

Strategic Initiative: Federal Forest Health

The Federal Forest Advisory Committee's 2009 Report to the Board of Forestry included a recommendation for the state to invest in increasing the pace and scale of restoration on federal forests. An FFAC subcommittee worked throughout 2012 to identify components of a state funding package which Governor Kitzhaber included in his 2013 budget request. The State Legislature funded this initiative and entrusted ODF to administer it. Selected outcomes to date include:

- USFS Record of Decisions were signed in the Blue Mountains on over 137K acres of restoration projects during the '13-15 biennium. In addition, four local collaboratives worked on planning an additional 465K acres of restoration projects in the same time frame.
- Jobs in eastern Oregon derived from forest restoration on National Forests increased by 16%.
- Timber volume sold annually from the four Blue Mountain National Forests increased 13% during the biennium, punctuated by a 58% increase in sawlog volume sold.

In the 2015 Session, the Legislature expanded the scope to statewide, funded the package at \$5 million, and approved 7.6 FTEs at ODF. This reinvestment, coupled with opportunities under the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) passed in the 2014 Farm Bill, present a significant opportunity for ODF to function as an implementation partner for both the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The increased scope, funding and human resources, and yet-to-be-scaled opportunities under GNA are reason to develop a Federal Forest Health Program (FFH) within ODF.

The draft core business statement of the FFH Program is: *Accelerate the pace, scale and quality of forest restoration to increase the resilience of Oregon's federal forests, in a manner that leverages collaborative efforts and contributes to the long-term vitality of regional economies and rural communities.* Principles of the FFH Program are to be partnership-oriented, execute transparent decision-making, remain flexible and adaptable, be intentional to increase capacity for implementation, and monitor effectiveness.

The FFH Program has two primary components:

- 1) Collaborative Support (\$1.3 million in 2015-2017) –includes a) a grant program (administered by OWEB) to provide direct support to local collaborative groups to expand agreements on forest restoration and b) contracts to provide science support and capacity building on commonly identified needs from multiple collaboratives. *Primary purpose: to increase the scale and quality of forest restoration.*
- 2) State-Federal Implementation Partnership (\$3.4 million in 2015-2017) – responds to the identified barrier of “NEPA-ready projects” to invest state resources to evaluate new business practices related to data collection and pre-sale activities. ODF will use a mix of seasonal workforce and contractors. *Primary purpose: to increase the pace of forest restoration.*

Selected biennium goals of the FFH Program include:

- Increased acres of active management, and a corresponding increase in timber volume sold, resulting in increased resilience to fire and other natural disturbances and/or habitat improvement
- Identify management actions best suited to ODF as an implementation partner to the USFS and BLM, including work completed by ODF employees and ODF contractors
- Broaden acceptance and trust regarding ODF's role in assisting the USFS and BLM