

# **2026 Environmental Justice Council Report from the Oregon Department of Forestry**



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# AGENCY INTRODUCTION

## Department of Forestry Mission Statement

**To protect and promote resilient forests that benefit all Oregonians.**

## An Agency in Transition

The Department of Forestry has been in a state of transition over the last several years. This includes shifts in leadership, oversight, external directives relating to the Forest Practices Act, and shifts in organizational structures to the larger issues around natural resource management and climate change (including shifts in fire behavior and tree species shifts, among others). The department looks forward to advancing efforts to adapt in ways that are culturally responsive and environmentally just.

## Department of Forestry Leadership

Oregon State Forester – in transition- (see [Appendix A](#) for Organizational Chart)

Kate Skinner - Interim State Forester 1/2025 to 2/2026

Kacey KC – Begins 3/1/2026

For more than a century, the Board of Forestry and Department of Forestry have been stewarding Oregon's forests. The initial iteration of the board was established in 1907. Following massive fires in western North America in 1910 legislation was passed to establish the Department of Forestry along with the positions of state forester and deputy state forester. Together, they were charged with overseeing forestry in the state and preventing forest fires and coordinating the response when fires did start. This structure remains but has evolved many times in the last 114 years. Beginning in 2025, the State Forester will be appointed by the Governor and not the Board of Forestry.

The Oregon Board of Forestry is a [seven-member citizen board](#) appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. The board is charged with representing the public interest and its primary responsibilities are to:

- Supervise all matters of forest policy within Oregon.
- Adopt rules regulating forest practices.
- Provide general supervision of the State Forester's duties in managing ODF.

The Department of Forestry's work is truly a team effort. The policy and direction established at the headquarters level guides the work happening in the field districts. While the department's headquarters are in Salem, much of the on-the-groundwork is done at the local level in ODF's 12 districts with 24 units from Astoria to Wallowa and down to Lakeview and Medford. The dedicated public servants in these offices are the people responsible for managing the State's forestlands, assisting landowners, regulating forest practices, and fighting wildland fires.

## Environmental Justice Key Personnel

A short list of some of the key people within the department's environmental justice space:

- Sabra Purifoy - Workforce Development Analyst, DEIB Council coordinator
- Danny Norlander – EJC Liaison
- Cindy Kolomechuk – Government to Government Coordinator
- Scott Althenhoff- Urban and Community Forestry Manager
- Hillary Olivos-Rood- Urban and Community Forestry
- Evan Elderbrock- Urban and Community Forestry, member of the EJC mapping tool workgroup

## Agency Budget and Revenue Sources

The agency has an all funds legislatively adopted budget for the 2025-27 biennium of \$720,177,685. This includes an appropriation of \$184.6 million of General Fund, \$448.5 million in Other Funds, \$85.1 million in Federal Funds authorization, and \$2.0 million of Lottery Funds.

## Agency Programs Relevant to EJ Reporting

- Natural and Working Lands Fund – NCS Implementation
- Forest Resources Division Urban and Community Forestry
- Schroeder Seed Orchard
- Landscape restoration and resiliency
- State Forests Division Forest management for the “greatest permanent value” to all Oregonians
- Recreation, Education and Interpretation
- Smoke Management
- Wildfire prevention, mitigation, and recovery

# ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE HIGHLIGHT

As we know, black, indigenous, people of color, and other under-served communities are often the most climate impacted; increasing representation on our staff and preparing staff to better understand the needs of Oregon communities empowers those voices historically left out of conversations around environmental justice, thereby ushering in the opportunity for true collaboration.

## Urban and Community Forestry Program

The Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program advances environmental justice by expanding access to urban and community forest benefits and delivering resources for urban planning and maintenance. The program focuses on building community connections through partnerships and education, supporting workforce diversification, facilitating collaborative demonstration projects, and strengthening climate resiliency.

The UCF Program received \$26.6 million in Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) grants from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to launch two major initiatives: \$10 million dedicated to federally recognized Tribes in Oregon and \$12.5 million to advance urban forestry and tree equity in underserved communities. These efforts aim to deliver broad benefits to Tribal, rural, coastal, and urban communities beyond individual projects.

The UCF Program has presented to regional partners, state networks, and national consortia on the lessons learned in developing a program for underserved and historically under-resourced communities. In addition, the UCF Program contracted a Tribal relations consultant to ensure continuity of services to Tribal partners, as ODF hired its newest Tribal Liaison and is now actively engaging representatives from each of the nine federally recognized Tribes of Oregon to advise program staff on program delivery and collaboration opportunities for new initiatives with Tribes.

Additional environmental justice activities include:

- Developing a state of the state report about the current mosaic of urban forest work with an outlook towards forging sustainable resources, education, and assistance.
- Acquired a statewide urban tree canopy assessment tool that allows the UCF Program to maintain mapping layers for green space, rights of way, and community demographic data for urban-rural gradients in Oregon.
- Implemented a \$190,000 State Urban Forest Resiliency grant to support proactive tree care in low-income communities.
- Entered into interagency agreements to support the administration and specialized needs for implementation of two 2023 Oregon state-funded initiatives, and funding has continued through the 2025/2027 biennium.

- Department of Land Conservation and Development's \$6.5 million state-funded grant program focused on planning and implementing green infrastructure projects in low-income communities who bare a disproportionate health burden and lack equitable access to environmental benefits.
- Higher Education Coordination Commission's \$10.7 million state-funded grant program centered around funding wildfire mitigation and providing workforce training opportunities for young adults across the state through the Oregon Conservation Corps.
- Supporting the state-mandated environmental justice mapping tool by providing technical expertise to the Environmental Justice Council's Mapping Methodology Working Group.
- Developed and now implementing a program that provides technical assistance to public bodies, Tribal Governments, watershed councils, and CBOs for planning, responding, and recovering from damage to habitats and urban tree canopies due to pests, disease, or other natural or human-created conditions that lead to tree canopy loss.
- Cooperatively administering the state-funded Forestry Natural Climate Solutions allocation of \$1 million for the nine federally recognized Tribes of Oregon. Whether through direct representation from the Tribe or proxy from Tribal-led nonprofits or Tribal-led enterprises, the Climate Smart Forestry grant program aims to fund forestry projects that implement natural climate solutions to mitigate the future impacts of climate change.

## Workforce Development Program

ODF's Workforce Development Program intends to provide a series of trainings and micro-learnings on equity and inclusion in the next 12-18 months; these include sessions on active listening, cultural competency, inclusive leadership, and inclusive communication. These trainings will strengthen employee skills in respectful and effective engagement, creating more genuine community partnerships, and improving accountability to community stakeholders.

Workforce development staff are also available to collaborate with the EJC and the Forest Climate, Carbon, and Health Analyst to incorporate themes of equity and inclusion into environmental justice trainings.

## Schroeder Seed Orchard

The seed orchard staff engaged in the following EJ activities in 2025:

- Worked with the NCS Fund to increase the ability for the seed orchard to provide seed to small and disadvantaged landowners in the future. The Oregon Seed Bank

(administered by the staff at Schroeder) has long-term cold storage for seed of various species, a portion of which are available to non-industrial forest landowners.

- Management planning began to collect acorns from existing Oregon white oak stands at the orchard. These will be available to tribes and smaller landowners that may be interested in alternative species or more drought resistant trees as climate adaptation measures.

## Other EJ highlights

- Co-hosted the Ridgetops to Rooftops Summit with the Oregon State Fire Marshal. This summit is a follow on to the 20-year landscape resiliency summit from 2024. A core component of the strategy is engagement with the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon which were engaged and conversed with at the 2025 Summit.
- Established projects to provide Natural Climate Solutions funding for post fire reforestation efforts in Eastern Oregon following the destructive 2024 fires. These funds are providing seedlings for small forestland owners that were impacted during this record number-of-acres-burned year (including range and grass lands).

# AGENCY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE CONSIDERATIONS

The Department of Forestry (ODF) has a goal to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion in decisions made at the agency and Board of Forestry. This includes “prioritizing actions that will help vulnerable populations and impacted communities adapt to climate change impacts.” (ODF Climate Change and Carbon Plan, 2021). As part of these efforts, ODF has dedicated staff focused on operationalizing justice and equity into the work of the agency and developing staff trainings on these topics. This work creates a foundation for external community engagement. By providing professional development trainings on intentional inclusion agency staff can better understand, serve, and partner more authentically with all the communities it serves. This, in turn, allows ODF to build organizational capacity and trust, which translates into fair and equitable community engagement and increased involvement of community voices in decision-making.

## Climate Change and Oregon’s Forests

The Oregon Department of Forestry has been committed to preserving and sustainably managing forested ecosystems across the state. The agency considers climate change a major threat to those goals and has been actively collaborating with agency partners to develop effective policies to help mitigate and adapt to the projected changes.

Climate change threatens the health and viability of both Oregon’s human and ecological communities. The human communities facing the greatest threats are often those that already experience environmental justice issues and face social and economic hardships on a regular basis.

ODF’s [Climate Change and Carbon Plan](#) works to position Oregon as a leader in climate-smart forestry; a three-legged stool of ecological adaptation, climate mitigation, and the social dimension that supports communities and economies. The goals are to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, increase carbon sequestration (e.g., storage of carbon in trees), and positively benefit climate-impacted and natural resource-dependent communities. This plan will be revised and updated in 2026.

Additionally, the work of the Urban and Community Forestry Program is striving to enhance resilience to climate change in the state’s urban and community forests. Importantly, communities in this sense move beyond physical borders to include areas of cultural significance, especially for the Tribes of the Pacific northwest.

# ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ISSUES (ORS 182.550 SECTION 1)

## Environmental Justice Consideration Process

As has been previously noted, some specific programs, like Urban and Community Forestry or the NCS Fund, do take environmental justice factors into account because of the clear connection between EJ and their work, there isn't currently an agencywide process to ensure consideration as part of all policy and operational decisions.

The department has established an internal Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Council with broad membership both organizationally and geographically. This group's work looks to help further goals around EJ, Tribal input, and agency demographics and looks to include DEIB in the culture of the department moving forward. The DEIB Council includes the department's Government to Government representative and the EJC liaison, the former recently being filled permanently after a period of staff in an acting capacity.

# PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT (ORS 182.535 SECTION 2)

*ORS 182.550 Section 2: Increase public participation of individuals and communities affected by agencies' decisions*

## Public Engagement Policy and Processes

### Public Engagement Policy

ODF does not have an internal public engagement policy. The department is aware of the need for one but has not had the capacity to fully engage in this work across the agency. The lessons learned during broader engagement efforts related to strategic planning (e.g., Vision for Oregon's Forests) will be incorporated into future efforts.

### Criteria for Public Participation

- The most common occurrence of public participation is in the rulemaking processes and review of district-level fire protection budgets, both of which require public hearings. Under Oregon Administrative Rule, the department also solicits and considers public comments as part of our state forest management plan (which is a rule) and operational planning processes.
- The Board of Forestry has long incorporated public comment opportunities into its meetings, both on decision items and any other forestry-related topics. This practice continues and the Board finds it a key way to hear and learn from the interested citizens of the state.
- The State Forests Advisory Committee has broad representation that provides input on implementation issues specifically. SFAC includes a diverse representation of recreation, environmental, and forest industry representation, as well as a Tribal representative, county commissioner, 2 non-affiliated representatives and an OSU extension service representative.

### Level and Quality of Public Participation

The level and quality of public participation depends heavily upon the topic and staffing. Some topics are seen as controversial or polarizing and generate a high level of public input — verbally and in writing — to department leadership and staff, as well as the Board of

Forestry. The quality of the content varies greatly. The two factors that contribute the most to content quality are the degree of understanding of the topic and whether the input process is being guided or driven by special or political interests.

## **Follow-up**

Currently each of the three operational divisions within the agency has its own process for responding to public input received. The department may develop a public engagement policy that will set a base expectation for follow-up for consistency and equity in response and allow Oregonians to have reasonable expectations for engagement with the department.

## **Focus Audiences**

Historically, the department has heavily engaged with two specific groups of constituents: forest industry interests (including forestland owners, loggers, mills and others involved with forest products) and environmental/conservation interests.

Specific to State forestlands, the division regularly engages with outdoor recreation groups and commissioners of the forest trust land counties that financially benefit from state forests timber harvest.

More recently there have been efforts to broaden the engagement process, including events like the Ridgetops to Rooftops Summit (2025) that made a concerted effort to engage Tribal interest and participation.

# AGENCY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IMPACTS (ORS 182.550 SECTION 3)

*ORS 182.550 Section 3: Determine the effect of agencies' decisions on environmental justice communities.*

State forests management plans have associated performance measures designed to measure the success of plan goals and strategies in delivering economic, social and environmental benefits to the people of Oregon. The Western Oregon State Forests Management Plan is currently being finalized and new performance measures will be included when complete.

The department's smoke management rules will be changed and reoriented in the future, but do currently identify smoke intrusions from planned fire events that impact communities. There are specific goals around the number of intrusions per year.

Many recent Forest Practice Act rule changes were a result of the Private Forest Accord. This document, accepted by the legislature, sets a high bar for future rule and FPA changes but is focused on the natural resources (flora/fauna/environment). The board is required to adopt the "least burdensome alternative to landowners and timber owners, in aggregate" as assessed in a set process.

# AGENCY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PROGRESS (ORS 182.550 SECTION 4)

*ORS 182.550 Section 4: Improve plans to further improve environmental justice in Oregon*

## How is EJ built into agency strategic plans?

The Board of Forestry and Department of Forestry are currently working on their strategic planning process, performance measures, and workforce planning. As this process progresses, they may choose to include more metrics that would specifically or non-specifically measure the impact to environmental justice communities.

As other plans and actions are developed or revised, department staff will work to include both environmental justice and Tribal concerns to the best of their ability and authority to do so. This could include work plans, operational plans, and guiding documents for the agency.

## What does your agency need to further develop and implement environmental justice policies at the agency?

Clear expectations and building a culture that includes environmental justice will be key for further implementation of environmental justice policies. The department would benefit from guidance on where, when, and how to engage with the EJC and what the broader expectations are around EJC consultation for the department, especially as there has been significant turnover in agency leadership over the last several years.

# AGENCY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MAPPING TOOL INVOLVEMENT (ORS 182.550 SECTION 5)

*ORS 182.550 Section 5: Utilize the environmental justice mapping tool developed under section 12 of this 2022 Act.*

## How is your agency participating in the development of the environmental justice mapping tool?

The Oregon Department of Forestry has a staff member, Evan Elderbrock, sitting on the EJ mapping tool workgroup. Through this group he has:

- Met regularly with representatives from academic institutions (i.e., OSU and PSU) and state agencies to discuss methodological approaches to mapping Environmental Justice Communities in Oregon.
- Evaluated existing EJ mapping tools to identify pros and cons for different methodological approaches.
- Provided input on important considerations for Oregon EJ mapping tool based on my experience as a researcher.

When complete, there are several areas (UCF, climate work, etc.) that anticipate being able to utilize the tool.

# AGENCY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT 2026

The Department of Forestry will be on-boarding several key leadership roles in 2026, including a new State Forester, new Board chair, and several new board members, among others. The EJC liaison for the department will work to inform and engage with these individuals and help them to understand the role of the department in environmental justice and how the department can be the best partner it is able to be in the future. ODF may seek advice and guidance from the Environmental Justice Council on key environmental justice topics in Oregon. ODF will use that guidance to:

- Inform its development of a policy and process for incorporating EJ considerations into planning and decision making, and
- Identify actions the department can incorporate into its operational planning to help address the EJ issues that are within our scope and authority.

# AGENCY ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COUNCIL LEGISLATION CITATIONS

**SB 83 (2025):** Eliminated certain building codes and mapping requirements [from SB 762 (2023)] that had faced great public concern around rising insurance rates and real estate values across the state.

**HB 3940 (2025):** placed a tax on the distribution of oral nicotine products with the revenue generated to go to a fund to support wildfire risk reduction and response.

# AGENCY MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT RELATED LEGISLATION

**HB 3409 (2023):** The UCF Program is also collaborating with the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCDC) on the Community Green Infrastructure Grant, established through House Bill 3409. Additionally, the department is now able to access funds to pursue natural climate solutions through the NWL Fund established in HB 3409. The three initial projects included efforts to be able to provide climate ready seed to landowners in the future, funding to the nine federally recognized Tribes, and funding for local-specific natural climate solutions with an emphasis to small and traditionally underserved forest land owners.

# LOOKING AHEAD

Over the last decade-plus, the department has undertaken significant changes to its core business functions and been adjusting operationally and administratively to adapt to climate change induced shifts in the states forests and human decisions, including substantive redevelopment to the forest practice rules of the state. The changes climatic and social will require further changes to the agency business model, the breadth and focus of function, and manner by which it responds and engagement efforts that it makes as impacts to the forests increasingly impact people beyond the forest edge. The department will look to cooperators, community groups, and sibling agencies to to fulfill its evolving mission while maintaining its values and public trust.

Department of Forestry Organizational Chart as of January 2026.



# APPENDIX B

## Definitions

### ***Environmental Justice (ORS 182.535 Section 3)***

“Environmental justice” means the equal protection from environmental and health risks, fair treatment and meaningful involvement in decision making of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, immigration status, income or other identities with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies that affect the environment in which people live, work, learn and practice spirituality and culture.

### ***Environmental Justice Community (ORS 182.535 Section 4)***

“Environmental justice community” includes communities of color, communities experiencing lower incomes, communities experiencing health inequities, tribal communities, rural communities, remote communities, coastal communities, communities with limited infrastructure and other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards, including seniors, youth and persons with disabilities.

### ***Meaningful Involvement (ORS 182.535 Section 7)***

“Meaningful involvement” means:

- (a) Members of vulnerable populations have appropriate opportunities to participate in decisions about a proposed activity that will affect their environment or health;
- (b) Public involvement can influence a decision maker’s decision;
- (c) The concerns of all participants involved are considered in the decision-making process; and
- (d) Decision makers seek out and facilitate the involvement of members of vulnerable populations

### ***Environmental Burdens (ORS 182.535 Section 2)***

“Environmental burden” means the environmental and health risks to communities caused by the combined historic, current and projected future effects of:

- (a) Exposure to conventional pollution and toxic hazards in the air or in or on water or land;
- (b) Adverse environmental conditions caused or made worse by other contamination or pollution; and
- (c) Changes in the environment resulting from climate change, such as water insecurity, drought, flooding, wildfire, smoke and other air pollution, extreme heat, loss of traditional cultural resources or foods, ocean acidification, sea-level rise and increases in infectious disease.

# APPENDIX C

## House Bill 4077 (2022)

Legislation establishing the Environmental Justice Council, the Council's responsibility to develop an environmental justice mapping tool, develop a biannual report to the Governor, and the requirement for natural resource agencies to submit an annual report to the Environmental Justice Council.

## Senate Bill 420 (2007)

Legislation establishing the Environmental Justice Task Force, the predecessor for the Environmental Justice Council. It also includes requirements for the Task Force to submit biannual reports to the Governor and the requirement for natural resource agencies to submit an annual report to the Environmental Justice Task Force.

## ORS 182.550 Reports by natural resource agencies

All directors of natural resource agencies, and other agency directors as the Governor may designate, shall report annually to the Environmental Justice Task Force and to the Governor on the results of the agencies' efforts to:

1. Address environmental justice issues;
2. Increase public participation of individuals and communities affected by agencies' decisions;
3. Determine the effect of the agencies' decisions on environmental justice communities;
4. Improve plans to further the progress of environmental justice in Oregon; and
5. Utilize the environmental justice mapping tool developed under section 12 of this 2022 Act.