



Promoting and practicing sustainable forestry

# 2009-2011 BUDGET REQUEST



## Seeking solutions for federal forestlands

### Restoring Oregon's federal forests

Federally owned forests are enormously important to Oregon's environmental health, economy and social fabric. However, due to legal and policy gridlock, outmoded past management practices, and natural factors such as climate change, they are deteriorating and vulnerable to catastrophic fires and other damage. This trend already is causing far-reaching consequences.

This proposal would build the foundation for an increased state role at every level – from policymaking to on-the-ground projects. It would help the state work with many groups to restore these forests and their ability to make sustainable, diverse contributions to Oregon's economic, environmental and social wellbeing.

### Federal forests are part of Oregon's larger forest landscape

About 60 percent of Oregon's forests are federally owned – about 25 percent of Oregon's total land base. When they're healthy, these forests can provide family-wage jobs in rural communities, critical fish and wildlife habitat, clean water, wood products, recreational opportunities, financial support for roads and schools, and capacity to absorb gases that cause global warming.

Oregon's forests form a dynamic mosaic, with potential and challenges that cross ownership boundaries. Together, they can produce a wide range of benefits. **We cannot chart a sustainable, productive future for all of Oregon's forests without considering federal forestlands.**

### Oregon's federal forestlands are in crisis

Oregon's federal forests are in crisis. **Climate change, past forest management and fire suppression policies, and other factors have left about 12 million acres outside of wilderness and roadless areas overstocked, and in danger of uncharacteristic wildfire and/or insect and disease outbreaks that threaten key ecological resources.** Many of these stands are already dead or dying.

**Wildfire has become a major problem**, with record acreages burned in the West in recent years; high suppression costs; threats to natural resources, public safety and adjacent ownerships; and large emissions of gases that cause global warming. Climate change in turn could make already-distressed forests more vulnerable.

**Largely as a result of the crisis on federal lands, the forest products infrastructure in Oregon – particularly east of the Cascades – is collapsing.** In eastern Oregon, 38 mills have closed since 1990, leaving only 10 sawmills still operating. Maintaining and enhancing this infrastructure is essential to the work needed to improve federal forest health, and to enable private forestland owners to continue to manage their lands and keep them in forest use.

**Federal agencies' capacity to repair deteriorating roads (major sources of erosion, water quality and fish-passage problems), prepare timber sales, conduct thinning and fuel reduction projects and undertake other work has been declining since the early 1990s.** Without such work, federal forests will become liabilities, rather than valuable, sustainable resources.

### Coordinating with other initiatives underway

Some local collaborative efforts have shown promise in creating consensus for action. However, these projects lack the scale needed to address the problems.

Enhanced state participation could help bring some of these projects to the larger, "landscape scale" necessary to make a real difference.



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## Backgrounder Seeking solutions for federal forestlands

### Coordinating with other initiatives underway (Cont.)

Both the Governor and the Legislature have directed the Board and Department of Forestry to lead the state in promoting and implementing a vision for the future management of federal forestlands in Oregon. The Federal Forestlands Advisory Committee was organized to develop this vision and the necessary actions to implement and achieve the vision. This request reflects the work of this committee, as well as the work of the Western Governor's Association, the Global Warming Commission and other groups.

The Department of Forestry currently has one position available to work on the complex issues facing federal forests. **Increased state investment in restoring federal forests and charting their future will yield environmental, economic, and social benefits that exceed the cost.**

### What's proposed

The proposal seeks **\$1.5 million in General Funds for 10 positions, including 4 foresters working in the field and in communities; water quality and wildlife specialists; policy and planning experts, and a unit manager and office support person.** Another \$800,000 would be available to help facilitate and support a target of six local, collaborative processes designing restoration projects in 2009-2011, and to fund scientific assessments to strengthen Oregon's involvement in federal forest issues.

### Expected outcomes and benefits

This proposal would provide for:

- **On-the-ground guidance and participation in local, collaborative processes** focused on thinning overstocked stands, reducing dangerous fuel levels and other work that both restores forest health and provides economic activity.
- **Assistance to understaffed federal agencies** with existing timber sale, post-fire, thinning and other operations that have been approved under existing environmental policies and authority.
- **Technical experts to assist with environmental analyses** and other steps necessary to move restoration and improvement projects forward on federal lands.
- **Increased, direct involvement in shaping long-term federal policies** that represent the interests of Oregonians and Oregon's forests.

Such activities have the potential to produce tangible benefits such as:

- **Designing restoration treatments** to restore historic wildlife habitat, reduce fire danger, and produce long-term supplies of renewable energy from over 200,000 acres of beetle-killed lodgepole pine on the Fremont-Winema National Forest.
- **An increase in federal acreage receiving needed thinning, prescribed burning or other treatments each year.**
- **Decreases in the risk of severe wildfires and their consequences**, including emission of greenhouse gases. For perspective: A recent study found that four Northern California wildfires caused as much greenhouse gas emissions as half of the cars driven in California for a year.

### For more information

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