

# Elliott State Research Forest

## Vision

Oregon forests have sustained life for millennia. By merely closing our eyes, we can imagine rolling hills and rising mountains, deep green forests and pastel meadows; salmon runs churning rivers and birds making the most extraordinary sounds. With some careful effort, we can find a patchwork of spaces that provide this experience in the first person. As European presence occurred across the western United States, and the expansion of populations and cities, the ability to grow trees for timber became a critical component of Oregon's rural communities and of expanding economies across the region.

In seeking to create an Elliott State Research Forest, we are reflecting on the immense capacity that exists for forests of Oregon, and beyond, to provide the values we need to sustain ecosystems and economies. We believe that carefully crafted research and scientific inquiry in a dedicated area can inform the conservation and management decisions required to protect endangered species and ultimately lead to their delisting. With broad engagement in designing such a process, economic growth in a genuinely sustainable manner could stabilize and revitalize communities that have been flailing for decades and are always at risk to the boom and bust of policy changes.

We cannot do this with our eyes closed or an unwillingness to dialogue. We must all recognize that this is a unique time for Oregon, the Pacific Northwest (PNW) and the world. We are experiencing the fruits of our unbridled consumption of fossil fuels in the form of human-induced climatic change. The impacts of these changes are evident in the increasing occurrence of extreme weather events, increased scale and effects of wildfire, and an accelerated loss of species. Forest management has a significant role in helping to bring back balance to the PNW and once again take a front seat in the environmental movement, but this remains to be seen. Science and discovery must lead in informing forestry's future.

Forestry must accept its role and responsibility in managing forests for the good of people and the environments upon which they depend. The responsibility is not a small task; people demand many values of their forests, including clean water and air, habitat for species to thrive and survive, climate regulation, places to recreate and gain the benefits of time in nature, and yes, fiber production. The Elliott State Research Forest represents an enormous and unique opportunity to apply science to sustainably provide its myriad values and guide and inform forest management everywhere in an ethical, and life-sustaining manner. The opportunity includes the study of innovative practices, investigating climate resilience of these practices, demonstrating the forest is far more than timber to be logged, and maximize the value and sustainability of ecosystem goods and services provided by the coastal slopes of western Oregon. The efforts will be for the betterment of people and society, whether they are aware of them or not.

Over a century ago, the discipline of forestry was introduced to the western US as a response to the cut-out-get-out logging of the 1800s that only viewed forests as stumpage value. Forestry as a discipline was radical, and it was the first environmental science put into practice on the landscapes of the western United States. The framing of American forestry through millennia of indigenous management that led to the development of the dramatic and beautiful forests. The condition that we often hold up as 'natural,' was actually a construct of indigenous human design, expert use of fire and conservative, yet broad scope utilization of forest resources. Importantly, it was managed for sustainability and as a part of their community identity. The establishment of American forestry was to address the scars left by wasteful, hasty logging practices and to ensure forests for future generations – to protect ourselves from ourselves.



A century later, economic demands shifted the focus of forestry from conservation and correcting past inadequacies to centering on the net present value and financial returns. Non-economic values often associated with sustainable forest management were frequently cast in a subordinate role to efficient fiber production and addressed within that context—not quite as bad as the cut-out-get-out principles of the 1800s. The listing of at-risk species sharpened this contrast and led to increasingly polarized views of appropriate goals for active forest management and healthy working landscapes. Fast forward to today, and history defines the forestry profession. Forestry is inappropriately categorized and perceived as one of several extractive industries that are struggling (and failing) to adapt to a changing world. This characterization must change. But, forestry must also change.

In the future, forestry must maximize biological diversity, minimize fragmentation and enhance habitat for species of concern while still meeting fiber demands of a growing population. Forestry and its science should draw upon the wisdom, knowledge and history of indigenous partners to learn how to ethically approach and apply management so that nature and people may thrive. Forestry needs to support and sustain rural economies with skilled jobs that support families and livelihoods. Forestry needs to protect and promote the health and well-being of rural communities through ecosystem services and places to recreate. The practice of forestry must maximize its contributions to societies to offset global warming. Forestry can accomplish this by yielding sustainable, renewable and value-added timber for homes and cost-effective mass timber products for commercial wood buildings that displace carbon-emitting steel and concrete construction. To ensure we practice forestry in a manner that provides these multiple values on a sustainable basis will require operational scale research in representative settings that can seed enhanced methods and practices that can be implemented on forest lands across the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

Can we create such a path forward for a forestry's future? Yes, absolutely, and the size, location, and multiple values that define the Elliott State Forest present a singular opportunity to study, develop science, and demonstrate how to attain this future.

To transform the Elliott State Forest into the “Elliott State Research Forest” will require forethought and adherence to a platform that will support research initiatives today and into the future with the controls and replication that define the rigorous expectations for thoughtful science. As others in this process suggest, we must be capable of undertaking science that helps address how we can achieve broad-scale conservation goals and ameliorate climate change on forest landscapes while also producing fiber for a growing world population. Undertaking science of this scale is the central challenge that the Elliott State Research Forest must meet to fulfill its potential. While there are many issues to address before the ongoing conversations narrow to a recommendation to the Land Board, I believe there are five pillars essential to accomplishing the vision for the OSU College of Forestry to oversee an Elliott State Research Forest:

1. The primary purpose of an Elliott State Research Forest is research; however, the values people hold for it and forests everywhere drive its management. The prime motivation is the sustainable and ethical provision of all of the values. We base decisions on the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion of all values and the people that hold them.
2. A cross-section of treatments that represent a spectrum of operational settings from reserves and conservation-oriented thinning to more intensive management must support the research design. The TRIAD research design currently being considered has excellent potential for creating a platform capable of supporting a variety of research over an extended time. The challenge is to align these different treatments with stand attributes and species concerns without introducing bias that will compromise that research.
3. While the forest must be self-supporting, harvest will not take place for the purpose of generating revenue. Only when there is certainty and transparency that revenue from harvests is a derivative of maintaining and implementing the research design platform can stakeholders and the public be assured that OSU management reflects public expectations for what the research forest is supposed to represent.

4. TRIAD treatments need to maximize the values of older forests by minimizing impacts to the structure, composition (including species of concern) and function of older forest stands. The research design should protect past unmanaged, naturally regenerated stands. However, this has to be accomplished without limiting the scope of future research to test the relationship of management actions in different age classes to a variety of response variables.
5. The structure and values associated with how we make decisions relating to the management of the Elliott into the future are as important as the research design we agree to implement. I aim to achieve a transparent structure, collaborate with a cross section of stakeholders, and create clear lines of decision-making authority and accountability to ensure the development and execution of a forest management plan is always supportive of the research goals for the forest.

We stand at the edge of a new frontier with a choice to make. We can move forward into as-yet uncharted territory and work together to place forestry at the forefront of a sustainable future, or accept the status quo. As we know, forestry as a practice is far more than just a means of acquiring timber. Forestry, in its essence, is a conservation science and an adaptive practice that considers ecosystems holistically and seeks to meet multiple objectives and provide for future generations. Being adaptive means being able to evolve to meet challenges and opportunities. The evolution of the forestry profession requires thorough scientific inquiry, application and evaluation. The Elliott State Research Forest represents our path into this new frontier. It will require that those who care deeply for this forest, forested landscapes across the Pacific Northwest, and for the practice of forestry, remain committed partners to our College well into the future.

Sincerely,



**Tom DeLuca**

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the Oregon State University College of Forestry*