

STAFF REPORT

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| Agenda Item No.: | 05 |
| Work Plan: | Forest Resources Division |
| Topic: | Ceremonial Events and Recognitions |
| Presentation Title: | 2025 Forest Practices Operator of the Year Awards |
| Date of Presentation: | January 7, 2026 |
| Contact Information: | Greg Wagenblast, Policy Analyst, Forest Resources Division 541-525-6462, Greg.Wagenblast@odf.Oregon.gov Scott Swearingen, Field Support Unit Manager, Forest Resources Division (541) 580-7485, scott.swearingen@odf.oregon.gov |

SUMMARY

The Board of Forestry recognizes Operators of the Year. This year's award recipients are Boulder Ridge, LLC, Weber Logging and Construction, Inc. and Quality Excavation, Inc.

BACKGROUND

The Oregon Forest Practices Act aims to provide for the overall maintenance of air quality, water resources, soil productivity, and fish and wildlife. These forest resources are important to all Oregonians. The Operator of the Year program recognizes operators who voluntarily protect these resources in a conscientious and diligent way. To recognize operators who meet or exceed Forest Practice Act requirements, typically the Board names one Operator of the Year per Region and one or more Merit Award recipients; ODF districts may also issue Letters of Commendation. Program goals are to:

1. Recognize operators who consistently meet or exceed the Oregon Forest Practices Act and voluntarily raise industry standards; and,
2. Improve public understanding of the Forest Practices Act, its administration, and its effectiveness in protecting natural resources.

PROCESS

Anyone may nominate candidates for the Operator of the Year. Agency staff screen the nominees for minimum requirements. The Regional Forest Practices Committees review the nominations for their region. Each committee chooses a recipient based on innovative techniques, cooperative spirit, consistent performance, and measures taken to protect forest resources. To make the selection, Regional Forest Practices Committee members tour the sites, review nominations, and watch videos that capture the operator's work.

The 2025 Operators of the Year are:

For the Eastern Oregon Region –

Boulder Ridge, LLC based in Bend, Boulder Ridge was asked by the large industrial landowner to reduce wildfire risk and improve the health of remaining trees by thinning out nearly 2,000 acres of ponderosa pine forest and removing trees infested with dwarf mistletoe. The stand northwest of Bend on the eastern slopes of the Cascade Range was dangerously overcrowded at 400 trees per acre. Years of fire suppression had allowed drought-sensitive white fir and Douglas-fir to infiltrate. The landowner wanted these removed as well as trees infested with dwarf mistletoe. This parasitic plant spreads easily in crowded conditions and saps trees' vigor and vitality. Spacing trees farther apart makes it harder for the mistletoe's sticky seeds to shoot out and infest nearby trees.

The operator worked to preserve the buffers around the Three Creek fish-bearing stream, using ground based equipment to reach in and remove mistletoe-infested trees along the stream while leaving healthy ones. To preserve soils, Boulder Ridge operated primarily during winter when soils were frozen or snow covered. This greatly reduced rutting and helped preserve understory shrubs and grasses for wildlife. Decisions about which trees to remove were made solely by the operator. He successfully thinned the unit while retaining enough healthy trees to not trigger replanting requirements for the landowner, and by leaving more than enough downed wood to satisfy requirements for wildlife habitat. The thinning selections established a multi-aged stand of timber, providing the landowner options for future forest management & harvest activities.

Southwest Oregon Region–

WEBER LOGGING AND CONSTRUCTION, INC. of Roseburg, Oregon. Landowner Roseburg Resources nominated Weber Logging and Construction based in Roseburg as this year's Operator of the Year for the Southwest Oregon Region. They state they nominated operator Austin Weber and his crew for consistency and tackling a difficult harvest of 60-year-old Douglas-fir on steep terrain at 2,500 feet on the west slopes of the Cascades. Owner Austin Weber faced new Forest Practices Act requirements to safeguard trees in designated slope retention areas where all trees had to be left. There were six of these areas on the unit ranging in size from a third of an acre to 1.7 acres. Each roadside landing required time-consuming set-up and take-down. This also required careful planning for yarding and hauling out timber. In addition to traditional yarding using a grapple swing yarder, Weber also employed tethered logging to minimize soil disturbance on the steep slopes, anchoring a feller buncher and a skidder to cables.

Another requirement Weber met under new Forest Practices Act rules was to protect equipment limitation zones, where entry of logging machinery was strictly limited. To protect those zones, Weber hand-felled timber on the other side and yarded it over the protected zone. The landowner reported that Weber kept vegetation in the protected areas intact with no damage. There was minimal disturbance to soils and logging debris was kept to a minimum, making it easy for the unit to be replanted with young trees.

Roseburg Resources states that Weber is a forward thinker who is always willing to try different combinations of equipment to meet the challenges of even the most difficult jobs. He is a past Award of Merit winner, noted for consistently meeting the highest standards of the Forest Practices Act.

Northwest Oregon Region –

QUALITY EXCAVATION, INC. of Seaside Oregon is this year's Operator of the Year for the Northwest Oregon Region. The team of Jason Bergeson and his crew earned the award for successfully installing their first and largest FRIA culverts, ones that meet new Forest Road Inventory and Assessment program standards. Jason Bergeson's son Cole led the project and did most of the work with a partner installing the culverts on two medium fish-bearing tributaries, one of the South Fork of the Klaskanine River and the other the North Fork of the Necanicum River. By installing these fish-passable modern culverts, Quality Excavation opened upstream fish habitat and spawning grounds that had been unavailable to salmon and trout for many decades.

Quality Excavation met a number of challenges on this job, first having to dam the stream, then divert the water downstream through long tubes to keep water quality clean during the work. They then removed the failed old culvert, along with big old-growth logs it had been placed on top of long ago. Finally, they had to place the new culvert in sections, renting a bobcat (Mini Skid steer bucket loader) to fill inside the pipe with rocks to create a natural stream bottom. The long length of the culvert required them, for worker safety, to rent a large industrial fan to blow carbon dioxide out of the pipe while working within it. Quality Excavation then had to rebuild the road on top of the culvert to a height of 30 feet or more above the creek and face it with rocks to prevent erosion. The new culverts performed perfectly over the winter, handling high winter flows, and the rebuilt road allowed successful log hauling from units beyond the crossing.

PUBLICITY

The department recognizes the operators through news releases, social media posts, and at annual statewide industry events, including the Associated Oregon Loggers Convention and the Oregon Logging Conference.

All nominees met or exceeded Forest Practices laws and improved Oregon's forests in multiple ways, from enhancing fish and wildlife habitat to forest management planning for private landowners to improving fire safety and forest health, and safeguarding water quality and soil.

Merit Award and Letter of Commendation recipients will be recognized at local functions. The Merit Award recipients for 2025 are:

- Jeff Maben of Mt. Vernon, OR – Eastern Oregon Region Merit Award
- Staton Forestry of Eugene, OR - Eastern Oregon Region Merit Award
- Dave Wilkerson Logging LLC of Eagle Point, OR-SW Oregon Region Merit Award
- Emerald Valley Thinning, Inc. of Philomath, OR – NW Oregon Region Merit Award
- RDL Northwest of Lebanon, OR – NW Oregon Region Merit Award

All of the videos for the merit award winners can be found at: [Oregon Department of Forestry - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/@OregonDepartmentofForestry) (<https://www.youtube.com/@OregonDepartmentofForestry>)

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhtLP-50RDaTT_2xQbO-LEfxJheH2YVYo

Staff will give a brief presentation, including videos, and operator recognition.

- Boulder Ridge, LLC:
[Eastern Oregon Operator of the Year for 2025, Winner - Boulder Ridge LLC](#)
https://youtu.be/-eWz0GhA3eQ?si=RiwaG_rZv1GNk5MG
- Weber Logging and Construction, Inc.:
[Northwest Oregon Operator of the Year for 2025, Winner - Quality Excavation, Inc.](#)
https://youtu.be/XCONj5vtJSQ?si=j5MBKqQDKlm_dc-p
- Quality Excavation, Inc.:
[Southwest Oregon Operator of the Year for 2025, Winner - Weber Logging and Construction](#)
<https://youtu.be/rqwOaRaQ2po?si=UeMYICR-x5bW5cmN>

RECOMMENDATION

The Department recommends the Board of Forestry present the recipients with plaques uniquely recognizing each operator for excellent forestry work.