

July 24, 2003: For immediate release

Why We Need To Sustain Oregon's Family Forestlands

On the day Legislators and Capitol media have been invited to visit the Bentz Family Blue Den Ranch, the recent recipients of an award from Governor Kulongoski for the decades of work restoring and stewarding their family forestlands, I feel it is necessary to highlight the role these and over 40,000 other family landowners are having in developing a sustainable Oregon.

I have worked for 8 years as a community forester and researcher in sustainable forest management, gaining experience with the US Forest Service, UK Forestry Commission and the WWF coordinated Global Forest and Trade Network. Recently I have become saddened by the polarized and poorly informed debate around our Northwest forests. The 4.4 million acres of family forestland in Oregon makes up almost one fifth of our state's total forest land-base. These families own working forests of up to 5,000 acres. The majority of which are is less than 100 acres. They care for their properties because they are their legacy and their home. However, I believe family forestland has a role to play far beyond their fence lines. Given proper support and fairly developed incentives for good land management, they can help the state achieve the ultimate prize: economic, social and environmental sustainability. Yet I see the debate about how we should use our forest resources here in the Pacific Northwest still revolve around an either/or solution that leaves the majority of the public including family forest landowners feeling confused frustrated and apathetic.

At a conference I attended on sustainable forest management in April 2002 in Atlanta Georgia, Chris Elliott, Director of the WWF Forests for Life Campaign, pleaded with participants to go beyond what are becoming increasingly sterile feuds between different systems of certifying "good" forest management. He reminded the audience of 2,000 that "We risk fiddling while Rome is burning." I agree with him. The world has changed since the "timber wars" of the 1980s began. NAFTA, global trade and 9/11 to name but a few developments. We need to move forward.

I am afraid it is an uphill battle. I recently overheard a conversation at the Salem Arts Fair where people were criticizing President Bush's Healthy Forest Initiative because they thought it would mean that all the trees would be cut down. I have actually read the document and while I still have questions about the implementation I don't see any reason not to pursuer the conversation further. To write it off now is to ignore a major threat to our and other nations forest environments and economies.

Everyday I see the effects of NOT harvesting and replanting trees as required by the Oregon Forest Practices Act. I see imports of wood from aboard and the use of less sustainable products such as steel and plastic to replace our local forest products. The Northwest Forest Plan is not being implemented as planned, often due to a few boycott groups whose lawsuits try to prevent any local forest management actions from taking place. I see a decline forest products industry infrastructure and the failure of eco-tourism to replace the jobs lost. The result is damaged communities and escalating social problems both here and aboard. I see politicians having to choose sides in order to get reelected in a state that is becoming increasingly divided along rural and urban lines. As a descendent of the ex British Empire I can tell you the fastest way to lose international credibility is to go beyond your shores to gain the natural resources or moneys to sustain your lifestyle. Remember the Boston Tea Party?

How did Oregon get to this state?

The Northwest Forest Plan was designed to protect forest resources like habitat for the spotted owl. It was also supposed to provide a limited but regular harvest from federal

lands that would keep local mills running and support local families with jobs, It was supposed to buy us time as we adapted and promoted a new way of doing forestry in the Pacific North west. Due to the Northwest Forest Plan and other actions, a large proportion of the Northwest's forests were set aside for protection from logging and development in the past decade.

But this doesn't mean we stopped using wood. In fact we increased, just as the rest of the world did. The biggest consumer of wood products by volume in the world is the USA. The country uses 3 times more wood than any other nation. While wood can be a sustainable resource in a way that oil and steel cannot, we need to make better use of our own forest resources. We all need to think globally and act locally.

California and Washington are now net importers of forest products. Where does this wood come from? According to the World Wildlife Fund report, The Forest Industry in the 21st Century, a large proportion is from Canada's slow growing boreal forest, or from areas of the world such as the tropics or Russian Far East with either non-enforceable or non-existent logging regulations. According to the report, more than 70% of the timber harvested in Indonesia and 60% in Cameroon is illegal. That is not the worst of it. The Brazilian government figures show that 80% of timber harvesting in the Amazon Basin is illegal.

Paradoxically, our high level of forest protection and consumption in this country threatens the world's geo-political and environmental balance. In essence, Americans are exporting our economic opportunity because we don't want to bring our consumption of wood in line with the production capacity of our nation's own forests. How much oil is being extracted to import slow-growing timber by truck and barge from Canada while we grow more than we harvest here in Oregon?

Potential solutions

Family Forest landowners in Oregon can be part of a global and a local solution. They can help Oregonians actually think globally while we act locally. Families balance a variety of objectives when they manage their forestlands. They strive to protect water quality and wildlife habitat, produce timber and non-timber forest products such as mushrooms, and prevent wildfire. In fact, at state level family forest landowners I believe already provide that celebrated balance between social, environmental and economic benefits that Oregonians want to see.

Most importantly, they have a deep desire to act sustainable for both their own benefit and for the legacy they will leave their children.

Oregonians have led the way in implementing sustainable policies and practices; The Forestry Program for Oregon, now based upon agreed international standards for measuring sustainable development, The Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, our Forest Practices Act, land use planning laws and minimum wages. Many of Oregon's family forest landowners are on the leading edge, managing multiple objectives of forest ecosystem protection while still paying their bills by harvesting and replanting Oregon's natural resource bounty.

It's now time to get credit for those practices and good family forestland management so we can sustain not only our forest habitats for future generations, but also the social and economic fabric that will make Oregon truly sustainable. Otherwise we may see Oregon burn along side Rome.

Mike Gaudern, Executive Director,
Oregon Small Woodlands Association
1775 - 32nd Place NE, Suite C, Salem, OR 97303.
Phone: (503) 588-1813, E-mail: oswaed@oswa.org

[Back to Press Release page](#)

[Back to Home page](#)

[Have your say](#)