



Forest Facts

Water quality on private forestlands in Oregon

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Oregon's forest policy supports a balanced and forward-looking approach to managing forests, whether it's for wood production, conservation or a blend of different strategies. When it comes to water quality, there is much that is working in Oregon's forests:

- Oregon's forestlands currently have the highest levels of water quality of any type of land use in the state.
- Oregon was the first state in the nation to regulate forest use with the 1971 Forest Practices Act. The Act has been updated and revised regularly as public expectations and the science has evolved. The most recent revisions occurred in 2005 with improvements to protections directed at roads and aquatic and stream-side resources.
- Oregon is among only 13% of states and territories in the U.S. that regulate forest best management practices for private woodland and timber owners to protect public resources, and is among the top three for holding forest landowners accountable for resource protection through high regulatory standards.
- It is estimated that about 60,000 Oregon residents own 10 acres or more of forestland regulated under Forest Practices Act standards. These Oregonians are held to higher water quality protection standards than any other category of private landowners in the state.

The recent Department of Environmental Quality report, "*Willamette Basin Rivers and Stream Assessment*" (June 2009), includes some of Oregon's most current findings related to water quality conditions on all land uses, including forestlands.

The extent of disturbance in forest streams was significantly less than in urban and agricultural streams. Also, the most disturbed biological condition was found on more than 80% of the stream extent in agricultural and urban land uses, and the least impaired sub-basins had a greater proportion of streams in forest land uses. Finally, forestry was found to have a comparatively low extent of disturbance, with about 13% of the stream extent biologically impaired.

Even with such a positive outlook on forestlands, and some of the most stringent private property regulations in the United States, Oregon continues to strive for improvements and to be a pioneer in research and monitoring of best management practices on forestland.

In 2002 the Department of Forestry became part of the Watersheds Research Cooperative - a coordinated effort involving a number of state and federal agencies - representing a new, forward-thinking effort to better understand and evaluate contemporary forest management in Oregon. The results of this watershed-scale research will promote efficiency in designing, implementing, and regulating forest practices into the future.



Preliminary findings have already emerged from several years of study on the Hinkle Creek watershed, one of three study areas that are part of this cooperative:

- No difference was seen in growth rates for young fish between the pre and post-timber harvest period, either in the reference harvest or in the watershed where timber harvesting occurred.
- While some change in the amount of insects available for fish diets was detected in the first year after timber harvests occurred, no change could be detected by the second year.

No biological effects on fish have been detected from timber harvest occurring upstream of those streams supporting fish habitat.

Another example of Oregon's proactive approach to continuous improvement of forestry laws and best management practices is the Department of Forestry's "RipStream" monitoring effort, designed to measure the effectiveness of stream protection rules on both State-owned and privately-owned forestlands. This nine-year project was initiated in 2002, with preliminary results that are consistent with prior monitoring findings related to the effectiveness of the rules in protecting water quality and meeting standards.

Despite the high levels of water quality originating on forestlands, there may still be work needed to ensure this continues in the future. Additional "RipStream" findings, as well as findings from the Watersheds Research Cooperative efforts, are anticipated in the next few years to better inform forest landowners and help the Department ensure Oregon's forestlands continue to provide high water quality for years to come.



View of trees within the 4,800 acre Hinkle Creek watershed research project in Douglas County

For additional information:

Oregon Department of Forestry website
www.oregon.gov/ODF

Watersheds Research Cooperative
<http://watershedsresearch.org/>

Willamette Basin Rivers and Stream Assessment study - June 2009, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
www.oregon.gov/DEQ/index.shtml

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