timber sale for DNR to consider alternatives under SEPA. Here, Plaintiffs allege both that (1) DNR did not conduct an adequate climate analysis under SEPA for the sale; and (2) DNR failed to "meaningfully evaluate alternatives that would reduce climate and other environmental impacts."

With respect to the first claim, Plaintiffs allege that in contrast to the Wishbone Timber Sale's analysis, DNR's Sustainable Harvest Calculation has now expired and cannot support DNR's climate analysis. Regarding the second claim, Plaintiffs identified multiple alternatives that they argue should have been considered, including alternatives that would conserve structurally complex stands, eliminate or modify harvest units in mature forest stands, eliminate or reduce the miles of roads constructed, use more variable density thinning, and remove a specific unit of concern to Plaintiffs.

Our *amicus* brief highlights that Plaintiffs' claims are not specific to the Chai Timber Sale but are a clear attempt to handcuff DNR's ability to sell timber. Additionally, it explains that such a disruption to DNR's timber sale program would have disastrous impacts on the beneficiaries of DNR's state trust lands including, county governments, school districts, libraries, universities, fire departments, and more. The *amicus* brief provides further context on the history of trust lands, recent caselaw regarding DNR's trust mandate, and DNR's Sustainable Harvest Calculation.

The Court is scheduled to hold a hearing on the merits on November 19. AFRC is hopeful that the added perspective from our *amicus* brief will assist the Court in identifying the flaws in Plaintiffs' arguments and remains optimistic that the Chai Timber Sale will be allowed to move forward. */Greg Hibbard*

New Video Series Highlights How Washington State Trust Lands Support Local Communities

The Washington Communities and Schools Network (WCSN) has launched a new video series featuring the voices of Washington's state trust land beneficiaries and highlighting the important role timber revenue plays in supporting rural communities.

The series features school leaders, firefighters, local elected officials and other community service providers who explain how sustainable timber harvests help fund public schools, emergency services, libraries and infrastructure, while supporting family wage jobs and local economies.



Among those featured are Noah Glaude, Executive Director of the North Olympic Library System (*photo, right*), who discusses how timber revenue helps maintain library facilities and invest in technology while preserving funding for essential services. Fire district leaders Keith Cortner and Justin Grider explain how this revenue supports equipment purchases and emergency preparedness, while Forks Mayor Tim Fletcher discusses the importance of working forests to local jobs and economic stability.

The videos offer firsthand perspectives from communities that depend on predictable timber revenue and demonstrate why responsible, active management of Washington's state trust lands remains important to the public entities and residents they serve. Watch the full series here.

WCSN, a project of AFRC and Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities, advocates for sustainable management of Washington's state trust lands to support healthy forests, strong communities and essential public services. WCSN supports beneficiaries, including school districts, fire districts, libraries, hospitals and counties, to give them a greater voice in discussions about state trust land management and policy. /*Nick Smith*