

Looking Forward II
Oregon Families & Their Forestlands: What's at Stake

Brief Summary
of
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Oregon State University

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the Committee for Family Forestlands

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Overview and Remarks

Gary Springer, forestland owner and moderator

The Committee for Family Forestlands (CFF) and the Oregon Board of Forestry co-sponsored a successful second family forestland symposium (the first one was held in 2001) at the LaSells Stewart Center on the OSU campus in late April.

This year's symposium, "Oregon Families & Their Forestlands: What's at Stake," was designed to take some of the most important "survivability issues" for family forestlands and turn them into an action plan. This action plan will have elements for the Committee for Family Forestlands, Board of Forestry, OSWA, Extension Service, Department of Forestry and others to work on in the coming years.

The hard-working symposium participants developed a "Top 10 Solutions" list. When you read through the list some clear themes emerge: intergenerational land ownership and land management transfer; development of markets for traditional and non-traditional forest products (including something new called "ecosystem services"); better understanding and sharing of values between landowners and the non-landowning public; adapting to changing social and environmental climates. You will read much more about these themes as the various groups listed above grapple with them.

The symposium's general-session speakers and the participants in the small-group breakout sessions produced a number of ideas for positive action, and offered examples of work already being done by both individuals and groups to address some of the family forestland challenges listed above. It is not as if all landowners are waiting around for someone to solve their problems for them. One of the important take-home messages from this event was that we need to do a better job of ferreting out good ideas that are already showing promise and expand upon them.

In his remarks at the Symposium, Board of Forestry chair Steve Hobbs posed the following challenge:

"We need to develop new state policies that will positively affect family forestland owners over *multiple* generations. What are the most important public policies influencing continued family forestland ownership? How can we better organize ourselves to influence these policies?"

PowerPoint presentations from the symposium and outcomes of the discussion are posted at the OFRI website (<http://www.oregonforests.org/conferences/ffl>). Information about the Committee for Family Forestlands can be found at the Oregon Department of Forestry website (www.oregon.gov/ODF).

Survivability Challenges

The symposium “Oregon Families & Their Forestlands: What’s at Stake” was attended by family forestland owners from all over Oregon, as well as many other interested people. As every attendee was well aware, family forestland owners face a variety of challenges. It is hard to make a living operating a family tree farm. Competition both domestic and foreign, loss of mill and other infrastructure, often-burdensome regulations, intermittent (and generally low) return on investment, disagreements with neighbors on social values, an unstable land-use environment, uncertainty about how to pass the land to the next generation—all these issues and more were thoroughly aired by speakers and small-group participants.

But not all news was bad. Participants firmly acknowledged the joys and opportunities of being a family forestland owner. They talked of emerging markets for such ecosystem services as carbon sequestration and wetland mitigation, and for other non-timber services such as hunting. They talked of the prospect (still largely theoretical) of societal recognition for contributing to watershed health, clean air, wildlife habitat, and beautiful views. Some spoke of their efforts to reach out to neighbors and urban communities in constructive dialogue. They told of inviting schoolchildren and others to tour their lands and learn about tree farming. Many family landowners are now engaged in such conversations, and many others are looking for ways to start.

The overall message arising from the two-day conversation was that, even with all its demands, most family forestland owners know they have a good life—good for themselves, good for their neighbors, good for society. There was a firm consensus that finding solutions to the challenges, even the really tough ones, is worth the time and effort.

However, participants agreed that there are too many issues to address all at once. Some winnowing is needed—a targeting, a narrowing of focus, making possible a concentration of effort.

The Best Ideas

The top 10 vote-getting solutions are listed below:

1. 63 votes

Issue: Uncompensated services

Solution: Incentives

For the ‘09 legislative session, the Board of Forestry and Committee for Family Forestlands create and advocate for state and federal incentive legislation including:

- A carbon credit program that is mandatory for polluters and voluntary for family forestland owners
- Exempt standing timber value from value of the estate
- Financial incentives for maintenance of buffers for water, fish, wildlife, ESA, etc.

- “Hold harmless” to shield family forestland owners from liability for trespassers on their properties

2. 59 votes

Issue: Uncompensated services

Solution: Incentives

Provide financial incentives to reward family forestland owners for voluntary conservation practices that exceed forest practices regulations

Use renewable stewardship and/or conservation agreements to gain access to:

- Reduced state inheritance tax liabilities
- State and federal income tax credits
- Protection from liability (“hold harmless” agreements) to encourage access of public to family forest lands
- Ability to sell tax credits
- Accessibility to cost-share dollars for ecosystem improvements
- Have payments for carbon sequestration linked to these agreements

3. 54 votes

Issue: Intergenerational transfer

Solution: Tools for profitability and conservation

- Collaboration
- Financial incentives
- Conservation easements (for example, payments for sale of development rights, fishing and hunting rights, water rights, recreational rights, carbon rights)
- Market enhancement
- Transfer liability to state in exchange for public access
- Education of public and urban dwellers
- Access to science and technical assistance
- Improve land use planning: increase private flexibility, retain public value

4. 44 votes

Issue: conflict of values

Solutions: Education and outreach

- More intensive public education, such as is done by the sponsors of this symposium and public educators
- Sponsor and support family forestland tours for the public and for schoolchildren
- Reach out to new rural property owners to explain the management and values of the forestland
- Promote opportunities for older children to visit and work on tree farms

5. 44 votes

Issue: Global climate change

Solution: Embrace new tools for new times

Global climate change is an opportunity for family forestland owners:

- To demonstrate how management practices align with societal values

- To create job and business opportunities that improve economic conditions and the environment
- To stimulate synergy between environmental groups, growers, manufacturers, and consumers
- To reconnect urban and rural Oregonians through the marketplace

6. 40 votes

Issue: the delivery mechanism for influencing stewardship and sustainability is not effective for either participating or non-participating groups and individuals

Solutions: Improve delivery

- Education, targeting message content to specific audiences
- Form new coalitions.

Examples of improved delivery mechanisms around intergenerational succession and transferring values:

- Train all foresters who interact with SWOs to engage in dialogue about Ties to the Land program
- Identify opportunities to engage SWOs who are not engaged around Ties to the Land program
- Use family values to build grassroots support
- Build new public/private/corporate/industry coalitions

7. 35 votes

Issue: economic challenges of family forestland owners

Solution: Local lumber for local projects

- Tree Farmers' Markets in local communities
- Build awareness of and pride in local sources (e.g., "My neighbor grew the lumber for my house")
- Get on "Oregon Field Guide"

8. 32 votes

Issue: engaging the wider community of family forestland owners

Solution: Educate and reach out to *uninvolved* family forest landowners

- Develop informed, motivated, and involved family forest landowners who can communicate effectively with wider community.
- Develop partnerships and identify leaders in NGOs to assist in training, creating cohesive interests, new funding sources, and communication/education materials.
- For managing family members: increase capacity of family forestland owners to work with elected officials at local and state levels and with state and other regulatory agencies.
- For nonmanagers/nonmembers: increase knowledge of value of managing forests.
- Provide education to larger community: neighbors, policy/decision makers, general public

9. 27 votes

Issue: viability of family forestlands

Solution: Establish a green-credit forest fund

Such a fund will provide annual payment for conservation easements on family forestlands that provide public benefit. Avenues to establish the fund could include conservation nonprofits and/or government agencies and existing mitigation funds. Funding would come from development charges or “green” payment from consumers.

10. 22 votes

Issues: viability of family forestlands, values conflict with urban neighbors; unpaid services

Solution: Create a multi-level set of performance standards to enhance current single-level Forest Practices Act. Focus on on-the-ground performance. How it might work:

Levels	Standard (buffers, carbon sequestration, etc.)	Policy incentive	Market incentive
Top	Highest level of ecological value	(Identify policy incentive)	(Identify market incentive)
Middle	A management plan		
Base 1	Current Oregon Forest Practices Act		

This helps:

- The public (consumers), who will have market options and thus will have more reason to be supportive of local producers of wood products
- The family forest owner, who will be encouraged toward high standards of operation
- Agencies and public, because it improves mechanism to maintain and build public values
- Businesses, because it offers means to better respond to market demands

These multi-level performance standards could be promoted to the public to communicate and value of family forestlands.

Discussion

For most symposium participants, **compensation for ecosystem services and other societal benefits** is clearly the most urgent challenge. Five groups (#1, #2, #3, #9, and #10) addressed it in slightly different forms. A synthesized list of solutions from these groups includes:

- Develop financial incentives (cost-share programs, others) for maintaining and enhancing environmental values and services
- Reduce state inheritance taxes
- Develop and increase access to market for carbon sequestration
- Enact “hold harmless” agreements protecting landowners from trespasser liability lawsuits

- Enact tax credits for keeping land in forest
- Create a “green credit” forest fund to pay for conservation easements on family forestlands
- Develop a multi-level set of performance standards, with policy and market incentives for managing to stricter environmental standards than those in the Forest Practices Act
- Improve Oregon’s land-use planning process to increase private flexibility while retaining public value

The next most important challenge is to **solve the conflict of values, reach out to the wider community and build on common ground.** Two groups (#3 and #8) addressed this issue, generating these solutions:

- Develop more intensive public education on forestry and family landowner issues
- Organize more family forest tours for the public and school children
- Increase capacity of family forestland owners to engage the wider community and elected officials
- Partner with NGOs to find funding, provide training, and develop educational material
- Reach out to rural property owners with diverging views
- Promote work opportunities for older children

The third most important challenge is to take advantage of **opportunities presented by global climate change.** The group that addressed this problem (#5) looked past the financial incentives of carbon banking to make the point that the public alarm over global climate change offers an opportunity to align the interests of family forestland owners with those of the larger society. In this way, this group’s solutions also address conflicts of values and outreach to the community.

This group proposed that family forestland owners:

- Demonstrate how management practices align with societal values
- Create jobs and business opportunities that improve economic conditions and the environment
- Stimulate synergy between environmental groups, tree farmers, manufacturers, and consumers
- Reconnect urban and rural Oregonians through the marketplace

The fourth most important challenge is to **improve the delivery of stewardship information to family forestland owners,** targeting particularly those who are not now being reached. The solutions proposed by the group that addressed this need (#6) also echo concerns about conflicts of values and outreach to the community. Group #6 proposed the following solutions:

- Train foresters who interact with family forestland owners to talk to them about the Ties to the Land family succession program
- Use the Ties to the Land program to engage landowners who are not now being reached by any forestry stewardship programs

- Build new coalitions among public agencies, private citizens, and industry

The fifth most important challenge is to **expand markets for locally harvested forest products**. The group that addressed this issue (#7) proposed these solutions:

- Develop local farmer’s market-style markets for wood products
- Build awareness of and pride in using locally grown wood and other products
- Improve marketing and public relations efforts on behalf of local wood products (the example given was “Get on Oregon Field Guide)
- An example of this is the Build Local Alliance (buildlocal.org)

These proposed solutions resist neat categorization under their various topic headings. Rather, they overlap with one another to address several problems at a time, testifying to the interwoven nature of the challenges faced by family forestland owners.

Other Good Ideas

Because the symposium’s objective was to offer a limited number of practical solutions, the top vote-getters are likely the best framework for an action plan.

However, many other good ideas emerged from the symposium. Some are contained in the full complement of solutions from all 20 breakout groups, which appears in long form in Appendix B. Others are contained in summaries of comments from general-session presenters.

A distilled (and probably incomplete) list of these ideas is below. Some require concerted cooperative action and political change, but many are practical steps that forestland owners can take without waiting for action from any official body.

- Partner with Oregon Tourism for an interpretive “Roadside Family Forests of Oregon” program
- Work toward a reasonable modification of Measure 37
- Work toward modifications of state and federal estate-tax law
- Increase availability of conservation easements through land trusts
- Advocate for a development pattern of denser housing and more open space
- Promote active management on federal forests
- Encourage adequate funding of state service-forester positions
- Promote understanding of family forestland owners as distinct from public forest agencies and the forest industry
- Adopt a formal business organization for your tree farm
- Do short-term, low-cost stock improvements
- Minimize fire and trespass liability issues by making breaks and putting up signs
- Put up “Family Forest” signs along roads
- Work with neighbors to build understanding and tolerance on both sides of the fence. Have one-on-one conversations with neighbors, family, friends, and “opponents”

- Keep your management plan updated and share it with family
- Talk with family and friends about successional issue—and then do something about it. Reward the kids who are interested
- Show your love for the land
- Enjoy the process. Be proud of what you do for your family and society
- Become political. Build relationships with elected officials
- Become competitive on specialty rather than commodity products
- Be a constant learner
- Take our own advice: Buy local, Buy smart, Buy green, Buy innovation, Buy the future, Buy fun, By God, support Family Forests
- Tell our stories to whomever will listen

The full Symposium Proceedings can be found at the Committee for Family Forestlands website: <http://www.oregon.gov/ODF/BOARD/CFF/cff.shtml>.