Increasingly, we hear terms like “collaboration,” “collaborative,” and “partnerships” applied to forest management. What do these mean? Broadly speaking, they refer to how multiple landowners, agencies, and other partners are working together to achieve shared goals. Why and how this happens depends on the place and the people. This issue of the Western Forester examines several forms of collaboration in forestry, and the value that foresters can bring to these efforts.

Common types of collaboration

If you live or work near national forest land, you may have heard about “forest collaborative” groups. These voluntary stakeholder bodies host dialogue and provide input to the U.S. Forest Service on a given area of public land that can range from a smaller watershed up to the ranger district or even the entire national forest scale. Collaboratives often have participants from different sectors including local government, the forest industry, environmental organizations, and other state and federal agencies. Facilitators or coordinators usually help lead a discussion of everyone’s values and interests, and keep these groups organized. There are often ground rules, policies, and other procedures to guide the conversation.

Collaborative groups typically meet regularly, review information from the Forest Service about planned actions, take field tours, and review relevant scientific information. They may develop written or verbal “zones of agreement” that articulate the kinds of future management activities that the group supports. Collaboratives do not have any formal decision-making authority or jurisdiction on federal lands, so it is ultimately the Forest Service’s choice how to utilize this input. These groups may also engage in other activities such as community outreach and monitoring.

There are over 40 forest collaboratives active in Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, with the largest number in Oregon. The Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative and Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project, both featured in this issue, are examples of this type of collaboration.

Another form of collaboration is all-lands partnerships. These forest management projects involve multiple organizations and landowners planning and/or implementing coordinated actions across ownership boundaries. Adjacent landowners may plan together to decide where, when, and how to manage the forest. These landowners might be state or federal agencies, private industrial, private nonindustrial, Tribal, or other interests. These projects also often involve a range of partners for activities like mapping, inventory, landowner cost share, outreach, and other technical assistance. It is common to see the Extension Service, soil and water conservation districts, state and federal agencies, or nonprofit organizations contributing services to make all-lands projects function. All-lands efforts can look very different in different places.

For example, numerous private family forestland owners might cooperate across their fence lines to collectively access resources or programs, as

(continued on page 2)
Collaboration and Partnerships Engage Forest Stakeholders
(CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE)

the Ritter Land Management Team has done in Grant County, Oregon. A federal agency might seek to coordinate with the other landowners along its boundaries to reduce the shared transmission of wildfire risk.

Benefits and challenges of collaboration

There has been a good deal of research about natural resource collaboration. Generally, it suggests that collaborative efforts can potentially produce land management decisions that reflect diverse perspectives and current science. Many also hope that collaborating will result in better ecological outcomes, and more economic activity and social wellbeing from forest management and wood products processing. For private landowners and foresters, participation in a forest collaborative or all-lands project could have additional benefits such as new opportunities to pursue land management goals, provide input on the larger landscape, learn more about what different agencies and organizations are doing, and to meet other landowners and partners.

However, collaboration can also be challenging. Working closely with others who hold diverse values can pose frustrations. Some personality types may find it easier to collaborate than others. Collaboration also requires time investment. Not everyone has the time or flexibility to attend collaborative meetings or otherwise participate in these processes. For those who are results-oriented, it may seem that desired outcomes do not come soon enough. Some environmental and timber stakeholders in the West have expressed concerns about the efficacy of forest collaborative groups on national forests and have also raised questions about the ability of these groups to fully represent their perspectives. For all-lands projects, it can be difficult to find and align multiple partners and sources of funding to work across boundaries in a coordinated way.

Contributing factors for functional collaboration may include how the effort itself is organized. For example, neutral facilitation, adequate capacity and resources, and accomplishing “small wins” to demonstrate outcomes can help. In addition, trust among participants and in the process is thought to be essential. If groups or projects...
involve government land managers, the role of these entities is particularly important. Their willingness to truly work with others and try new things can be pivotal to what is possible, particularly when they are a major landowner in the area.

All-lands projects also may benefit from the assistance of “intermediary” organizations or people who can help navigate and combine the different rules, funding, and landowner needs found across ownerships. This has been essential to the all-lands work of the Klamath-Lake Forest Health Partnership, which readers may remember from the April/May/June 2018 issue of this publication.

Roles for foresters in collaboration

As resource professionals with established standards for education, ethical conduct, and experience, trained foresters may offer valuable contributions to forest collaboration efforts. This may not always be feasible for the consulting forester or others who do not have latitude to participate given their job or other commitments.

Depending on their specializations, foresters may bring knowledge of local forest types, operator and mill capacities, and viability of planned activities. This technical information may aid a collaborative group or all-lands partners in developing more feasible and economical projects. Foresters also may be familiar with multiple area landowners and their goals, and could be uniquely aware of potential opportunities for working across boundaries. Further, projects involving private landowners may require data collection, inventory, and mapping that foresters are often well-suited to provide.

The stories in this issue help show in detail what collaborative forest management can look like on the ground. ◆

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To Learn More

For more information on collaboration, try the following resources:


Collaboration resources from the National Forest Foundation: https://www.nationalforests.org/collaboration-resources

Pinchot Institute article about all-lands projects: http://www.pinchot.org/doc/611

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Forestland owner collaborative and cooperative ventures are increasing in number across Oregon and the Northwest because they can be valuable tools enabling communities with shared interests and goals, and similar challenges, to leverage their combined strengths toward attaining those goals. This is the case for the Ritter Land Management Team (RLMT), a non-industrial private landowner collaborative formed in 2015.

Many landowners in the rural Lower Middle Fork John Day River Basin of eastern Oregon near the Ritter area were united in their desire to enhance the health and productivity of their lands and sustain their community and way of life for future generations. They recognized that to do this they needed increased access to technical assistance, funding for stewardship programs, forest product markets, contractors, invasive weed control, and other services. So when the Community for Family Forestlands approached the community about forming their own collaborative group, they found a receptive audience.

It should be noted here that the word “collaborative” is often used in various contexts and can be confusing or misleading as to the structure, function, and goals of an organization. For example, the collaborative groups formed by the Forest Service bring together various and diverse stakeholders for the purpose of providing meaningful input to Forest Service land management decision processes. In contrast, the Ritter project is a group of local, non-industrial private landowners with many shared interests and goals who hope to expand the scope and scale of their land stewardship efforts.

The road to a collaborative

The problems confronting the Ritter area and other areas of eastern Oregon came to the attention of the Committee for Family Forestlands (CFF), which serves to advise the

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The road to a collaborative

The problems confronting the Ritter area and other areas of eastern Oregon came to the attention of the Committee for Family Forestlands (CFF), which serves to advise the
Oregon Board of Forestry and the State Forester about family forestland issues. In 2012, the CFF traveled to Grant County to study eastern Oregon issues and composed a white paper of recommendations including collaborative options. A core group of 10 Ritter landowners and 11 local and regional organizations expressed their support for the recommendations.

As a result, the CFF, Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI), and OSU Extension formed a grant writing team and applied for a USFS State and Private Forestry grant for education and technical assistance, with input from landowners and local organizations. They also applied to the American Forest Foundation for additional funds. Both grant applications were successful, providing a total of $310,000.

A project coordinator was hired and helped the organization develop a Strategic Action Plan and an Operational Charter laying out the mission, vision, and goal statements developed and approved by the landowners. A consultant forester was hired to implement a plan for analyzing the forest, range, and water resources and individual landowner priorities and interests utilizing the Discovery Tools process. This process is a template used to identify a landowner’s geographical location, their land management goals and objectives, project types, mapped project locations, and treatment descriptions. The resulting information provided the foundation for the Strategic Action Plan. As activity increased, so did landowner interest, and by 2014 the project included 30 landowners owning 68,000 acres. In July of 2016, the landowners met and approved formation of the Ritter Land Management Team (RLMT) as a non-profit corporation.

The RLMT was soon successful in securing a three-year $135,000 capacity building grant from Meyer Memorial Trust. They were also awarded over $511,000 for the Rush Creek and Walton restoration projects from Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). These projects included juniper removal, noxious weed treat-

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ments, protecting anadromous fish bearing streams with fencing, and aspen restoration. An additional $59,000 was awarded by Business Oregon for a juniper sawmill feasibility study.

One of the principal goals for the RLMT is that their experiences could be used as a model for other communities contemplating forming a collaborative type of organizational structure. Undoubtedly, the RLMT is fortunate to have a cohesive group of landowners and many supportive organizations, resulting in significant accomplishments in a short time. However, maintaining a sustained effort is a difficult task for any organization and RLMT is experiencing their share of challenges.

Following are some suggestions that may be valuable for others to consider before deciding to form a collaborative.

**Lessons learned**

**Pick the place**

- It is advantageous for the community to have a history of landowner interrelationships, especially across landowner type boundaries.
- A diversity of landowner types is fine, as long as there are bridges between them and that there is mutual respect and connection. Ritter has a blend of multigenerational landowners with deep knowledge of place and extensive hands-on land management experience, and relative newcomers with very different backgrounds. But there is strong level of respect for the skills and ideas each group brings to the community.

**Start with early, diversified local leadership and ownership**

- Begin engaging multiple landowners and organizations early to better understand them and get their sense of ownership in the organization.
- Immediately build an action-focused, locally based operations committee that is accessible to the group. Not all landowners need or want to be involved with decision making and a smaller, diverse and trusted group is often preferred.
- Secure a flexible source of base funding that allows for early on-the-ground projects to show outcomes. Tangible outcomes help engage and motivate potential members and builds trust.
- Provide leadership that is patient with sorting through grant fund allocations and organizational arrangements.

**Landowner and service provider relationships**

- Help orient and organize landowners to understand potentially available resources and provide a list of possibilities.
- Also help orient agency service providers to the landowners. This intermediary work continues to be key. Agency personnel are typically very busy, already overstretched, serve large areas, and may not have the time and interest in catering to one sub-area within their region.
- Develop a sense of the community before process development. Proceeding with a pre-prescribed organizational plan may lead to perceptions of a top-down and restrictive effort.
- Landowners may be split in their interests. Some may be most interested in actions that improve the productivity of the land and the economic return while others are not. Balancing those diverse interests is important.
- Expect that landowner interest and focus will fluctuate over time. Part of that may be normal changes in opportunities, markets, or desires but the organization should be careful to not over-emphasize projects that may take energy away from main goals such as ground restoration work.

**Pay attention to equity**

Be sensitive to landowner differences and preferences. There may be big differences in ownership sizes, incomes, and willingness or ability to invest in stewardship. Not all opportunities that a collaborative can create are equally accessible to all.

- Plan for how the work will be conducted across the landscape to ensure more equitable outcomes, and be transparent with the process.
- Landowner or organizational viewpoints or priorities may vary widely. What one person sees as essential may be of little or no interest to someone else.

**Foster peer learning and co-production of knowledge**

- Prepare interactive learning experiences emphasizing peer learning over “expert” instruction for the sharing of knowledge and technical assistance.
- Provide information that is flexible and tailored to local needs. Don’t import “cookie cutter” ready-made information.

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**RLMT Partners**

RLMT recognizes the following partner organizations whose enthusiastic support and assistance have made the collaborative possible:

- Grant Soil and Water Conservation District
- North Fork John Day Watershed Council
- Monument Soil and Water Conservation District
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs
- John Day Basin Partnership
- Oregon Forest Resources Institute
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Oregon State University
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Sustainable Northwest
- Oregon Department of Economic Development
- RLMT provides special acknowledgement for OSU Extension Specialist Emily Jane Davis for many hours of hands-on work guiding the team through their formative process.

To learn more. For more information on the Ritter Land Management collaborative, visit www.ritterlmt.com.
Solving the Juniper Problems

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When asked what their highest stewardship priorities are, landowners in the Ritter area point to juniper encroachment as their single biggest concern. Juniper trees consume huge amounts of water and crowd out more desirable plants, which leads to reduced range and wildlife habitat quality and negative impacts to the ecological and economic viability of the land. Fixing the problem isn’t easy. Removing juniper is difficult, and expensive, and there is little cost-share funding to help or manufacturing facilities to sell juniper logs to.

The RLMT decided owning and operating their own sawmill would effectively support stewardship efforts by utilizing juniper logs created as a byproduct of their forest and rangeland restoration work. With help received from the Western Juniper Alliance, Sustainable Northwest, and Business Oregon, in 2016 and 2017 RLMT contracted for a business feasibility study that showed a sawmill was a viable option. RLMT is a 501c3 non-profit, so they subsequently formed a for-profit subsidiary and purchased a portable sawmill with grant funding from Business Oregon and the Oregon Community Foundation. The mill is now operational and selling lumber through Sustainable Northwest Lumber in Portland, Ore.

However, purchasing a sawmill is only the first step in a sawmilling adventure. Around the country, many collaborative and cooperative landowner organizations have made similar investments. Some have been successful, but many have not. A landowner cooperative manager once made this suggestion about directly involving the organization in a manufacturing enterprise: “I have three words of advice. Do not invest in capital. Do not invest in capital. Do not invest in capital.” In other words—think long and hard before buying machinery.

Just think about the challenges. A new sawmill venture must simultaneously, and successfully, leap numerous hurdles to survive: raw material supply, adequate manufacturing location, inventory cost, personnel, log and lumber handling equipment, milling machinery, and marketing, to name just a few. Failure with one leads to the failure of all.

Many landowner association members bring great energy, enthusiasm, and backgrounds rich in education, knowledge, and experience. But many do not have experience or knowledge with running a mill, and/or they do not have abundant time to lend to the project.

New business startups are often undercapitalized and have little leeway to accommodate normal financing and overhead costs, let alone equipment, personnel, or market problems. Access to new capital from lending institutions may be limited.

Finally, the organizational management and decision-making structure of the group may not fit well with the demands of running a business.

Fortunately, the RLMT as a group is strongly motivated to work together to solve land stewardship challenges. In just a few years’ time they have produced a good track record of success and there is much room for optimism. Stay tuned into the RLMT website (www.ritterlmt.com) for developments.
The scenic town of Darrington, Wash., is like many rural timber towns in the Pacific Northwest. It proudly celebrates a legacy of forestry, stewardship, and the economic benefits associated with such pursuits. Not surprisingly, the local high school mascot is a logger. Darrington and nearby communities like Oso, White Horse, and Swede Heaven also have a love for their community that is unique.

Never was that more on display than in March of 2014 when homes on Steelhead Lane near Oso were hit by a massive mudslide killing dozens of people, destroying 40 homes, and closing off the main highway to town for weeks. With the nation’s eyes on them, locals showed their strength in the face of adversity with calls of “Oso Strong” and “Darrington Strong.” Help came from unfamiliar places including national and statewide conservation groups that worked to preserve and boost that summer’s recreational season for the area.

Finding common ground

Those relationships grew over the following months resulting in a bigger and more lasting partnership—the Darrington Collaborative. Since July 2015, the Darrington Collaborative has brought together local community leaders, environmental organizations, members of the local timber industry, and STEM youth educators to find common ground around sustainable forestry.

“The positive response to the slide was overwhelming and opened up new partnerships,” said Dan Rankin, mayor of the town of Darrington and owner of a small milling operation. “While we don’t all agree on many issues, we do all support sustainable forestry and healthier forests.”

The collaborative works with the Forest Service, local elected officials, Tribes, and local stakeholders to simultaneously create a more ecologically resilient forest, provide for increased sustainable timber harvest on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, deliver economic benefits to the community of Darrington, and create educational opportunities for Darrington’s youth through the STEM program.

“We joined to take advantage of a win-win,” said Tom Uniack, executive director of Washington Wild, a statewide conservation organization. “It allowed us to work with the Forest Service and local interests to add capacity to restoration thinning projects consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan, while investing timber receipts in additional aquatic restoration projects and providing local economic benefits to the community of Darrington.”

Project development

Everyone agreed that producing a successful first project was important. Funds were secured from Pew Trusts and Governor Inslee’s office to contract for layout and design of a forest and aquatics restoration project. Our area of interest and influence was defined as the Darrington School District.
Our conservation partners were familiar with forester Derek Churchill from his work with the Olympic Collaborative and trusted him as a contractor. Local members chose a demonstration location in the Darrington Ranger District Adaptive Management Area (Northwest Forest Plan designation). Restoration involves partial cutting in dense second growth stands to encourage understory development and structural diversity more like legacy forests. A healthy, resilient forest has open early seral patches, dense cover patches, trees spaced for growth, and abundant ground cover. Developing these multiple attributes from single cohort stands is our goal. Always in mind are opportunities for education. Through the collaborative, students from Tesla STEM High School (Redmond, Wash.) and Darrington Middle School participated in a series of education exchanges involving water sampling, forensics, coding, and other skills. Glacier Peak Institute is working with the collaborative to involve students in measuring baseline conditions and monitoring future conditions on collaborative projects.

Since the collaborative was imposing on a Forest Service workload already fully assigned and engaged, we used a Categorical Exclusion (CE) pathway of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for forest health restoration of 70 acres or less. With a CE, USFS time for input was minimized. Surveys for invasive plants, cultural resources, and road conditions, along with reports, were done by the collaborative. Contractors laid out units and prepared silvicultural prescriptions. USFS NEPA coordinator Phyllis Reed volunteered countless hours to keep requirements on track and make sure our work would result in a signed Decision Notice to proceed.

Stewardship Authority was used in offering the project. Aquatic restoration, a goal of the collaborative, was achieved by replacing or removing inadequate or damaged culverts, and improving water flows and road surfaces causing erosion and sediment. A road heavily used by hikers, rock climbers, and others was chosen so the project also supported Darrington area recreation.

Pilot project Segelsen 1.0 was sold 26 months after the Darrington Collaborative was formed. It generated 12,293 tons of saw logs and improved aquatic conditions along six miles of road. Treatment in the stand will be completed by October 15 of this year when the contract terminates.

**Working for success**

Technology played a role in our ability to execute rapidly. GIS should be part of most foresters’ tool kit. We used USFS layers for stand year of origin, roads, and topography; and NAIP 2017 color imagery and LiDAR bare earth imagery to select our project area, map roads and streams, and layout draft unit boundaries. GPS was used to map thin, leave, and special areas. Dropbox file service was used to update and distribute project files. GPS was also used in road surveys to map culverts, streams, and points of interest, and to build a data table of items and condition. A UAV flight over Segelsen 1.0 is planned to show the diversity created by a restoration silvicultural prescription. The imagery will be used for monitoring, education, and promotion.

Another key to success is knowledge of laws and policy that pertain to USFS activities. We continue with CE projects to provide additional output benefitting the Darrington area. To be efficient, we are focused on law requirements and policy direction rather than procedures that became cumbersome policy. We are in the process of setting up a meeting with the new regional forester for Region 6 to clarify and streamline what we do in the field.

There are opportunities for improvement and the collaborative will adapt as we learn. One example is in communicating to the local community. After receiving feedback, we started updating our website more frequently and reporting to a monthly local community group meeting to keep them updated on projects.

One original local member of the collaborative stepped down and the manager of Hampton Lumber’s Darrington sawmill came onboard. Hampton has also hired a Darrington-based coordinator for other forest collaboratives they are involved in.

A grant received from Washington State DNR for landscape restoration efforts will allow us to contract for providing condition surveys and reports for an Environmental Analysis (EA) of the North Fork Stillaguamish Watershed, which should reduce the time and expense of a USFS prepared EA. With an EA, we can do larger projects than under a CE, and it also creates an opportunity to use Good Neighbor Authority and involve the DNR. Seven additional project areas have been identified. Layout is underway on two of them as 70-acre CEs and an additional two will be larger projects under a N. Fork Stillaguamish EA.

Optimism is our path forward; one can complain about how things are or figure a way to get things done.
Over the past 10 or more years, forest collaborative groups have proliferated across the Pacific Northwest to address some of the most pressing forest and watershed restoration and management challenges we face. Restoration efforts in dry, fire-adapted forests is a good example of one such challenge facing forest collaborative groups in southwest, central, and eastern Oregon.

Analysis by The Nature Conservancy and U.S. Forest Service demonstrated the immense scale of active forest restoration needed across the fire-adapted forests in Oregon; more than 6.5 million acres (nearly 4 million of which are on federal forestland) are in need of active restoration, including the use of prescribed fire to increase forest resilience to natural disturbances and reduce wildfire risk to local communities.

Beyond the sheer challenge of restoration at the scale commensurate with the ecological need is the challenge of re-introducing prescribed fire in forest types that depend upon this critical natural process but haven’t seen fire in nearly a century. Moreover, doing so in the context of today’s human-dominated landscapes, where multiple ecological, economic, and social values (think recreation, forest resilience, aesthetics, wildlife, timber, community wildfire protection, and more) are layered on every acre of our forests, means that collaboration is required to find solutions that will meet these varying needs.

In central Oregon, local collaborative stakeholders and partners have stepped up to take on this challenge. And while we recognize that restoration in our dry fire-adapted forest types involves multiple steps, including commercial and non-commercial thinning, brush mowing, and prescribed fire, the final step of restoring fire is all too frequently the activity that is not being completed.

In response, over the past two years stakeholders representing tribal, state, and federal land managers, local elected officials, landowners, recreation groups, conservation and environmental organizations, scientists, private citizens, loggers, and forest products industry have been working together to address the challenges and opportunities to increase the use of prescribed fire as a critical step in the larger forest restoration process.

We started by engaging local, regional, and national experts to better understand the ecological, economic, and social dimensions of our current prescribed fire paradigm. We then used this information to advance a strategy that balances stakeholder val-
ues in our fire-adapted forests, while also addressing two important barriers that are limiting the use of prescribed fire at a meaningful scale on the Deschutes National Forest. Those identified barriers were state-level prescribed fire smoke management regulations and community social license for prescribed burning.

**Addressing challenges and opportunities to prescribed burning**

On the first issue, local collaborative members played a central role in building a coalition of collaborative members and partners across the state working together to envision a more holistic approach to prescribed fire smoke management. In this case, the diversity of stakeholders driving this process translated into a network of highly effective and trusted messengers advancing proactive solutions with a coordinated, unified voice during the statewide Smoke Management Plan Review Process led by the Oregon Department of Forestry and Department of Environmental Quality.

It was through this collaborative coordination effort that novel approaches to proactive communications and community outreach strategies surrounding prescribed fire, smoke, and public health began to emerge.

In central Oregon, this translated into an effort to expand our already “big-tent approach” to collaboration by inviting new partners from our region to join the effort. This included launching a new collaborative group with a range of “non-traditional” partners, such as county health services, air quality regulators, and public health experts, many of whom came together for the first time to work alongside forest and fire managers to discuss challenges and opportunities related to prescribed burning, smoke, air quality, and public health. The effort culminated in the creation of a
new online community outreach platform (www.centraloregonfire.org) and a variety of communication tools to ensure that timely, relevant information regarding fire (prescribed and wildfire), air quality, and public health messages reach the public. Our goals were to provide simple steps that individuals (and particularly smoke-vulnerable populations) can follow to reduce their exposure to smoke, while simultaneously providing the information and advance notice of prescribed fires and potential smoke impacts to maintain and steadily increase the social license needed to scale up prescribed fire treatments over time.

Our collaborative groups have also invested significant time, money, and resources in a variety of community outreach and engagement strategies all aimed at increasing community social license for prescribed fire. In a fire-adapted forest landscape with nearly 200,000 neighbors and millions of visitors annually, community engagement is not optional. And in the context of prescribed fire, where the impacts include trail and road closures, aesthetic changes (albeit temporary), and some smoke in the air for short-duration s in the spring and fall, social license becomes an absolute imperative and a major limiting factor on the widespread use and acceptance of prescribed fire.

To that end, the collaborative group and its stakeholders and partner organizations are instrumental to our successful community engagement efforts. Each individual on the collaborative is a gateway and trusted member to different segments of the larger public and the communities of central Oregon. And as such, they are key to effective communication that translates into growing awareness of the risks to our forests and communities, understanding of the need for forest restoration, and support for increased treatments, such as prescribed fire, even when it means a beloved trail is closed for two weeks or we wake up to a little smoke in the air each spring.

Looking forward

We’ve made great progress to improve the enabling conditions for prescribed fire use in central Oregon. But our work is far from done. While we have made great strides in the realm of prescribed fire smoke management and social license for prescribed burning, we recognize there are other social, cultural, legal, financial, and operational barriers to widespread prescribed fire use and acceptance that warrant focused attention. With more than 450,000 acres of fire-adapted forest in need of active restoration on the Deschutes National Forest alone, a county-wide population projected to reach nearly 250,000 by 2025, and five of the top ten most wildfire-exposed communities in Oregon, we also know the solutions will not be easy. Yet thanks to our collaborative approach, and the diversity of stakeholders and partners that are working together toward a common vision for healthy and resilient fire-adapted forests and fire-adapted communities, we are well positioned as we look forward to the challenges ahead.◆

Pete Caligiuri is a forest ecologist for The Nature Conservancy and Ed Keith is county forester for Deschutes County in Bend, Ore. Both SAF members, Pete can be reached at pcaligiuri@tnc.org and Ed at ed.keith@deschutes.org.

Restoring low-intensity, prescribed fire to fire-adapted ponderosa pine forests on the Sisters Ranger District following thinning and mowing treatments as part of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project.

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Restoring a Lost Landscape

BY MIKE BRINKLEY AND TIM BAILEY

The Rigdon Collaborative Landscape Restoration project covers 105,000 acres in the upper Willamette River watershed. The Willamette National Forest, Middle Fork Ranger District (MFRD), and the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative (SWFC) have worked side by side for two years to develop a “restoration blueprint” called the Rigdon Landscape Analysis. By working together, the Forest Service and partners are hoping to implement up to three NEPA projects that improve forest resilience to disturbance, restore unique habitats, and protect private inholdings while providing socioeconomic benefits.

A land of meadows and savannah

The Rigdon area is located at the headwaters of the Willamette River on the west slope of Oregon’s Cascade mountains. It is named for Stephen and Zilphia Rigdon who ran a wagon road stage stop and way station in the 19th century. The landscape includes 26,000 acres of dry, mixed conifer habitat, a vegetation type that is currently at the northern edge of its natural range. Climate and fire, along with prescribed fire maintained by Native Americans, resulted in open, mixed conifer forests of Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, incense cedar, sugar pine, and Oregon white oak. Trees were widely spaced and the ground vegetation was composed of grasses, wildflowers, and scattered shrubs.

Cold, clear, springs fed tributaries and historically provided spawning habitat for Chinook salmon and bull trout. Wide floodplains of multiple channels were once common, especially near confluences, and braided streams provided for high-quality spawning and rearing habitat.

A history of fire suppression and logging

The Rigdon landscape has been dramatically altered by fire suppression and logging. One-hundred years of fire suppression resulted in the development of a dense secondary canopy of primarily Douglas-fir in the mixed conifer forests. Pine and oak savannahs have become closed-canopy forests with sparse understory vegetation, resulting in the loss of species diversity such as elk and deer populations that have little forage vegetation as open forests close.

The construction of Hills Creek dam extirpated the salmon, and bull trout were removed in favor of other fish species. Vegetation and riparian forest harvesting changed stream channels and increased the temperature of streams. Road construction and misguided attempts to promote fish passage by removing natural debris jams resulted in additional loss of

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spawning and rearing habitat. Overall, the landscape has lost diversity and resiliency that is important in the face of wildfire and climate change.

**Restoring the land**

Numerous agency directives exist for conserving and restoring prairie, oak, dry mixed conifer, and Douglas-fir habitats that have been altered by fire suppression and other management activities. Restoration of the Rigdon landscape provides an important opportunity to fulfill these goals, and to make these overly dense forests more resilient in the face of wildfire, insect outbreaks, and future climate change.

Several significant restoration projects have already been completed. In 2010, the Jims Creek Savanna Restoration Stewardship project restored 450 acres of oak savanna and pine forest in the heart of the Rigdon area. This collaborative stewardship pilot project removed Douglas-fir trees less than 24 inches, leaving mature mixed pine and Oregon white oak. Post-harvest, the project area went from 160 trees per acre to 20 trees per acre with a lush and varied understory of native forbs and grasses that are attractive to many wildlife species, including big game. Ground fuels were reduced by prescribed burning. Oregon white oaks have sprouted and are now present throughout the project. Overall, the project preserved cultural resources, restored sensitive habitats, provided economic benefits to the surrounding community, and is a successful template for future projects.

In 2017, the Middle Fork Willamette Watershed Council oversaw a mile-long floodplain restoration project that removed road berms from previous logging that had channelized Staley Creek. Root wads and large tree stems were deposited in the new channels to provide complex aquatic habitat. After just one year, native riparian vegetation has returned and recent aquatic surveys have found repopulation of native fish, including bull trout.

**Rigdon Landscape Analysis**

In 2017, the Forest Service formed the Rigdon interdisciplinary team comprised of multiple resource specialists to undergo a Facilitated Landscape Analysis Design process to understand the ecological systems and identify target landscape objectives. The final Rigdon Landscape Analysis (RLA) report identified landscape elements, ecosystem flows, and desired target landscape objectives.

About half of the dry mixed conifer forest in the Rigdon area is now composed of plantations and natural stands of 150 to 300 stems per acre, which is significantly denser compared to the historic average of five to 25 large trees per acre. Most stands now consist primarily of 100- to 150-year-old Douglas-fir, although about half of the savanna legacy trees still exist. Target vegetation landscape patterns for mixed conifer forests call for open late seral forest with scattered patches of other seral stages. Mechanical treatments such as density reduction in mature stands and plantations, revegetation of native grasses, forbs, and oaks, and prescribed burning can restore much of the mixed conifer forest, promote resiliency and increase biodiversity. Post treatment, this landscape would be maintained in open condition with a frequent fire interval.

As part of the RLA process, the Forest Service welcomed input from the public. Over two years, the SWFC Rigdon Collaboration Committee...
(RCC) facilitated seven learning sessions, eight field trips, and multiple roundtable discussions between interdisciplinary team and RCC members. The RCC developed landscape-level zones of agreement to share with the interdisciplinary team to consider in drafting the Rigdon Landscape Analysis and to develop future proposed management actions.

The RCC recognizes that the “past, more open and grassy forest conditions that were maintained by the historic frequent fire regime will be more resilient to the effects of wildfire and insect outbreaks in the face of a projected warming climate.” The RCC worked in subcommittees to draft specific restoration goals to share with the Forest Service:

- Landscape conditions should be restored in order to provide for diverse habitats, structure of streams and vegetation, wildlife, and landscape resilience in the face of wildfire and a warming climate.
- Vegetation and wildlife habitat should be restored to previous, more open conditions in the dry mixed conifer where the vegetation structure, species abundance, forest density, and/or the fire regime have been altered.
- Streams and waterways should be maintained or restored to a condition where natural processes and function provide the habitat and water quality conditions necessary for all native species and life stages.
- Landscape management should take into consideration economic opportunities and social and cultural values, such as recreation access, scenic views, healthy, abundant wildlife, community safety, and overall quality of life.

Implementing restoration projects

The Rigdon interdisciplinary team is proceeding through NEPA requirements with the goal to begin implementation in 2021 and the years afterward. The SWFC plans to stay engaged to provide specific project level zones of agreement if needed. As projects move into the implementation phase, the SWFC will stay engaged through a variety of stewardship authority tools to help fund future restoration work.

More about the Rigdon Collaborative Landscape Project and updates are available at the SWFC website southwillamette.wixsite.com/swfc/rigdon.

Mike Brinkley is a retired scientist with a focus on healthy forests and watersheds. He is an active member of the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative, representing the Many Rivers chapter of the Sierra Club, interested in planning restoration in the Rigdon landscape. Tim Bailey received his B.S. in Forestry from Southern Illinois University in 1974. From 1980 to 2014 he served as a forester, project planner, and silviculturist on the Middle Fork Ranger District of the Willamette National Forest. He was working on the restoration of the Rigdon landscape when he retired and continues to do so with the Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative.

FAIRWEATHER BIOMETRICS, LLC

Consulting services in forest biometrics and applied statistics

Stephen E. Fairweather, PH.D., ACF

steve@fairweatherbiometrics.com
To confront changing climate, wildfire risks, and smoke, collaboratives are leading an ambitious effort to restore resilience to the dry forests and nearby communities of the Rogue River Basin of southern Oregon. By engaging community on deeply held values, broadening partnerships, and developing a science-based risk assessment and strategy, collaboratives are assisting community and commerce in retooling their cultural relationship with the forest landscape. These efforts have centered on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rogue River—Siskiyou National Forest (RRS) and the U.S. Department of Interior Medford District Bureau of Land Management (MBLM) and are extending to provide an all-lands approach to address the shared risks across public and private ownership.

Wildfire is intrinsic to North American forests, yet fire impacts are increasing due to climate change acting on homogenized landscapes of overly dense forests with altered forest composition formed by a century of fire exclusion and extractive logging. Rogue Basin forests bridge diverse ecosystems under a Mediterranean climate, resulting in productive dry, mixed-conifer forests featuring diverse native hardwoods and shrubs. Consistent with dry forests of nearby regions, eight-year fire-return intervals historically prevailed, with fires common in the spring and fall—in addition to summer. The pattern began fading in the 1850s with Euro-American settlement and the forced removal of native Americans who had thrived with extensive fire use.

In the contemporary checkerboard of public and private lands with sprawling communities at risk, fires increasingly threaten natural habitats and human communities—despite aggressive fire suppression. Arising with the alarm over regional smoke and fire impacts, a ground-swell of support has grown for proactive, ecological thinning and controlled burning. Consecutive summers with multiple fires and long periods of unhealthy air threaten long-term human health, summer tourism-based business, the real-estate market, and the broader economy, amplifying ongoing dialogue and the urgency to act.

The conceptual framing for collaborative restorative forestry work in the Rogue Basin is based in forest and fire science and an approach guided by the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, a national vision for wildland fire management. Promoting a view of shared risk management among all stakeholders and across all landscapes, the strategy articulates the need for meaningful progress toward three goals: 1) resilient landscapes; 2) fire-adapted communities; and 3) safe and effective wildfire response.

As landscape-scale collaborative projects have developed in the Rogue Basin, experience, learning, scope, and partnership depth have increased (Table 1).

The Ashland Forest Resiliency Stewardship Project (AFR) focused on the City of Ashland’s at-risk municipal watershed located on the RRS. The USDI Secretarial Applegate Pilot on the MBLM demonstrated ecological forestry concepts developed by professors Jerry Franklin and Norm Johnson of the University of Washington and Oregon State University, respectively, and with community engagement led by the Applegate Partnership and the budding Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative (SOFRC), a non-profit with a board of directors and collaborative participants.

Meanwhile, the Ashland project expanded to an all-lands framing in the Ashland Forest All-lands Restoration Initiative (AFARI) with support of the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Program to complete work on the federal AFR footprint, and thousands of private non-industrial lands funded through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and significant co-investments from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

Sophisticated community engagement is a hallmark of these collaborative projects. In Ashland, the ongoing
AFARI reflects the City of Ashland’s deep historical engagement in watershed protection. When the RRS plans for watershed thinning of commercial sized trees in the 1990s met with protests, the city involved the community and concerned stakeholders in considering restorative commercial thinning on its municipal lands in the watershed—and successfully completed the project, building public trust in active, restorative management. By 2005 the RRS, using a provision of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, invited the City to develop a community alternative to protect the watershed and community from severe fire while restoring forest resilience. The RRS embraced the community design in the final AFR Stewardship Project, and the City endorsed it.

Success of AFR and the AFARI builds on collaborative relationships enabled by shared investment, understanding, and risk formalized in a 10-year Master Stewardship Agreement among the RRS, the City, Lomakatsi Restoration Project (LRP)—a local non-profit—and The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

As the land manager, the RRS is a critical partner and conduit for core funding. The City leads community engagement and brings experience managing its adjacent land. LRP brings foundational experience implementing projects under Stewardship Authority with a flexibly-scaled, skilled ecological-forestry workforce, integrating forestry contractors and workforce development, along with engaging diverse youth and tribal interests. The Nature Conservancy adds science engagement and a conservation perspective, leading multiparty monitoring for transparency and accountability. An Implementation Review Team provides external review by staff from the Oregon State University Extension Service, the environmental advocate Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands, and the SOFRC.

Under Stewardship Authority, retained receipts from the 14 mmbf restoration byproduct timber sold on AFR has been rolled back into the project, now nearly completed. With ongoing engagement, the community has developed a sense of ownership and pride in their accomplishment. And the City has provided for ongoing maintenance using controlled burning by establishing a water bill assessment that generates $175,000 annually.

**Modeling a 20-year project**

To help bring such projects to a meaningful regional scale, the SOFRC and partners layered conceptual and design elements of the foundational collaborative projects into modeling a 20-year Rogue Basin Cohesive Forest Restoration Strategy. These early projects demonstrated the integration of values through landscape design with strategic treatment placement and varied prescriptions to address the key shifts in forest composition, structure, and wildfire risk. The projects also generate timber as a byproduct of restorative forestry, while supporting the recovery of the northern spotted owl. The Rogue Strategy articulates a principled and comprehensive approach to restoring forest and community resilience to fire across the 4.6-million-acre basin. Completed in 2017, the Rogue Strategy articulates a collaborative vision for a 1.1 million acre, 20-year program of work that focuses on thinning and controlled burning. A quantitative wildfire-risk assessment is at the core of the Rogue Strategy, connecting complementary partners focused on landscape resilience, fire-adapted communities, and safe and effective wildfire response.

The Rogue Strategy provides data, tools, and approaches to integrating wildfire risk reduction with endangered species recovery and climate adaptation. It identifies forests to protect intact, then uses optimization software to place ecological thinning and controlled burning where accessible and appropriate. The outputs account for forest density reduction, reduced wildfire risk, and resulting timber revenue and jobs for three alternative scenarios. The all-lands scenario, mirroring the AFARI project, reduces wildfire risk to human communities and old growth habitats by 50%, while annually delivering 83 million board feet of federal timber, the restoration byproduct, to local mills.

**Leveraging funding and engagement**

Proactively treating 1.1 million acres over 20 years at a cost of $600 million is daunting, requiring co-investment toward shared landscape-scale objec-

(Continued on next page)
RFRI. The $6 million/six year pledges from OWEB, backed with $3.8 million in match from an expanded group of partners, will touch down with treatment implementation and community engagement on six projects distributed across the Rogue Basin. Successive implementation of staged projects distributed among management units will seed the approach in different communities. RFRI will leverage engagement on these initial projects to catalyze further understanding and support of new co-investments to expand and integrate across the basin.

To succeed, the RFRI Partnership must become a trusted institution with wide and diverse affiliations. Federal land treatments alone require a five-fold increase in the treatment schedule and funding. Considering the possible and potentially avoided costs (California spent $15 billion in fire remediation and recovery from the 2018 fires), the investment in the Rogue Strategy appears wise. Industrial forest owners, the insurance industry, water utility fee payers, tribes, and county government could potentially become co-investors. Smoke impacts have spread the risk from localized fire-vulnerable locations to broad communities now energized to proactively manage forest landscapes. To our advantage in going to scale, the region retains a viable timber industry, a growing and highly-trained workforce, and significant economic activity.

Collaboratives are manifesting a proactive, middle way past historical tension between resource use and conservation, sidestepping a false dichotomy between the needs of people and nature. Fortunately, broad public and partner support for proactive, restorative mechanical treatments with controlled burning has been buoyed by successful projects and the positive news coverage about the SOFRC’s Rogue Strategy. The AFARI and RFRI are grounded in best science and collaborative partnerships to integrate objectives and deliver long-term landscape-scale solutions. The Rogue Strategy provides a foundation for a shared landscape vision to transforms society’s reactive stance toward wildfire to proactively and positively engaging with fire.

Darren Borgias is Southwest Oregon Forest Project Director for The Nature Conservancy, Ashland. He can be reached at dborgias@tnc.org or 541-708-4989. Kerry Metlen, an SAF member, is a forest ecologist with The Nature Conservancy, Ashland. He can be reached at kmetlen@tnc.org.

Table 1: Prominent collaborative forest stewardship efforts in the Rogue Basin. Analyzed acres (ac) are of the entire landscape, from which fewer acres are planned or funded for treatment (Trt). Core partners were involved in project design, formal agreements and/or contributed substantial funding or match. Supportive partners provided review. Participating partners were engaged in workshops or field tours that informed project development and were only included if they were Core or Supporting partners in a separate project.

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*AP= Applegate Partnership; COA=City of Ashland; JACK=Jackson County; JOSE=Josephine County; JSWCD=Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District; KBO=Klamath Bird Observatory; KSWILD=Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands; LRP=Loamakatsi Restoration Project; MBLM=Medford District Bureau of Land Management; NRCS=National Resource Conservation Service; ODF=Oregon Department of Forestry; OSUEx=Oregon State University Extension Service; OWEB=Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board; RRS=Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest Restoration Collaborative; SOU=Southern Oregon University; TNC=The Nature Conservancy; USFWS=US Fish and Wildlife Service; UW=University of Washington.
Calendar of Events

**Starker Lecture Series: Coquille Tribal Forestry; Seeing the Forest through a Cultural Lens**, April 10, LaSells Stewart Center, Corvallis, OR. Contact: starkerlectures.forestry.oregon-state.edu/.

**Slope Stability and Landslide Management in the Pacific Northwest**, April 11-12, Springfield, OR. Contact: WFCA.

**Oregon SAF annual meeting**, April 17-19, Boulder Falls Inn, Lebanon, OR. Contact: www.oregon-forestry.org/oregon.

**Alaska SAF annual meeting**, April 24-26, Anchorage, AK. Contact: Trevor Dobell-Carlsson, trevor.dobell@alaska.gov.

**Forest Biomass and the Bioeconomy**, April 25, Vancouver, WA. Contact: WFCA.


**2019 Scaling for Non-Scalers**, April 30, Wilsonville, OR. Contact: WFCA.


**Washington Farm Forestry Association annual meeting**, May 2-4, Best Western Silverdale Beach Hotel, Silverdale, WA. Contact: www.wafarmforestry.com.

**Fundamentals and Best Practices for Forest Inventories**, May 7, Olympia, WA. Contact: WFCA.

**OSAF Foundation Fellows Luncheon**, May 22, Forestry Club Cabin-Peavy Arboretum. Contact: Melinda Olson, 503-224-8046, melinda@forestry.org.

**CESCL Erosion and Sediment Control Lead Training**, June 17-18, Portland, OR. Contact: NWETC.


**We Remember**

**Wilbur Wolf 1937-2019**

Wilbur E. Wolf, Jr., husband, father, grandfather, patriot, soldier, captain, armor officer and aviator, forester, farmer, public servant, mentor, and friend passed away. He was born on August 26, 1937, in York, Penn., the son of the late Wilbur E. Wolf, Sr. and Hazel Woodring Wolf. He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Margaret Smyers Wolf, his four children, and 12 grandchildren.

On January 4, in a pasture on the family farm near where his old deer stand stood, he and an also aging ash tree engaged in battle. And, on that hillside, in the end, joined as one, they both died an honorable death.

From their beginnings, as a child and as a young sapling, to their ends, as a distinguished elder and a mature tree, theirs was a life well lived. In lieu of flowers, the family welcomes well-wishers, friends, and comrades to contribute to organizations that Wilbur held dear: Pennsylvania Wounded Warriors (www.pawoundedwarriors.org/), The Ruffed Grouse Society (www.ruffedgrouse.org/), and The Big Spring Bulldog Education Foundation (www.bigspringbulldogfoundation.org/).

Contact Information

**NWETC:** Northwest Environmental Training Center, 1445 NW Mall St., Suite 4, Issaquah, WA 98027, 425-270-3274, nwetc.org.

**WFCA:** Western Forestry and Conservation Association, 4033 SW Canyon Rd., Portland, OR 97221, 503-226-4562, richard@westernforestry.org, www.westernforestry.org.

Send calendar items to the editor at rasorl@safnet.org.

I suppose it is only fair that a lumberman's voice should be among the many that fill the pages of this fascinating book. Still, I was pleasantly surprised when Society of American Foresters editor, Steve Wilent, asked me to submit an essay.

I am not an SAF member, but helping the US Forest Service find innovative ways to restore natural resiliency in western national forests is vital to the future of our third generation, family-owned company—Vaagen Brothers Lumber Company, Colville, Washington—and to the futures of the rural communities of northeast Washington.

Over the last 15 years or 20 years, I have probably devoted more time to helping build up forest stakeholder collaborative capacity than any other lumberman in the nation. I did it because nothing else was working, and nothing else has done more to ease the log shortage our family has endured for 15 years.

Many of my sawmilling colleagues think I'm wasting my time, but I don't. The old New England Town Hall meeting format—the backbone of our democracy—still works. In fact, its appeal is growing among forestry's advocates for one very significant reason: the process—what we call collaboration—reduces the risk of litigation by increasing citizen-stakeholder participation in the management of our publicly-owned national forests.

Our company's strong support for collaboratives that represent the broadest possible cross-sections of values found in northeast Washington communities honors commitments made by my father and his brother when they founded Vaagen Brothers in 1952. We are deeply rooted in at least a dozen rural timber and farming communities in Stevens, Pend Oreille, and Ferry counties. We employ about 225 workers in two mills in northeast Washington. Our main mill is at Colville in Stevens County. We also operate a HewSaw single-pass milling machine at Usk in Pend Oreille County. For years, we owned mills at Republic in Ferry County, and Ione in Pend Oreille County, but lingering uncertainty with federal log supplies forced us to close the mills several years ago.

Many of our employees have been with us for more than 30 years. We have seen one another through many ups and downs, both economic and personal. That's what families do for one another. From experience, I can tell you that replacing a mill that burns down is easy compared to the challenges that go with hiring and training a top-quality work force, so we work hard to retain our employees.

The 1.1 million-acre Colville National Forest is the geographic and economic backbone of northeast Washington's rural communities, and a major source of logs for our mill. But its value to us extends far beyond that of its standing timber. It is our primary source of drinking water and our year-round outdoor playground. We hunt, fish, hike, camp, ski, snowshoe, snowmobile, and ride horseback through its rugged beauty.

Our Northeast Washington Forest Coalition, which includes collaborative stakeholders who advocate for more Wilderness as well as those who advocate for more active forest management, believes that between 500,000 and 600,000 acres of the Colville is well-suited to a mix of forest management objectives, including timber production and the restoration of natural resiliency in stands that hold too many trees for the carrying capacity of the land.

Given our mix of shade tolerant and intolerant conifer species, and other considerations, including soil quality, elevation, aspect, slope, and rainfall, the Colville lends itself to perpetual thinning on a 50-year rotation, meaning that in Year 51, we’ll be back thinning the same forest we thinned 50 years ago. Our mills at Colville and Usk are designed to process the types of small diameter trees that these perpetual thinnings will yield. Logs with four-inch tops are routine for us. What we cannot mill as lumber, we sell in chip
form to pulp mills or as biomass used by wood-to-energy producers. Nothing is wasted, and more thinning could easily be done.

**Sustainable: In perpetuity**

My own back-of-the-envelope estimate is that about one-third of the Colville could be actively managed in perpetuity, another third could be managed with a lighter touch—again in perpetuity—and the remaining third ought to be left alone, and maybe even added to the nation’s Wilderness system.

Our collaborative group wants to see more Wilderness acres designated on the Colville, but they also want to see a significant increase in the pace and scale of collaborative restoration work. The Colville has about 250,000 acres of overstocked and beetle-infested trees. These trees have already been damaged by large fires and are more susceptible to insects and diseases. They are ready to burn, and will burn if the Forest Service cannot find ways to move beyond its current pace of treating 4,000 acres per year.

Our collaborative has recommended that between 15,000 and 20,000 acres be treated annually. Fortunately, we still have the skill sets and capacity necessary to harvest, process, and market the added volume. In Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona, such infrastructure no longer exists.

Our family’s capital investments in small-diameter milling technologies have given us a very good grounding in managing thinning costs. From experience, we know that most of the work needed on the Colville National Forest will generate about $750 per acre that could be reinvested in more restoration activity—at the county level. The point is that, contrary to what you may have heard, the costs associated with restoring natural resiliency need not be borne by taxpayers. We have the capacity to treat more acres within our working circles.

The key to turning money-losing projects into revenue-neutral projects lies in selectively removing a few larger trees from each project to cover the added planning and restoration costs. The alternative is to purposefully allow these trees to burn in stand-replacing wildfires, then hand taxpayers the firefighting bill. Why would we do this when we have the knowledge and tools needed to restore natural resiliency before wildfires strike?

Thinning overstocked forests isn’t a new idea. The Forest Service conducted its first experimental thinnings at the Fort Valley Experimental Station in northern Arizona more than 100 years ago. The work continues to the present day and is well documented in research reports and repeat photography. Similar demonstration projects can be found in every western state.

By volume, 44 percent of the annual gross growth on the Colville dies that same year. If these were your trees that you had planted and paid for, how much mortality would you be willing to accept? Think about it. Every American owns a share of this forest. Is a 44 percent annual loss in growth acceptable?

You might be surprised to learn that the Colville is in better condition than any other national forest east of the Washington Cascades. On these forests, cumulative net growth is a minus 58.253 million cubic feet annually. Mortality (327.2 million cubic feet) exceeds gross growth (268.95 million cubic feet) by 58.253 million cubic feet. No private landowner could ever accept such a loss, yet our country does. Why?

The latest estimate is that about 80 million acres (125,000 square miles) of western national forestland are in Condition Class 2 or 3, meaning it is ready to burn or soon will be. (Forests in Condition Class 1 are generally healthy).

This is an area almost twice the size of the entire state of Washington. Why on earth do our national forest shareholders—that’s all 324 million of us US citizens—accept this loss? I don’t

(continued on next page)
Some western national forests are doomed because the mills that once provided commercially viable markets for timber are gone. About 700 mills have closed for good over the last 30 years, which is in large part a result of the federal government’s decision to shutter the timber sale program it built up following World War II.

The old federal timber sale program has gone the way of our society’s ever-shifting felt necessities. We value different things today than we did in the post-war years. Aesthetic—some say spiritual—values now trump timber production in the West’s national forests. That’s fine, but these values are now being lost in stand-replacing wildfires.

Increasing the capacity of collaboratives

Many conservationists now support thinning and prescribed fire as tools for restoring natural resiliency. And this is why our company has, for the last 15 years, actively supported increasing forest collaborative capacity in the West. Unfortunately, collaboratives cannot by themselves circumvent regulatory tools Congress has provided commercially viable markets for timber are gone. About 700 mills have closed for good over the last 30 years, which is in large part a result of the federal government’s decision to shutter the timber sale program it built up following World War II.

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The old federal timber sale program has gone the way of our society’s ever-shifting felt necessities. We value different things today than we did in the post-war years. Aesthetic—some say spiritual—values now trump timber production in the West’s national forests. That’s fine, but these values are now being lost in stand-replacing wildfires.

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favored the Forest Service. My guess is that judges admire what they see in this uniquely American problem-solving tool we call collaboration.

Where strong leadership exists at the regional and supervisory levels, the Forest Service is moving beyond its fear of being sued by serial litigators. I credit the collaborators with helping restore the agency’s faith in its own ability to do good, legally defensible work. The spirit and intent of these projects underscores our nation’s conservation ethic, the necessity of citizen resolve, and a “can do” attitude that has been missing from federal forest management for too long.

**Communities at the core**

We still have some hurdles to cross concerning wildfire suppression funding, post-fire timber salvage harvesting, “green” timber sales, future Wilderness designations, and funding for rural timber towns devastated by the collapse of the old federal timber sale program. These towns are surrounded by national forests. They can’t reinvent themselves in some new and dramatically different likeness. They are what they are: old timber, mining, and farm towns. Amazon won’t be building its new campus in Kettle Falls or Ione, and New York’s Metropolitan Opera won’t be moving to Colville anytime soon.

But these communities have something in them that you won’t find in New York, Seattle, or any other metropolitan area in our country: people who know how to care for forests. Some are professionally-trained foresters, biologists or engineers, but many of our neighbors know what they know because they’ve lived in forests all their lives. They are hands-on with generational knowledge who know how to get things done. They work with nature every day of their lives. They are the heart and soul of northeast Washington.

Who better to help the Forest Service care for the Colville National Forest than the people who live in it and depend on it for their every use and necessity? It belongs as much to them as it does to every American. They are the rural links in a human chain that stretches south to Spokane and west to Seattle and Portland.

There are countless thousands of us who are, in one way or another, socially, spiritually, culturally, or economically dependent on the wellbeing of the Colville National Forest: Wilderness advocates, hunters, loggers, fishers, sawmill workers, conservationists, native Americans, snowmobilers, retail merchants, school teachers, elected officials, hikers, campers, skiers—and lumbermen, like me.

It has taken us years to really get to know one another, but we’ve persevered in our shared belief that we could accomplish more by working together than we could by going our separate ways. And we have, mainly by being patient and respectful of one another’s differing points of view.

We don’t always immediately agree on the finer points, but we do stand on common ground and we are committed to helping the Forest Service find ways to treat more acres annually. Coalescing change in a centralized bureaucracy as large as the Forest Service isn’t easy. The decision-making process is slowly migrating to the local level, where it belongs, but restoring resiliency in our national forests requires that we also restore public confidence in the whole idea that managing forests is a better option than watching them burn.

Big wildfires provide teachable moments, but as soon as the smoke clears, the news media and public lose interest. Out of sight, out of mind. That’s the bad news. The good news is that the collaborative piece of this story—the human-interest element— isn’t dying between wildfire seasons. Even the most hardened journalists seem to see collaboration for what it is: a forum open to anyone who shares our interest in protecting our national forest heritage. We remain a work in progress, but we have come a long, long way in 15 persistent years.

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**Duane Vaagen is a third-generation Northeast Washington lumberman. His grandfather operated portable cedar mills before and during World War II. His father, Bert, and uncle, Bud, started Vaagen Brothers Lumber Company in 1952. Today, Vaagen Brothers owns mills in Colville and Usk, Washington, and Midway, British Columbia.**

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**Policy Scoreboard**

**Editor’s Note:** To keep SAF members informed of state society policy activities, Policy Scoreboard is a regular feature in the Western Forester. The intent is to provide a brief explanation of the policy activity—you are encouraged to follow up with the listed contact person for detailed information.

**OSAF Approves Updated Position Statement on Active Management to Achieve and Maintain Active Forests.** At the February 2, 2019, OSAF Executive Committee Meeting in Troutdale, an updated version of our position statement entitled “Active Management to Achieve and Maintain Active Forests” was approved by the ExCom. Only minor changes were made to the existing position. The core position states that OSAF “supports active forest management prescribed by professional foresters to achieve and maintain healthy public and private forests, consistent with land management objectives. To accomplish this, a wide range of proven forest management strategies and tools must be available to forestry professionals. These include carefully planned uses of forest thinning (sometimes removing trees over a wide range of sizes and ages), approved chemicals (e.g., fertilizers and pesticides), prescribed burning, sanitation and salvage of designated dead and dying trees, regeneration harvesting (e.g., clearcutting, shelterwood, selection) and mixed species planting as appropriate. Many federal forests in Oregon now have an especially acute and long-term need for active management that will require diverse strategies and tools, including road access and administrative flexibility to effectively expand and maintain such management. Broad benefits, from wildlife to recreation to forest products, can be achieved and sustained through active management on public and private forestlands.” The updated statement can be found at: www.oregon.forestry.org/oregon/policy/general. Contact: Mark Buckbee, OSAF Policy co-chair, buckbeefamily@msn.com.
Good signs make good neighbors.

Oregonians are more accepting of forest practices if they know forests are being planted after harvest. Let them know with a free PLANTED sign provided by the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

Visit KnowYourForest.org and search for “Landowner Signage.”