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FOREST BRIDGES PUBLISHES INNOVATIVE O&C LANDS MOIST FOREST PROPOSAL

[Click here to access the proposal](#)

ROSEBURG, Ore. — “With the last ten years of intense and widespread wildfire acknowledged by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management as the top reason for old growth northern spotted owl habitat loss, it is time to rethink conservation set asides,” says Thomas McGregor, Chair of Forest Bridges: The O&C Forest Habitat Project, and a local conservationist and non-profit leader.

“This trend is contrary to the goals of protecting these habitats,” says McGregor, “and it is now widely viewed in the scientific community, and in many sectors of the public, that late-successional and other reserves are not working.”

“Furthermore,” says McGregor, who is also the past President of Umpqua Watersheds, “recent Oregon State University scientific modeling shows that, given a warming climate, moist forests in the Pacific NW can expect more frequent, larger and more severe fires in the coming decades.”

Dana Kjos, Oregon Logging and Contract Timber Manager at Roseburg Forest Products, and Forest Bridges’ Treasurer, says the ten-year-old grassroots non-profit collaborative has developed what it calls an *all-lands, active conservation management approach* for the 2.9 million acres of western Oregon’s O&C Lands.

As a step in sharing this approach, Forest Bridges has just released its [Moist Forest Proposal for Western Oregon's O&C Lands](#)—specifically designed for the 1.4 million acres of O&C moist forests, located in Northwest Oregon, along the Oregon Coast Range, and in moister parts of the Cascade Range.

According to Kjos: “Our approach removes most of the reserves, except wilderness areas and recreation sites, to address a range of ecological, economic and community issues that have resulted from this and other barriers, including the removal of Indigenous people, fire exclusion, and past—as well as present—forestry activities and inactivity.”

Kjos says that around 2.4 million acres of these federal lands are managed by the Bureau of Land Management, while the Forest Service manages the balance 500,000 acres.

“When we say all-lands,” says Kjos, “we have innovated management approaches, with strict specifications and limits on harvest, where they are needed most to sustain the O&C forests and their

habitats and to build long-term wildfire resilience—creating forests that can withstand fire, rather than being consumed by it.”

According to Rick Sohn, Forest Bridges co-founder and Board member, like its O&C Dry Forest Proposal set for publication early this fall, Forest Bridges moist forest proposal aligns with the O&C Act of 1937. “That includes sustained yield as a tool to achieve sustainable multispecies forest ecosystems and habitats by restoring these forests over time,” he says. “The aim is to treat moist forests with a metered, measured application of ecological silviculture methods and prescribed fire to achieve pre-contact Indigenous Period composition, structure, and densities.”

According to Denise Barrett, Forest Bridges Executive Director, the proposal will provide a balance of ecological, economic and community benefits, such as the development of ecosystem complexity and the enhancement of clean air, water and other ecosystem services, resilience to climate cycles and timber production. “The technical solutions in the proposal,” says Barrett, “are based on the organization’s collaboratively developed Principles of Agreement and a synthesis of consensus Western Science, time-honored Indigenous Knowledge and practice, field practitioner experience and innovative ideas.

“Our approach,” McGregor says, “honors how Indigenous people stewarded lands throughout this region and elsewhere in North America for millennia and promotes increased Tribal co-management of the O&C Lands—the traditional homelands of nine formally recognized Oregon Tribes.”

According to Barrett, Forest Bridges’ moist forest proposal is intended for use by the Bureau of Land Management, the US Forest Service, scientists, Oregon and other congressional leaders, Tribes, and non-profit interest groups with technical staff. She says the public is also welcome to review the proposals and provide Forest Bridges with feedback by email—info@forestbridges.org. The proposal is downloadable on the project page of forestbridges.org.

“Forest Bridges has provided a thoughtful vision for the future management of the O&C lands,” says Sustainable Northwest’s President Dylan Kruse. “Their outcome-driven strategy for the benefit of forest and watershed health, wildlife habitat, and good jobs is the kind of approach needed to solve current challenges, incorporate diverse perspectives, and chart a more durable and collaborative path forward.”

According to Jerry Franklin, leading authority on sustainable forest management and the maintenance of healthy forest ecosystems, as well as a member of Forest Bridges’ Group of Independent Scientists and Ecocultural Reviewers: “For the O&C Lands of western Oregon, Forest Bridges is putting forth management proposals and addressing barriers to management that align with the principles of Ecological Forest Management and are worthy of consideration and modeling.”

Tim Vredenburg, former Forest Bridges Board member and Director of Forest Management, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians, says: “If we put our differences aside and focus on these solutions, we’re going to have the opportunity to celebrate outcomes that our children and future generations will benefit from.”

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Additional Background Information and Quotes:

According to Forest Bridges Executive Director Denise Barrett, Forest Bridges has, since 2015, been building consensus and trust across the spectrum of forest interests—conservation and environmentalism, forest industry, recreation and wildlife—as well as a body of work specifically to improve active conservation management of O&C forests. “Like other forests in the Northwest Forest Plan Area,” Barrett says, “O&C forests have endured decades-long disagreements among groups representing different federal lands management perspectives, while increased wildfires, disease and invasive species, litigation and other barriers have negatively impacted forest health and plant and wildlife habitats, rural economies and public health due to wildfire smoke.”

“Our collaborative’s strength,” says McGregor, “comes from this diversity of perspectives and our partnerships with Tribal Nations, governments, scientists, other nonprofits, businesses and the broader public. Together we foster sustainable forest health and habitats by collaboratively agreeing on active conservation management and restoration solutions intended to help shift the O&C lands management paradigm to a viable, sustainable model for each type of forest ecosystem—dry, moist and a combination of the two—and heal this conflict over their management.”

Sohn says that several key factors motivated the organizations’ collaborators to develop the O&C Moist Forest proposal, as well as its soon to be published O&C Dry Forest proposal. “First,” says Sohn, “is the organization’s desire to address current conditions in these forests, which differ from historical conditions due to the removal of Indigenous people, fire exclusion, and past—as well as present—forestry activities and inactivity. Many moist forest stands on O&C lands are dense and even-age with less than desirable biodiversity and deficient in both early- and late-seral successional features.”

Sohn says Forest Bridges’ collaborators discovered through their early review of scientific evidence that moist forests in the Oregon Coastal Range maintained on average 50% structurally complex old growth forests for 3,000 years and that the current percentage of structurally complex old growth forests in O&C moist forests is around 25% and now dropping due to wildfire.

“With this realization,” says Sohn, “our collaborative worked out a management system rooted in nature that would sustainably manage the moist forest on a trajectory to achieve and then maintain 50% of the acreage of the forest as structurally complex old growth, while regularly creating a specified amount of complex early seral habitats through harvest, while also retaining legacy features.”

“In addition,” says Sohn, “these young forests could grow through the stages of maturity to become structurally complex old growth communities over time, to sustain a diversity of wildlife and other biological habitats consistent with the historical record.

Forest Bridges’ proposed All-Lands, Active Conservation Management approaches apply a light touch, application of ecological silviculture through specified amounts of Variable Retention Regeneration Harvest, combined with thinning and prescribed fire, as needed for forest sustainability across the O&C moist forest landbase, except for Congressionally-designated wilderness areas and recreation sites. “This approach allows the managing agencies to evaluate all moist forests for treatment or “let grow as is”

based on their potential to become or remain a contributor to the diversity of wildlife and other biological habitats,” says McGregor. “This is a major change in the current paradigm of management, recognizing the importance of habitat sustainability throughout the O&C Lands rather than a system of fixed location reserve areas.”

According to Barrett, Forest Bridges collaborators believe that the current O&C forest management strategies miss some important goals and are not of sufficient scale to sustain the full range and proportions of biological habitats for native species, Forest Bridges’ primary driver. “Forest Bridges proposals are designed to sustain the full range of stand ages, habitats and functions, including structurally complex old growth as well as early seral habitats and in-between,” she says.

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