



Oregon Tree Farm System, Inc.

February 18, 2016

HRC 208 Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the American Tree Farm System

My name is Scott Hayes. I'm the chair of the Oregon Tree Farm System and chair of the American Forest Foundation's National Public Affairs Committee.

The American Forest Foundation sponsors both the American Tree Farm System and Project Learning Tree. CEO Tom Martin leads a staff of 34 people. An all-volunteer Board of Trustees guides the Foundation.

Project Learning Tree

To prepare the next generation to inherit America's forest legacy, AFF works with over 500,000 teachers in all 50 states to deliver a peer-reviewed, award-winning environmental education curriculum – [Project Learning Tree](#) – to millions of students each year. PLT teaches students *how* to think, not what to think, about the complex environmental issues they will face in the coming decades.

American Tree Farm System

Today forty-four states have members in the Tree Farm System. AFF works closely with its 80,000 members who sustainably manage more than 21 million acres of certified forests. ATFS works on-the-ground with families, teachers and elected officials to promote stewardship and protect the values provided by our nation's forest heritage. A commitment to the next generation unites our nationwide network of forest owners.

Most of America's forests are owned privately and nearly 22 million family forest owners own 282 million acres of forestland. Family forest owners are key to protecting the values that come from well-managed forests: Clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, wood products, good-paying rural jobs, and nature for hiking, hunting and fishing.

American Tree Farm System: A New Focus

For the past 75 years, as you heard from Mr. Courter and Mr. Barsotti, ATFS has focused on family woodland owners, helping them manage their lands. But the fact is, our members across

the county, and even in Oregon, represent less than 1% of the family forestland owners, and acres.

Under the direction of the Board of Trustees, AFF has been evaluating how to more effectively engage family woodland owners to protect clean water, provide sustainable wood supplies, and expand and enhance critical wildlife habitat. While these familiar goals have been a part of the ATFS sign for decades, to date, ATFS has not focused on how to improve woodlands in ways that deliver these benefits *measurably* and at *significant scale*.

Achieving significant, measurable impacts at scale means improving the position of ATFS with existing and new landowners, and with different audiences and partners. Nationally ATFS is studying three key questions:

- 1) How do we define our measurable impacts (i.e. how much water, wood or wildlife)?
- 2) How do we achieve measurable impacts?
- 3) How will we get there - what are the strategies and barriers?

How ATFS Is Doing It

Nationally AFF and ATFS are working closely with partners in local communities to design and implement outreach campaigns that borrow the tools of some of the nation's most successful businesses, from Coca-Cola to Nike. Taking these lessons and drawing from experience, we know that:

- Social marketing campaigns that begin with landowner values, beliefs, and needs leads to more responses;
- Building a database to target and track the outreach, responses and follow-up engagement is essential to long-term success;
- Engagement leads to more active stewardship - the more engaged a landowner is with his or her forests, the more likely they are to take further action on their land;
- Providing information to unengaged landowners about issues they care about is an important first step to building trust; and
- Sustaining the relationship with landowners over time, through follow-up emails, phone calls, e-newsletters or other contacts, is critically important to seeing results on the ground.

To achieve measurable and significantly scaled goals, outreach is being focused nationally with a growing portfolio of projects across the country. From Wisconsin's Driftless forest area in the Midwestern region, to Mississippi's Piney Woods, prototype landscape scale projects have helped cultivate interest in active forest stewardship from thousands of otherwise unengaged private forest landowners.

But the oak-hickory and longleaf pine forests of these landscapes aren't the Ponderosa Pine, Douglas-fir and mixed conifer forests of the West. And ATFS understands that all landowners do not hold the same beliefs, or face identical challenges.

So in the 11 Western states, ATFS is carefully adapting different models to fit the unique needs of family woodland owners. These models are being based around the issues of fire, water and private forestlands – summarized in a new report.

Western Water Threatened by Wildfire: It's Not Just a Public Lands Issue

What most do not realize is that while only 31% of the West is actually forested, 65% of the public water supply comes from these forests. These forested lands store water, replenish streams and rivers, and filter pollutants. Catastrophic wildfires lead to severe erosion, debris flows and water quality degradation.

To better support family forest owners in protecting water, AFF created a new report, *Western Water Threatened by Wildfire: It's Not Just a Public Lands Issue*. (<http://www.forestfoundation.org/western-water-forests-report>)

The report reveals a previously unknown opportunity to protect clean water that comes from forests. The report looks at a spatial assessment of 11 Western states and examines which forests are at high risk of wildfire and where these high-risk forests threaten clean drinking water. The report also includes a West-wide survey of the behaviors, motivations and barriers to action of Western family forest owners.

Key Findings from the Report

Across the West, private and family-owned lands with high wildfire risk:

- Cover an area the size of Kansas. More than one-third, or 52 million acres, of the high wildfire risk falls on private and family-owned lands, not public land.
- Nearly 40% of the lands that keep water clean in important watersheds that are at a high risk of wildfire, are private and family-owned. This is three times the size of New Jersey.
- Western family forest owners offer an opportunity to protect public water supply by addressing wildfire risk now.
- Family forest owners want to do the right thing and they are motivated to take action on their land.
- Barriers: the majority cites the high cost of implementing management.

Recommendations to Protect Family-owned Forests and the Clean Water that Flows from Them

- Increase on-the-ground efforts to engage private and family landowners on wildfire risk reduction and forest restoration, in order to see measurable results across the region.
- Increase collaborative efforts to engage and support private and family lands for wildfire mitigation and restoration.
- Collaborative campaigns pull financial resources, allow for broader reach to landowners, and help everyone achieve mutual goals.

- Enhance restoration policy and funding that supports on---the---ground efforts that include private and family lands.
- Congress needs to create and enhance authorities to stimulate cross---boundary restoration efforts on public, private and family owned lands.
- Oregon needs to continue its focus within the State Forest Action Plan to prioritize cross---boundary activities such as wildfire risk reduction and forest restoration, especially within key watersheds.
- Catalyze markets that reduce the costs of wildfire risk reduction and forest restoration and make ongoing healthy forest management economical.

In the West, in close partnership with local community-based collaboratives, and with support from the Forest Service, state forestry agencies and other key partners, AFF plans to lay the foundation for *a ten-fold increase in fire risk reduction and forest restoration activities on private forestlands.*

Oregon’s Success Story: East Face of the Elkhorn Mountains Project

AFF has already begun efforts to bring together organizations to work cross-boundary in Oregon.

The Blue Mountains of northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington encompasses over 24,000 square miles of scenic, rugged terrain. We all know the close connection between the people, and the land. Farming, ranching, and timber production have a long legacy.

Many of the stands of Ponderosa Pine, Douglas-fir, and Western Larch in the Blue Mountains have a high or very high risk of uncharacteristic wildfire. This risk threatens not only residents’ homes and many forest landowners’ livelihoods, but also wildlife habitat and water quality. Large, stand-replacing fires were never the norm for much of this country. Conditions are critical unless action is taken.

The Blue Mountains were designated as one of two areas in the country to pilot the new national cohesive strategy, an effort to break down silos between federal agencies and bridge the divide between public and private land. Within this larger planning area, the East Face of the Elkhorns project seeks to restore forest conditions and therefore reduce fire risk across some 140 square miles.

Working with partners including the Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon State University, Oregon Forest Resources Institute, Oregon Small Woodlands Association and Wallowa Resources, ATFS is engaging landowners across a four county area to increase not simply their awareness of their fire risk, but provide them with resources and assistance to act to mitigate that risk. By bringing new landowners to the table and empowering them, ATFS is helping to increase forest and community resiliency to the inevitable fire, and in so doing we’ll restore wildlife habitat, safeguard water supplies, and support the community knowledge and infrastructure necessary to carry this work forward in the years to come.