

## Potential Solutions Older Forest

### **Problem Statement**

**The desired amount of older forests on federal forestlands needs to be established and protected as a component of sustainable forest management. Habitat types should provide for wildlife diversity. A well-balanced program of forest management activities is necessary to maintain the mix of successional stages and vegetation conditions that provides for the full diversity of habitats and species.**

### **Problem Description**

Old growth forests are characterized by structural conditions, ecological processes, and micro-environments that may require very long periods to develop. Their importance in wildlife conservation derives from the diverse and specialized habitat conditions provided, dependence of many wildlife species on these habitats, and the fact that old growth forests are depleted. Others recognize the aesthetic value of “cathedral-like” old growth stands or the existence value of extremely old trees.

Most old growth forests occur on federal lands. Agencies have implemented restoration programs to accelerate the development of stands with old growth habitat characteristics; however, many decades will be required to reverse the depleted status. Conversely, reduced timber harvesting on federal lands is likely to lower the representation of early successional stages in some forest types in the future.

Oregon lacks a comprehensive policy to ensure that biological diversity goals are being met through the combined management objectives of Oregon's public and private landowners. Desired habitat conditions such as tree species composition, age class distribution, stand density and structure, snags and downed wood, and the size, shape, and juxtaposition of forest stands is essential for creating short- and long-term conditions to sustain populations and communities of wildlife. Conservation actions focused on the restoration and maintenance of natural habitats are likely to benefit a wider range of organisms than conservation actions developed for a single species. It is best to maintain diverse and healthy wildlife communities.

### **Issue/ impediment – #1**

How should Older Forests be defined?

Defining older forest:

- Principles
  - Flexibility
  - Integration
  - Specific to type
  - Widely accepted
  - ?

- Location – eastside/westside, other?
- Forest type
- Ecosystem values
- Attributes

**Cause of the issue –**

**Background Information –**

Old growth is simply a forest dominated by big, old trees, live and dead, standing and fallen, usually containing many smaller trees, giving the overall impression of diversity, and often reservoirs for species that are rare or not found in other forest age classes. As old growth characteristics accrue over time, definitions must be biologically flexible, widely accepted and specific to forest type, location and structure. Forests grown on long rotations for ultimate harvest can provide some older forest values and should not be excluded from old forest definitions.

**Desired outcome –**

Older forest definitions should be scientifically grounded, while acknowledging social perspectives on old trees and forests.

The definition of old growth should be based upon the goals to be achieved, which vary from place to place.

**Solution to address the issue –**

**How the solution will lead to desired outcome –**

**Who should implement –**

**Measures of success/ on the ground or administrative benchmarks –**

**Issue/ impediment – #2**

What process(es) should be used to determine the appropriate amount of Older Forest?

Vision for older forest

Goals for older forest

**Cause of the issue –**

- O&C lands (public trust)
- Trust
- Existing policies/conflicting laws
- Combination of social values and science

- Lack of \$ to support policy
- National forest policy
- Lack of commodity stream

### **Background Information** –

Processes to determine the appropriate amount of old growth, should take into account risk of loss to catastrophic fire, insect attack, disease or other agents of destruction, should be a primary determinant of old forest amount. Additionally, the full forest cycle should be provided for; there should be a balanced array of forest ages, and location should be an important determinant.

Policy changes to be considered include more local influence in the form of greater management and regulatory flexibility, and incentives to produce older forests. Federal policy change should embody the creation of a balanced network of older forests across the landscape. The Northwest Forest Plan indicated increasing amounts of older forests on federal lands. Federal fire policy has been important cause of older forest loss.

The major barrier to policy change is *existing* policy. Many of the laws and regulations affecting forest policy were passed over thirty years ago. All forest policy must be rethought and changed where appropriate. Another barrier was the continual clash of special interests over public forests.

A core barrier lies in the culture of the federal land management agencies and a lack of trust due to past mismanagement.

### **Desired outcome** –

Trust building

Public awareness

Research needs

The amount of older forests must be enough to provide enough habitat to successfully recover threatened and endangered species, improve the viability for forest indicator species, improve water quality and protect watersheds.

O & C lands are managed by the Bureau of Land Management under a federal statute (The O & C Act) that makes timber production the dominant use for the lands. There must be agreement on the legal constraints and the objectives before progress can be made on determining the desired amount of older forest.

Legal constraints define the amount of each agency's discretion. Knowing what we are trying to accomplish through the preservation of old growth would guide the decision of what is needed, how and where.

There are those that view the O & C Act as a barrier to be removed. If so, there must be a realistic, achievable plan to compensate the counties and communities for their loss of a critical source of revenue and benefits.

The older forests of today, and the future, should respond to identified climate change issues. Drier, warmer climate trends will increase insect and disease activity. There must be a diversity of tree size and species mix to adequately respond to future conditions. Active management must take place to achieve desired future conditions. Commercial forest products are a reasonable output from that activity.

All national forests, outside of special designations, could be used to re-grow an old growth forest. The cessation of logging on the national forests is wasteful; we must move beyond that. Overstocking and disease issues must be addressed through active management. Commercial products are removed from the forests through competitive bidding, and are converted efficiently into well manufactured, dependable wood products.

**Solution to address the issue --**

Community-based collaboration (priority areas, protecting outcomes, process, etc.)  
Stewardship contracts

Agencies need specific direction from Congress that older forests are off limits, and that resources must be redirected to ecologically justifiable forest and road restoration and appropriate community protection work.

The impossibly intricate maze of conflicting laws and procedural requirements must be simplified, or the management plans must be given additional legal protection by Congress.

**How the solution will lead to desired outcome --**

**Who should implement --**

**Measures of success/ on the ground or administrative benchmarks --**