

Statement to the Board of Forestry and Stakeholders involved in development of the Forestry Program for Oregon and Forest Practices Advisory Committee:

A problem of trust

During Board of Forestry discussions on October 24, 2003 on whether to move forward with new draft rule related to small and medium stream as recommend by staff working with the Forest Practices Advisory Committee, I heard a continued break down in trust and in process. With science changing all the time on natural resource related issues and rules makers trying to catch up this is unsurprising. It is also unsurprising that as we took nearly four hours to have a discussion about essentially one new rule, little time was left to discuss how we deal with the bigger picture that include sustainability and integrated goal setting, monitoring and possible branding cooperation between state agencies and other stakeholders.

Possible solutions

Trust, I feel, will be greatly enhanced amongst all stakeholders when we see rules and regulations dropped if they are no longer needed to achieve our hopefully forthcoming statewide measurable goals. This is the one way to alleviate the burden that an increasing list of restrictions imposes on forest landowners, transforming Oregon into an increasingly unattractive place to own and actively manage forestland.

Another is to utilize the FPFO as the tool that once and for all will develop integrated agency state level monitoring processes that allow us to set state level goals. This will in turn allow us to compare with our ability to blend economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sensitive practices to other states and regions of the world. Once we have this data in hand we can I hope brand our forest products and services based upon what I believe are some of the most stringent laws in the world.

With the FPFO in place as of today, that highlights the need for voluntary action as opposed to more regulation in order to achieve further environmental protection on private lands and better integration between agencies it is my expectation that this state will move toward adaptive rule making, revision, and when appropriate, outright repeal, based upon best science. I commend Chairman Sohn and agree with his comments yesterday to this end. I would add that such an evolution is vital to building trust and credibility among parties.

I recognize that the two processes started at different times. I also recognize they address different purposes. I hope, however, that today the Board and Department can clearly see the intersection of both, from a private landowner's perspective.

Yesterday, the Board and staff invested an entire morning discussing various issues that ultimately distilled to the same fundamental question of credibility. From among Oregon's family forestland owners, the overriding cry is for providing some form of regularity, operational and investment certainty and equity with other competitors who are not subject to our same regulations - through regulatory policy, tax policy and or branding.

While I concur with the Chair's comments that management of dynamic systems is, by definition, also dynamic, this response is only a statement of fact that ultimately satisfies neither the landowner who seeks long-term stability, nor the Department's need for buy-in and credibility. Frankly it doesn't serve the public either, who benefits from a vital and diverse set of management values across all landscapes.

So, how can the issue of credibility be successfully addressed? I'd suggest it is both timely and appropriate for the Board to step forward and conduct an honest, full and difficult discussion with its many constituencies about the level of compelled contributions from private landowners for public benefits. If claims are made by the Board, the department had better be backing them up via credible verification and monitoring.

At what point are the public's ever-growing expectations of these privately-sponsored societal benefits significant enough to unduly burden the goose providing the golden egg? When only one party pays (and I argue that private forestland owners are more often than not the party that pays the cost of each increasingly expensive and marginal benefit), the flock begins to thin.

Oregon's flock of landowners is understandably flighty. The Board's identified need for credibility is warranted, but will be achieved through outcomes rather than dialog. I challenge the Board to commit to a strenuous effort during this interim to explore and develop a legislative concept delineating a bright line for Oregon landowners. I hope they will illuminate the point at which their contribution is picked up in a shared partnership with the public. To our members, that would provide operational certainty. And credibility.

At present we are seeing the vital family forest landowner class being eroded at 26,000 acres a year. Many more family lands are falling into a passive management category (a reversal of a state goal) because of uncertainty over new rules and lack of markets for Oregon forest products. Our members recognize that regulatory certainty is impossible in an ever changing, dynamic, social and natural system. All we ask is that if society wants to achieve wider goals that they clearly identify what they are and work with us rather than against us.

My experience from global level tells me that land tenure is vital to promoting healthy forest management. And that economic viability is vital to securing land tenure. I hope we can find a way to have private property rights valued as an asset benefiting all parties, rather than simply an irritating barrier to the implementation of single-issue, prescriptive management on Oregon's private land base.

I would caution my colleagues in the environmental community who may feel they are "winning a battle" when they stop any active forest management on Oregon's forestlands, industrial or non-industrial in order to address wider consumption and population increase issues, such as clean water. The danger of this approach is removing the incentive and infrastructure to manage forestland for any reason, often leading to its conversion to other uses.

On a related point, during my time with the Global Forest and Trade Network, a group of over 600 forest products companies, environmental and social interests, I helped produce a report that shows wood consumption a global level is likely to continue to rise in the future. And yet Oregon has seen a major reduction in its harvest levels since the implementation of the Northwest forest plan and now places its own increasing consumption burdens on other regions or non timber forest products. I would ask us all to look up from our local issues once in a while and think global before we act local, if sustainability is what we hope to achieve with the FPFO and other policy choices here in the state.

I would also encourage you to visit our website, www.oswa.org where we have just released a discussion document about a Brand Oregon concept. This document presents a clean sheet upon which to build. For example could we develop a purchase policy and help that has Oregon use forest thinning from fuels projects as poles for road signs? To use steel instead seems a little strange. I encourage all stakeholders who live, work and have influence over Oregon's forests, both public and private, to join us in support of the new approach the Board is taking with the FPFO to identify and find attractive and useful incentives to achieve our common, measurable goals and to support us as we and others develop Brand Oregon.

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