



United States Department of Agriculture

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION SHOWCASE

Above: The Tribe recently worked with NRCS to conduct a manual release. This conservation practice opens up young forest canopy and reduces the population of certain trees to provide valuable conifers more space to grow.

Producer Profile:
Coquille Indian Tribe

Programs:
Environmental Quality
Incentives Program

Location:
North Bend, Oregon
(Coos County)



**Oregon
Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service**

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Top Timber Forest Balances Business with Culture

The Coquille Indian Tribe considers nature, culture and community along with profit to manage its internationally recognized forest.

It's been described as one of the best-managed forests in the nation. It's certified by the international Forest Stewardship Council as environmentally sound and sustainable. It's also the only land under the federal Northwest Forest Plan that meets all environmental targets while still producing a whopping 3,000,000 board feet of timber each year. But if you ask Chairperson Brenda Meade, the Coquille Tribal Forest is much more than a vibrant and sustainable business:

"It's home."

Unlike many American Indian tribes, the Coquille Tribe (pronounced ko-kwel) based in North Bend, Oregon has called the same place home for thousands of years — a tenure that

has given Tribal leadership a long view on the management of their 5,400-acre forest. And it's exactly that long view that has given the Coquilles an edge when it comes to sustainable forest management.

"With Coquille Forest giving us about 20 percent of our general fund revenue, it is a big piece of what we're doing today," says Meade. "But it's also about looking at the landscape and being able to look at all those things that are influencing the health of the forest, not only for timber, but for the use of people who live on this land."

In many timber operations, undesirable trees are removed to make room for more valuable species such as Douglas fir. This tendency towards monoculture means traditional timber operations

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—Brenda Meade
Coquille Indian Tribal
Council Chairperson

Below:

This recently harvested section of the Coquille Forest demonstrates the number of trees the Tribe leaves behind. These “leave trees” support wildlife and forest health as the area recovers. Conventional timber harvest removes all trees from the harvested section

function more like farms than forests. Trees of uniform size and species are easier and cheaper to harvest, but reduced plant and animal diversity also means less healthy trees that are more susceptible to weather extremes, fire and disease.

Fortunately for this forest, the Coquille Tribe values more than Douglas fir. Biodiversity is an important component of Coquille culture, and many of their traditional foods and materials rely on the variety present in a healthy forest. Side-by-side with their “cash crop” trees, culturally significant trees such as cedar and spruce thrive, as do large mammals such as bear and elk.

“Being able to manage the land not only for timber production, but also biodiversity, and species that aren’t commercially valuable, but are valuable to the Tribe, is important, and we really depend on the assistance from NRCS to pull it off,” says Colin Beck, Coquille Tribe natural resources director. The Tribe has been working with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to achieve its forest management goals through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The financial

assistance available through EQIP has made it possible for the Tribe to accomplish costly conservation practices such as pre-commercial thinning to reduce tree competition and the creation of firebreaks to reduce the risk of wildfire.

“When the Coquille Tribe comes into the office, they already have a documented forest plan for what needs to be accomplished,” says Eric Moeggenberg, NRCS District Conservationist for Coos and Curry Counties, “and this plan benefits much more than just their bottom line. A lot of the conservation they’re doing goes well beyond a strictly business perspective. The Tribe’s forest planning enhances wildlife habitat, addresses over-all forest health and improves species of special cultural significance to the Tribe. They do these extra practices because it’s the right thing to do.”

As many non-industrial forests succumb to reduced productivity and increased wildfire danger,



the Coquille Tribe's emphasis on culture and community has resulted in a forest that's as much a centerpiece of tribal life as it is a pillar of the Tribe's business portfolio.

"It's not just about one species, it's all species," Meade says. "I think about all the materials we use for basketry, regalia, houses, canoes — it's cedar, it's maple bark, it's the willow that grows on the river. All of these species are important to life. It can't be just one species we focus on."

Successional Plants:

In addition to benefiting commercially valuable trees such as Douglas fir, reducing tree density in young forests opens the forest floor to myriad other plant species and provides new habitat for wildlife.



About the Coquille Forest Health Conservation Strategy

NRCS conservation projects within the Coquille Tribal Forest are part of a larger conservation strategy to improve forest health on tribal and private forest lands along the Middle Fork Coquille River in Coos County. Lack of effective management or lack of forest management funds has led to unhealthy structure in Coos County's forests. As a result, many forests in the target area have low productivity, offer poor wildlife habitat and are an increased wildfire danger. The Coquille Forest Health Conservation Strategy makes resources available to private forest landowners to address these issues and restore health and vigor to the area's forests.

To learn more about this project and other conservation resources available in Coos County, contact the NRCS Coquille Service Center at 541-396-2841 or Coos Soil and Water Conservation District at 541-396-6879.

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