



FOREST BRIDGES  
THE O&C FOREST HABITAT PROJECT

# Principles of Agreement

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February 2026 Board Approved Update



## **Forest Bridges “Living” Documents**

Forest Bridges documents, including its Principles of Agreement and Active Conservation Management policy papers and proposed alternatives for dry, moist and transitional O&C forests, are “living” in that they will continue to evolve as new information comes to the Forest Bridges’ attention, or the organization takes on additional forest management issues or topics for further development.

## Introduction

Forest Bridges: The O&C Forest Habitat Project, Inc. (Forest Bridges) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with deep roots in collaboration and focused on the management of the federal forest lands in western Oregon. Founded in 2015, our goal is to bring people together as Friends and Followers of Forest Bridges, in support of the Forest Bridges Principles of Agreement, along with detailed supporting information.<sup>1</sup> As the collaborating team has evolved, it continues to include individuals and representatives of different, historically opposing viewpoints, while working to grow its partnerships with Western Oregon Indigenous tribes. We are also committed to the inclusion of underrepresented and underserved people and communities.

Forest Bridges has focused its work on the O&C Lands, the Revested Oregon and California Railroad lands, as well as the Reconveyed Coos Bay Wagon Road Grant Lands of Western Oregon.<sup>2</sup> The work and proposals of Forest Bridges also include the O&C Controversial Lands managed by the US Forest Service, as well as Public Domain lands managed as forest land by the BLM in Western Oregon. Hereafter all of these lands in total shall be referred to as the “O&C Lands” ). While focused on the O&C Lands, some of these Principles are potentially applicable to other federal or other nonfederal lands managed with the lead purpose of habitat sustainability. Our Principles and supporting materials would require review by the relevant agencies for relevance.

For the O&C Lands, Forest Bridges proposes a metered and active approach to habitat sustainability through harvest, beneficial prescribed fire and other actions within carefully defined guidelines for site-specific projects. This approach is intended to increase certainty around the extent and kinds of management. Management is active, creating new habitats regularly, yet metered in amount and monitored for effectiveness. Harvest and thinning, both with legacy retention, seek to emulate the range of historical conditions, and are limited to work which puts the forests of the O&C lands as a whole on a trajectory for regular habitat renewal as well as increased persistence, storage of carbon, creation of structurally diverse forest, resistance to fire, and sustained growth and development. We look to Cultural Burning practices, partnering and co-management with Indigenous tribes on their terms as also integral to these proposals.

Forest Bridges approach would expand upon current management, a paradigm shift in the program of sustained yield forestry driven by habitat outcomes to develop and maintain desirable proportions of forest seral stages and forest resources (soil, water, fish, wildlife), on the O&C Lands. Generally

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Forest Bridges policy papers on the Dry and Moist Forests buttress the Principles of Agreement, providing more details on our forest management proposals for the O&C lands. These living documents are posted on our website @<https://www.forestbridges.org>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information and a map of the O&C lands [click here](#).

speaking: the management paradigm shifts from fixed location land use allocations and reserves to specifications and limits on thinning and harvest.

Fixed location land use allocations were originally developed in the mid 1990's and continued by the BLM in a different form in their 2016 Forest Plan. Forest Bridges proposes, instead: a required yet limited amount Variable Retention Regeneration Harvest, accompanied by strictly specified variable retention thinning and fuel management practices in order to provide the carbon sequestration, ecosystem services and the desired balance of forest habitats and seral stages that move around the O&C Lands over very long periods of time (measured in centuries) as a result of wildfire.

All of the O&C Lands are included in this paradigm shift and the long-term strategic proposals of Forest Bridges, recognizing the importance of habitat sustainability throughout the O&C forests. Habitat sustainability retains legacy trees and sustains forest stands. Active management renews and sustains the forest by creating complex preforest and early seral conditions and promoting other habitats. Under this new paradigm, all areas are evaluated by the land management agencies to determine the most effective places to practice Active Conservation Management or not to-treat periodically. This decision should be based on site specific conditions for habitat growth, development and renewal—their potential to become or remain a contributor to the diversity of wildlife and other biological habitats. Decisions are made and implemented at the local level with the team electing the best locations to operate for the sake of habitat development as well as renewal. There are no limits on the location to develop and to sustain sequestered carbon. While not prohibiting Variable Retention Regeneration Harvest on any particular moist forest stands as a result of wildfire, disease, or other deleterious conditions, embedded goals for the increased development of structurally complex old growth habitat will make it less desirable to harvest forests with old growth characteristics for the foreseeable future.

Barriers to management from current legislative, legal, financial and regulatory restrictions currently limit which of the O&C Lands can be actively managed at present, including to the scale of management that would help ensure sustained healthy and resilient forests and habitats. Forest Bridges' proposals require greater flexibility and a well-funded program of very long-term, metered and active forest management. For those activities unrelated to timber sales there is a great, current urgency to change how forests are managed and funded in order to sustain forest habitats before they are consumed as a result of climate warming and wildfire. The Principles of Agreement and proposals of Forest Bridges are intended to facilitate forest planning and site-based projects by providing context and supporting federal agency planning and project implementation processes.

Following the western Oregon Labor Day Fires of 2020, which resulted in severe habitat loss, as well as the ongoing smoke intrusions everywhere, Forest Bridges hopes that public urgency will aid in addressing the barriers to effective forest management and securing the necessary financial support for

ecosystem services enjoyed by all. Information that informs legislation to lower the barriers is needed and is covered in the Forest Bridges Legislative Concepts.

As these Principles of Agreement were developed, the collaborators asked themselves, “if we accept the legal framework and federal governance that have guided the O&C Lands for nearly 100 years, what would we change, and what should stay the same?” The Principles of Agreement that follow are a comprehensive summary of policy statements. Ultimately, all of these areas of policy need to be addressed for increased effectiveness and longevity of our forests. Supporting information that expands many of these policies has been developed and can be found on the Forest Bridges’ website. These principles reflect the wisdom of the diverse-minded Forest Bridges collaborators, who have contributed to these Principles since inception in 2015 and who are committed to arriving at durable solutions for the O&C Lands. Changes are now less frequent, but revisions are made over time to clarify and fill in certain areas when new information or insights become available. While the Principles of Agreement anticipated events like the Labor Day fires of Western Oregon in 2020, future insights from monitoring will play a significant role in shaping forest plans under this new paradigm for Active Conservation Management.

These Principles of Agreement have been endorsed and regularly reaffirmed by Forest Bridges for the forests of the western Oregon O&C Lands. It is intended to be welcomed by parties with diverse viewpoints and serve as a framework for improved management.

## **Legal Framework/Governance of O&C Lands**

1. The O&C Act (The Revested Oregon and California Railroad Lands Sustained Yield Management Act of 1937) requires that the O&C Lands “shall be managed... for permanent forest production... in conformity with the principle of sustained yield for the purpose of providing a permanent source of timber supply, protecting watersheds, regulating of stream flow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, and providing recreational facilities.”

This broadened interpretation of the O&C Act beyond sustained yield as the dominant use contributes to the Forest Bridges paradigm shift of management for the O&C Lands. These Principles, Forest Bridges Legislative Concepts and forest management planning and pilot project proposals offer a path to sustainable diversity of wildlife and other biological habitats on these Lands, as well as a multitude of Ecosystem services for the public including clean air and water, recreation, as well as a source of wood for manufacturing and harvest revenues for the western Oregon O&C Counties from timber harvests. This proposal of sustained yield forest management is based on creating and maintaining a diversity of sustainable wildlife habitats, by the respective land management agencies.

2. In addition to The 1937 O&C Act, the O&C Lands are also governed as applicable by other Federal laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and other federal legislation.
3. Forest Bridges' work and proposals focus on the "O&C Lands"\*—a checkerboard of ownership found throughout much of rural Western Oregon, which include all forest lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the Department of the Interior, and the O&C Controversial Lands managed by the US Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture.
  - a. Forest Bridges proposes applying the terms of the 1937 O&C Act to all of the O&C Lands managed by the Department of the Interior. This includes the interspersed Public Domain lands.
  - b. The O&C Controversial Lands managed by the US Forest Service are subject to the disposition of revenues in accordance with the O&C Act but are also subject to management under the National Forest Management Act as well as the Controversial Lands Act of June 24, 1951. As O&C lands, Forest Bridges is including the Controversial Lands in its proposals.

\*The "O&C Lands" (capital L) described above, is more inclusive and is distinguished by Forest Bridges from the O&C lands (small "l") which are the lands originally addressed in the 1937 O&C Act.

4. The O&C Lands are to remain in Federal ownership, managed by the respective land management agencies with applicable management guidance.
5. Revenues from O&C harvests are to continue to be distributed to the O&C counties in accordance with the O&C Act.

### **Vision of Management Outcomes on O&C Lands**

6. The present condition of much O&C land differs greatly from precolonial conditions, of the pre-contact Indigenous period. This is due to Indigenous population declines from the introduction of European diseases, the colonial removal of Indigenous people, fire exclusion, past forestry activities, and inactivity. These changes have contributed to increased combustible fuel, increased densities of trees and simplification of stands. There is a shortage of both structurally complex forest generally and regularly generated and complex early seral habitats. There are also over- and under-abundances of standing snags (dead trees), that is snag retention for habitat contribution vs snag removal to reduce fire hazard, as well as shortages and excesses of some other forest features.

7. While continuing to enhance the potential for conifer establishment, reforestation practices that yield longer and more complex early seral stages of habitat development for certain plant and animal species will be used and will generally not include herbicides. The exception: current herbicide practices would continue to be used where prescribed by the agencies for the control of invasive and non-native or noxious weeds on O&C Lands to make room for native species.
8. The specific proposals offered by Forest Bridges are intended to provide continuing sustained yield forestry to renew forest habitats sustainably across the O&C Lands. These proposals also perpetuate dynamic ecosystem integrity and a full range of healthy/resilient wildlife habitats for the endemic native species (as they shift with climate warming), while continuing to provide wood, non-wood and economic values. Managing under this Forests Bridges paradigm to sustain the diverse range of wildlife and other biological habitats, over time and across the O&C Lands, is a sound basis for a sustained yield forest plan (see Principle 13 below).
9. We believe that continuing active and passive management strategies can speed up ecosystem restoration and fire resistance, to support the regular progression of forest aging and development while also adapting those strategies to climate warming. The science of managing for structural forest complexity is rapidly advancing and monitoring will help increase our understanding of the impact of actions taken and not taken.
10. Actions that create typically low, short-term risks or costs (such as thinning, smoke from beneficial prescribed fire, or other tools of fuel reduction) must be weighed against the potential for consequent long-term gains (such as the reduction of severe wildfire and avoiding protracted and hazardous smoke.)
11. Forest Bridges endorses agency management changes that mitigate for climate warming and the risk of high severity wildfires through a combination of Cultural, professional and science-based practices.

### **Recommended Approaches to Improve Management on O&C Lands**

12. Our challenge is to describe an approach to active, long-term management of the O&C Lands that is constructive and viewed as reasonable from the perspective of all our partners and interest areas: Tribal Nations, ecological and climate resilience, legacy forests, wildlife and other biological habitats, timber and wood products production, county revenue expectations, recreation, as well as a broad array of additional Ecosystem Services for the public.

13. An effective forest management plan for the O&C Lands should begin with a long-range vision for the dry, transitional and moist O&C Lands, following the principles of comprehensive ecosystem management. This vision eliminates land use allocations, including reserves, and replaces them with strict specifications and limits on thinning and Variable Retention Regeneration harvest, implemented by the local agencies.

13a. Dry Forests: These areas are characterized by historically low-severity, frequent fires. Due to the removal of Indigenous people and their forest stewardship, past fire suppression, insufficient-scale of forest management, and climate warming, the dry forest is overstocked generally and needs immediate site-specific density and fuels management. This includes the reintroduction of prescribed fire and an aggressive program of strategic, density-based thinning to a sufficient extent that it will support sustained legacy, provide fire resistance, provide appropriate structural and species diversity, and support the full range of wildlife habitats.

13b. Transitional forests: These forests are intermediate in geographic location, annual rainfall and other factors between the dry and moist forests. They are found in areas where there is a mosaic of dry and moist forest stands within close proximity. Entire areas behave like dry forests in severe fire weather conditions, and many areas need thinning and prescribed fire to mimic a more frequent, low severity fire pattern, even though the events are measured in decades rather than years. Even though they can be consumed in extreme fire conditions, some stands are more appropriate for moist forest treatment based on site specific characteristics, including aspect, moisture, soil type, etc.

13c. Moist Forests: These areas were, until very recently, described as areas with exclusively high severity infrequent fire. Recently, scientific evidence of more frequent and varied burn regimes—analogueous to the effects of thinning and prescribed fire—are indicative of past Indigenous stewardship. A Variable Retention Regeneration Harvest program to regularly create early seral habitat with legacy, is required but with strict limits, to accelerate toward the goal of 50% structurally complex forest to sustain a range of habitats and ecosystem functions in moist forests over time. This is complemented by a thinning program to reduce densities and align current fire conditions with historic levels of stand consumption associated with the level of fire severity.

14. Adaptive management is critical to successful long-term forest sustainability. Adaptive management means applying the best Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science to management actions; monitoring what was done and assessing the changes over time; then comparing the results with predicted expectations. Future plans and actions are modified based on the comparison of expectations and results.

15. Prescribed fire, other fuel reduction practices, and management should emulate the role of low- and moderate-intensity fire on these O&C Lands, including the reintroduction and flexibility for increased cool season burning modeled after Native American Burning practices. These and other strategies are critical for landscape restoration and resilience. Increased cool season burning shall be promoted, including in partnership with Tribes. Fire will continue to be suppressed and managed as needed when it poses risk to neighboring properties in the checkerboard.
16. Future Forest Plans shall anticipate rapid re-entry into burned stands for harvest and restoration following severe stand replacement wildfire. The Plans shall contain the flexibility to substitute multiple years of planned green forest harvest acreage allocations anywhere on agency O&C Lands in Western Oregon where a severe wildfire has occurred. These burned area restoration harvests shall use the same harvest and green tree retention standards as in respective dry, transitional and moist forest stands.
17. Achieving optimal watershed health requires management across whole watersheds, but this project focuses only on the O&C Lands as Forest Bridges' area of focus and an achievable step forward. Future adaptive management will further restore and sustain habitats on the O&C Lands within these watersheds.
  - 17a. Habitat improvements on non-O&C Lands within the O&C checkerboard, beyond the requirements of existing applicable law, would be voluntary and require funding for commensurate compensation.
18. An extensive road network is necessary in alternate section checkerboard ownerships. However, the historic, extensive valley bottom and midslope road systems in these lands impede watershed health and ought to be improved over time. The historical natural range of variability of stream channel conditions should be locally optimized or restored. At the same time, right-of-way road access for management purposes and for firefighting should continue for neighboring landowners in the checkerboard ownership.
19. Riparian area management. Forest Bridges believes that a riparian management strategy should be site-specific and align with the distinguishing topographical and biological features along streams, consider whether or not a stream is intermittent or perennial, and be designed to optimize, at the same time, riparian requirements for shade, sunlight amounts to promote biological productivity, large persistent wood and fire resilience. With stream size and habitat considerations in mind, Forest Bridges would enter some portions of riparian areas for silvicultural treatment to improve the riparian area quality for long-term benefit. This would include considering density and fuel management to sustain areas of legacy forest and promote the additional legacy forest through thinning—along with

prescribed fire—in the outer or even inner Riparian areas where density is considered either excessive or too low and there is need for restoration.

## **Recommendations for Addressing Barriers to Improved Management on O&C**

### **Lands**

20. Both before and since the Northwest Forest Plan was developed in 1993, adequate monitoring has been a goal but difficult to achieve on the O&C lands. Dedicated and sufficient monitoring funds for an evaluative program are needed. A diverse multi-stakeholder collaborative group should operate long-term on the O&C lands to support adaptive management by the land management agencies.
21. Liabilities: The Loss of neighboring property owner value in the course of diligently conducted prescribed fire and other fuel reduction activities shall be indemnified or fairly compensated by the responsible party for value lost. This applies to all landowners and agencies. In addition to prescribed fire (including pile burning), other tools to reduce fuels and the risk of neighbor exposure, would also be promoted.
22. Reallocations of funding and additional appropriations for the managing agencies will be required to cover the cost of FB's new management programs, over and above the current level of agencies' funding. We call this additional funding, "Sustainability Funds". These include most importantly funding for dead fuels reduction, non-revenue-generating thinning and beneficial prescribed burning when there is no associated entry for harvest, ongoing monitoring, increased legacy restoration, as well as public safety and adaptive management programs.
23. Implementation of management activities will require a timely path through the legal system. Legal consistency standards among laws, plans, and proposed actions shall allow both legal challenge and a streamlined resolution process for timely implementation.
24. Public access to the O&C Lands generally shall be a goal, supported by funding that includes on-the-ground human presence for increased public safety capacity.

### **Principles of Inclusive Operation**

25. Forest Bridges believes in the implementation of policies that support human diversity, equity and inclusive policies throughout its organization and work. Further detail can be found in the Forest Bridges DEI statement, Bylaws and human resource policies .

26. Recognizing the historical importance of Indigenous Knowledge and the use of beneficial prescribed fire/Cultural Burning as active forest management approaches to fostering a balance of forest habitats and sustainability of native species and cultures, Forest Bridges promotes their use in active forest management on the O&C Lands, integrated with current ownership, laws, professional experience and co-management opportunities with the western Oregon Tribes.