

Concepts and Principles for Developing an Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests¹

**Prepared by the Oregon Department of Forestry
Forest Resources Planning Program**

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¹ This paper was prepared by Oregon Department of Forestry staff, in consultation with invited agency partners and Oregon citizens, in response to Board of Forestry direction to develop the Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests concept. The paper is intended to reflect the intent of the Board and be consistent with the *Forestry Program for Oregon* and the Board's Strategic Planning, Implementation, and Monitoring Work Plan. It also incorporates the comments and ideas received from the agency partners and Oregonians who provided significant and thoughtful input on the concept throughout 2009. While the paper attempts to faithfully incorporate the recommendations resulting from that input, it does not necessarily reflect a consensus among those parties who commented.

Concepts and Principles for Developing an Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests - Abstract

There is not a shared professional or general public understanding of what sustainable forest management means or how it can be evaluated for its effectiveness in meeting any desired balance of economic, environmental, and social needs. Neither is there a shared policy approach across federal, state, and local governance. There is a need for an improved, shared understanding by all parties about the linkages among the economic, environmental, and social aspects of forests and to understand how specific “on the ground” approaches affect these three aspects of sustainability.

The issues of forest sustainability affect all Oregonians. However, there has been a high degree of enmity, antagonism, and mistrust that has dominated the discussion of these issues. Most Oregon citizens and even many natural resource professionals are frustrated, fatigued, and/or disengaged by the decades of ongoing forest policy battles.

To improve the dialogue, the focus must change to promote real collaborative discussions. To do so, participants must come together willing to listen and look for mutually beneficial solutions.

At the request of the Board of Forestry, a group of interested individuals and organizations has developed this framework for a public dialogue around sustainable forest management called the Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests (the Oregon Roundtable).

An Oregon Roundtable would be part of a dynamic social process whereby Oregonians shape an evolving vision of what constitutes science-based sustainable forest management and what it means in Oregon. Ideally, the Oregon Roundtable will produce high quality public dialogue that will result in greater understanding of sustainable forest management among Oregon individuals, communities, academia, businesses, and government. Shared learning about Oregonians’ economic, environmental, and social values and the potential outcomes of sustainable forest management can then inform subsequent discussions on how forestry can be encouraged and implemented to meet the expressed needs of Oregonians.

This paper proposes that the purpose of the Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests is to engage multiple stakeholders through collaborative efforts to advance understanding, assessment and reporting of forest sustainability, and to encourage forest resource management that integrates economic, environmental, and social considerations.

The approach would utilize the *Forestry Program for Oregon* goals and objectives and the Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management as a common statewide framework by which to organize topics and discussions, to assess forest conditions, and to evaluate progress. Within this framework, the Roundtable could serve as a semi-independent forum that would select and discuss the issues that are of greatest interest or importance to Oregonians.

The Oregon Roundtable also could be contacted by governing boards, universities, agencies, communities, interest groups, or others to request that it assist them with public dialog around sustainable forests issues.

The Board of Forestry’s work on the “Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management” could be used as a pilot project to begin the work of an Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests.

The Board of Forestry is asked to determine its level of support for the proposal and its willingness to engage with other forest policy leaders to identify a clear mission or charge for the Oregon Roundtable, to commit to actively support and participate in the Roundtable’s work, and to provide opportunities for the Roundtable to submit input in their decision-making processes.

Concepts and Principles for Developing an Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests

People Depend on Forests and Forests Depend on People

No forest is an island with respect to time, place, natural processes, people, or communities.

Forests are part of, and often defined by, their broader geophysical setting and are part of the larger scale natural processes at work.

There is much more to our forests than just the trees! Forests are also where people live, work, and play; and we depend on their continuous flow of goods, environmental services, and amenities. Forests are a reflection of the human societies they interact with through communities, cultures, people - the surrounding social milieu.

In the United States, we have six predominant forest estates – each with unique management objectives and unique contributions to sustainable forest management: (a) federal forest lands, notably National Forests and forests administered by the Bureau of Land Management; (b) Tribal forests, (c) State, county, and community public forests; (d) industrial forests; (e) non-industrial family-owned forests; and (f) urban forests. All of these forest estates are inextricably linked to the broader human history of which they are part.

The bottom line is this: Today people depend on forests and forests depend on people--they do not and cannot exist in isolation from each other. We need to take good care of all of our forests so they in turn can take good care of us.

There is another, more subtle implication: If forests are inextricably connected with people and communities, then forest owners and managers, public policy-makers, and anyone with a unique interest in forests must recognize they are vital links that help to create and maintain this connection.

An Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests is an opportunity to reframe conservation, management, restoration, and use of all forests in Oregon to reflect, embrace, and energize this inextricable linkage between people and their forests.

Background

The Problem

While discussions about how to promote sustainable forests have been held in a host of forums around the United States (US) and the world and forest management approaches have been implemented to promote sustainable forests - there is not a shared professional or general public understanding of what sustainable forest management means or how it can be evaluated for its effectiveness in meeting any desired balance of economic, environmental, and social needs. Neither is there a shared policy approach across federal,

state, and local governance. There is a need for an improved, shared understanding by all parties about the linkages among the economic, environmental, and social aspects of forests and to understand how specific “on the ground” approaches affect these three aspects of sustainability. This is true nationally and in Oregon.

To date, much of the dialogue about sustainable forest management has centered on what interests forest managers government agencies, and advocacy groups, not necessarily what interests communities and ordinary citizens or identifying where common policy approaches might work across a variety of land ownership interests or agencies. We are challenged to expand the dialogue around sustainable forest management to include voices that have not historically been actively engaged or who have become disengaged after three decades of polarized debate. We are also challenged to recognize that forests are physical and biological systems that do not recognize political boundaries and that the necessary degree of policy coherence across various levels of governance currently does not exist.

Examples of topics that have been missing or minimized from traditional forestry discussions include:

- the importance of steady employment to social balance
- biological diversity
- community identity
- opportunities for improving community health through forest-based recreation
- forests as a classroom
- the emotional and spiritual connections people have to forests
- the significance of forests to communities and communities to forests

These are just a few among a very large list of human, social, and community connections to forests. The agreement on and use of criteria and indicators across governmental jurisdictions is a new approach where great opportunity exists for improved discussions and measurements about these connections.

The Opportunity

The issues of forest sustainability affect all Oregonians. However, there has been a high degree of enmity, antagonism, and mistrust that has dominated the discussion of these issues. Most Oregon citizens and even many natural resource professionals are frustrated, fatigued, and/or disengaged by the decades of ongoing forest policy battles with no narrowing or convergence of goals.

To improve the dialogue, the focus must change to promote real collaborative discussions. To do so, participants must come together willing to listen and look for mutually beneficial solutions.

To make a difference in achieving the sustainability of Oregon’s forests there must be enhanced dialogue among forest owners and managers, local communities, those who use the forest, leaders in the forest policy sector, and leaders in government.

The dialogue around Oregon's forests should be a robust engagement among diverse points of view and experiences for all forests - public and private. The people involved should reflect and honor the diversity of our society and communities. Wider agreement among citizens and agencies within the state on the meaning of sustainable forest management could result in more public support, promotion of substantial economic, environmental, and social benefits to Oregonians and to the nation, greater coherence of forest administration, and the perpetuation and enhancement of Oregon's forest land base.

The Oregon Board of Forestry (the Board) wants to foster a new forum for Oregonians to recognize the importance of forests to their economic, environmental, and social well-being. To that end, the Board recognizes the need to provide opportunities for Oregonians to participate in public discussions and decision-making on sustainable forest management. Such discussion will strive to clarify what we know about forest systems, what we value, and how public policy can balance environmental, economic, and social values shared by Oregonians. Oregon has an opportunity to create a long-term evolving dialogue that can lead to a body of literature, policies, improved practice, and citizen engagement that can transform sustainable forest management in Oregon and perhaps elsewhere.

Sustainable Forests

Oregon law defines "sustainability" as using, developing and protecting resources in a manner that enables people to meet current needs and provides that future generations can also meet future needs, from the joint perspective of environmental, economic and community objectives (ORS 184.421).

The founding documents for sustainability and sustainable development are the agreements and understandings that have grown between nations starting with the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, popularly known as "The Earth Summit." Subsequently, a variety of international forums have taken up the issue of forests and have led to a variety of international agreements including the Montreal Process for the conservation and sustainable management of temperate and boreal forests that the Oregon Board of Forestry has adapted for state-level policy and technical work.

A substantial body of literature has arisen from organization-based dialogues around sustainability and sustainable development. Good examples of such dialogues include the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the European Union, the United Nations, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—comprising the 30 most-developed countries of the world.

The United States is unusual in that there has been little national dialogue around sustainability and almost no development of policy. Oregon, however, is among the shining lights in the country with regard to sustainable forest management as a result of

the Oregon Department of Forestry's and the Oregon Board of Forestry's continued commitment in that regard.

The Board has defined sustainable forest management as meaning forest resources across the landscape are used, developed, and protected at a rate and in a manner that enables people to meet their current environmental, economic, and social needs, and also provides that future generations can meet their own needs. On a statewide basis, the Board believes sustainable forest management will provide:

- Healthy and diverse forest ecosystems that produce abundant timber and other forest products;
- Habitat to support healthy populations of native plants and animals;
- Productive soil, clean water, clean air, open space, and recreational opportunities; and
- Healthy communities that contribute to a healthy state economy.

For the purposes of this paper, the term, "sustainable forest management" includes all the possible approaches to promoting sustainable forests. Thus the term includes conservation, restoration, enhancement, and utilization of forest systems and resources and the silvicultural methods that might be employed to produce the desired results.

Proposal – An Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests

At the request of the Board of Forestry, a group of interested individuals and organizations has developed this framework for a public dialogue of, by, and for Oregonians around sustainable forest management called the Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests (the Oregon Roundtable).

Pending a more clearly assigned role by policy makers, this paper proposes that the purpose of the Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests is to engage multiple stakeholders through collaborative efforts to advance understanding, assessment and reporting of forest sustainability, and to encourage forest resource management that integrates economic, environmental, and social considerations.

The approach would utilize the *Forestry Program for Oregon* goals and objectives and the Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management as a common statewide framework by which to organize topics and discussions, to assess forest conditions, and to evaluate progress. Within this framework, the Roundtable could serve as a semi-independent forum that would select and discuss the issues that are of greatest interest or importance to Oregonians.

The Roundtable would seek ways to extend the science, practice, and social dialogue around sustainable forests and sustainable forest management. Activities associated with this endeavor may include:

1. Refining and encouraging the use of indicators;
2. Finding ways to link with and learn from the efforts of local initiatives, other states, countries, and organizations that are actively pursuing sustainability of forests;
3. Providing opportunities for pilot projects and case studies associated with forest sustainability; and
4. Sponsoring conferences aimed at helping to extend the science and practice of forest sustainability.

The basic premise for this paper is that an Oregon Roundtable would be part of a dynamic social process whereby Oregonians shape an evolving vision of what constitutes science-based sustainable forest management and what it means in Oregon. Ideally, the Oregon Roundtable would strive to produce high quality citizen dialogue that will result in greater understanding of sustainable forest management among Oregon individuals, communities, academia, businesses, and government. Shared learning about Oregonians' environmental, economic and social values and the potential outcomes of sustainable forest management can then inform subsequent discussions on how forestry can be encouraged and implemented to meet the expressed needs of Oregonians.

The Oregon Roundtable would bring together those who want to learn from each other and find common ground on sustainable forests issues. It is not intended to bring those with extreme, polarizing, intransigent views together to simply confront each other – that has often been the result of the traditional model.

To do so, the Oregon Roundtable must build on the strengths of past approaches but ultimately must create something new that is structured and conducted in a manner that will encourage a wider range of Oregonians to participate and not allow only a few voices to dominate.

It will be important for the Oregon Roundtable to encourage integrated thinking about how forests and people affect each other. Our forests are complex physical and biological systems that exist in a complex societal context. A learning approach that respects all points of view and fosters the shared understanding of cause and effect relationships to economic, environmental, and social indicators will allow the group to focus on how to achieve successful outcomes rather than arguing over perceptions and values.

While many members of the group support initiating the Oregon Roundtable proposal, some believe that now may not be the time to begin such a process or question whether such a process would improve sustainable forest management or the public dialogue. Most do agree that without clear support from Oregon leaders in forest policy – the idea should not be carried forward. If such support exists – then the idea could be translated into a specific pilot project that we can learn from and further develop or discard the approach.

More Details on the Roundtable Concept

The United States Forest Service implemented a national roundtable in 1998. As stated on their webpage, <http://www.sustainableforests.net/>, “The Roundtable on Sustainable Forests” is an open and inclusive process committed to the goal of sustainable forest management on public and private lands in the United States. Roundtable participants include public and private organizations and individuals committed to better decision-making through shared learning and increased understanding.”

Oregonians have participated in the national roundtable and it is a model for the organization of the Oregon Roundtable. However, the Oregon Roundtable would be specifically designed to meet the specific needs of Oregonians.

Support From Policy Makers in the Forest Sector - Oregon leaders in forest policy must determine if there is a viable mission for an Oregon Roundtable. Public and private landowners and managers, specifically the Oregon Board of Forestry, the USFS, the BLM, private landowner representatives and perhaps others must play a strong role in supporting the work of an Oregon Roundtable. This means that these organizations would set forth a mission or charge for the Oregon Roundtable, to commit to actively support and participate in the Roundtable’s work, and to provide opportunities for the Oregon Roundtable to provide input in their decision-making processes.

The initial sponsor could be the Board of Forestry, however, sponsorship should eventually be broadened to a consortium of forest sector policy makers. This consortium could be formalized through a Declaration of Cooperation that would allow additional agencies and organizations to join over time.

Participation – Progress toward a shared vision of sustainable forests via the Oregon Roundtable is entirely dependent on the willingness and commitment of interested individuals and organizations to engage and, to the extent possible, “do work.” Further and significant progress toward sustainable forests now requires the emergence and “unleashing” of champions, national and local leaders who are willing to step out and lead the dialogue, assessment, reporting and application of sustainable forests efforts. The Roundtable is a broader forum than just showing up at a meeting, but a combination of face-to-face as well as electronic collaborative processes. There will be opportunities and levels of engagement, at multiple scales, that are open to all who are interested in the purpose of the Oregon Roundtable. Participants may include virtually any Oregonian, including but not limited to forest landowners, forestry practitioners, public officials, agencies, scientists, recreationists, and communities.

Leadership – The Oregon Roundtable would be led by a “Core Group” of individuals that represent a diversity of interests. The Core Group would initially be appointed by the Board of Forestry. Eventually, a broader consortium of forest policy leaders – including landowners and land managers from government agencies; private landowner representatives; and perhaps others, could serve as the appointing authority. The Core

Group would serve as the steering committee for the Oregon Roundtable. It would be comprised of 6-10 members who have committed to a higher level of voluntary participation in the work of the Oregon Roundtable including: planning meetings, attending two to four Core Group meetings per year, drafting and periodically reviewing and updating an Oregon Roundtable Work Plan, and reviewing and commenting on other pertinent Oregon Roundtable documents.

The group would have two co-chairs: one from a public agency with substantial forest management responsibilities and one from the non-governmental sector. The State Forester – acting for the Board of Forestry in the capacity as Secretary to the Board, would appoint the co-chairs. Duties of the co-chairs would include convening Core Group meetings, providing leadership in developing collaborative agreements within the Core Group, recruiting participants to the Oregon Roundtable that represent the diversity in Oregon's population, and being spokespersons for the Core Group. Co-chairs would be expected to share their own interests, look out for the interests of others, and move projects along efficiently.

Core Group members would be appointed for two-year terms. However, for the first appointment round, half of the members would be appointed by lot for one year and half would be appointed for two years, to stagger board terms. Members may be reappointed and there are no term limits.

The Department of Forestry's Forest Resources Planning Program Director will provide staff support to the Core Group.

Types of Projects – The Oregon Roundtable could choose any project it identifies on its own. The Oregon Roundtable also could be contacted by governing boards, universities, agencies, communities, interest groups, or others to request that it assist them with public dialog around sustainable forests issues.

Examples of potential projects include:

- Board of Forestry could request help with discrete projects such as the development of future updates of the *Forestry Program for Oregon*. An Oregon Roundtable could discuss and synthesize relevant topics and provide input to the Board.
- Other organization could request that the Oregon Roundtable help them to enhance and improve programs that deal with sustainable forests.
- Scientists or technical specialists may request help in the integration and interpretation of information dealing with sustainable forests.
- The Oregon Roundtable could provide a forum wherein stakeholder organizations can explore common interests; develop collaborative ventures; test proposals, policies, programs or projects; identify and catalyze actions around indicators of concern; and help set priorities.
- The Oregon Roundtable can be a venue for the exchange of information and learning about sustainability from other organizations, regions, venues, and fields of sustainable development.

Roundtable Products – For each project, the Core Group would determine if discussions are targeting information exchange, or helping implement sustainable forest management approaches, or making recommendations to decision-makers or some other outcome. In some instances, the goal may be to simply encourage the dialogue and the associated learning. In other cases, if some decision-making body requests recommendations or if the Oregon Roundtable determines that it is desirable to make recommendations – then a collaborative process would be designed to develop recommendations through consensus or some other transparent approach.

Methods – A range of methods may be employed. Small highly informed technical or policy groups may be formed to work on specific technical issues or application of technical information to policies. Large information sharing conferences may be held that serve to inform and educate large audiences. Community venues may be sponsored to enhance discussion about local issues and needs from sustainable forests.

Impartial facilitation -- In order to provide a safe setting in which a diversity of views, opinions and perspectives about sustainable forest management can be expressed, it is desirable that the Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests be facilitated by an independent, impartial facilitator who is skillful in managing discussions where multiple, and sometimes strongly held, viewpoints are present.

Working guidelines will provide for safe and productive collaborative forums. Working guidelines will be developed and mutually agreed to by the participants at the initial meetings of any workgroup or venue. Working guidelines may include basic standards of conduct for the participants as well as agreements for how to deal with issues such as the decision-making process, communication with the press, etc...

Examples of working guidelines include:

- Be respectful of one another
- Be candid and honest but do not blame, attack or put-down others.
- Work toward an agreement that is fair and constructive for everyone.
- Share all information that may affect the final outcome

Potential Pilot Project – Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management

The Board of Forestry’s work on the “Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management” could be used as a pilot project to begin the work of an Oregon Roundtable on Sustainable Forests. The Board of Forestry decision to use a system of indicators to set policy was a change in their traditional approach to policy-making. The Oregon Roundtable could serve to fill the need for a “sounding board” for the indicators work. It could be a valuable forum for developing a broader understanding of the impacts of our collective management actions on the indicators and ultimately how to manage toward a desired balance of economic, environmental, and social indicator targets. If this effort is successful it may lead to discussion of broader topics such as the *Forestry Program for Oregon*.

If the Roundtable is effective at drawing in a larger audience, then the potential for future Roundtable work will be enhanced. If only a small group engages, it will still be beneficial to the Board of Forestry and to advancing the thinking about the Criteria and Indicators. (See Appendix)

Next Steps

First, consult with the Board of Forestry. Determine its level of support for this proposal and its willingness to engage with other forest policy leaders to identify a clear mission or charge for the Oregon Roundtable, to commit to actively support and participate in the Roundtable's work, and to provide opportunities for the Roundtable to provide input their decision-making processes.

Second, if the Board determines that an Oregon Roundtable merits their support and commits to supporting the concepts in the proposal or some revision of those concepts:

- Ask the Board to engage with other public and private forest landowners and managers in Oregon to encourage and assess their interest in helping to create and sustain an Oregon Roundtable.
- Develop and initiate a Roundtable charter and a short-term work plan for the pilot project on the Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management or some other project suggested by the Board. This would be accomplished through Oregon Roundtable meetings and ongoing collaboration with the Board. The work plan would identify needed logistical and financial support for implementation.

Appendix

Potential Oregon Indicator of Sustainable Forest Management Pilot Project Description

Background

The Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management are intended to provide the Oregon Board of Forestry, Board partners and cooperators, Oregon citizens, and potential purchasers of Oregon forest products with a comprehensive but manageable set of indicators to assist them in understanding Oregon's forest conditions and trends. Oregon is currently collecting data on a set of 19 indicators that is broad enough to provide the most important information needed to address the seven *Forestry Program for Oregon* strategies, yet focused enough to allow efficient and cost-effective assessment and tradeoff analysis to be completed in a timely fashion for policy analysis. The indicators are a mix of spatial and non-spatial data that can be used to display the condition of Oregon's forests at multiple scales (i.e., the ecoregion, county, or watershed scale), depending on the policy question.

Where possible, the Department of Forestry is coordinating data collection with other state and federal agencies to create economies of data collection. The resulting information can feed directly into future regional, national, and international evaluations of sustainable forest management. For example, Oregon indicators are already being used to inform two Oregon Progress Board Benchmarks and data may be used in future updates of the United States National Report on Sustainable Forests.

Purpose of Roundtable Involvement

The Roundtable or a Roundtable subgroup with structured, knowledgeable representation from a range of perspectives could receive technical briefings on the Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management in a priority order determined by the Roundtable. The Roundtable could be charged with providing ratings for each of the indicators regarding current condition, current trend (in light of previously established initial desired trend statements for each indicators), and quality of the indicator information. These ratings would be forwarded to the Board and posted on the indicator's website. The Roundtable could also provide a forum for discussing improvements to indicator implementation.

Looking further into the future, the Roundtable could serve as the primary forum for assessing the utility of the current set of indicators and recommending additions, deletions, or changes to the Board of Forestry. The Roundtable could assist the Board in reaching consensus among Oregonians on quantifiable targets for each of indicators as a means for measuring progress towards a tangible understanding of what sustainable forest management means to Oregonians. In this capacity, the Roundtable would serve in a role similar to the 2005 to 2007 Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to the Board on Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management.

The charge from the Board for the Roundtable to participate in evaluating the Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management is already implied in the Board's current Strategic Planning, Implementation and Monitoring Work Plan.

Roundtable Project Timeline

2010

Spring:

- ***The Roundtable could receive briefings on the indicators and develop ratings and evaluations and submit them to the Board.***

2010

September:

- Board will receive information updates on the Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management information (***With Roundtable ratings and evaluations incorporated***)

October:

- Public symposium on Oregon forest resource conditions and trends organized around the seven *Forestry Program for Oregon* goals and the 19 Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management (***The Roundtable or a Roundtable subgroup could assist the steering committee for this symposium***)

2011

June:

- Board will begin discussion on using indicator information as a basis for setting quantifiable policy targets (***With the Roundtable serving as the primary public forum***)

September:

- Board will receive information updates on the Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management

November:

- Board will update the Oregon Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management with desired trend statements and potentially targets (***Based on information that includes Roundtable recommendations***)