

Oregon Governor, state officials sign Good Neighbor Agreement with Forest Service

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Salem, Ore – Furthering work to advance healthy, resilient national forests, habitat, and communities, Oregon Governor Kate Brown, U.S. Forest Service Regional Forester Jim Peña, Oregon Department of Forestry State Forester Doug Decker, and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Curt Melcher jointly signed a Good Neighbor Authority agreement today.

Stemming from authorities in the 2014 Federal Farm Bill, the Oregon Good Neighbor Authority Master Agreement increases opportunities for efficiently working across jurisdictions, expands options for sharing skills and funding, and provides a creative and collaborative tool for restoring and managing national public forestlands and watershed health.

National forests account for nearly 60 percent of all forests in Oregon. Wildfire risk, habitat connectivity, species recovery and sustainable wood products and job creation are among the challenges and opportunities facing these public lands.

“The social, economic, and environmental issues tied to public lands go far beyond their boundaries,” said Governor Brown. “Today’s signing is an important new tool that brings these issues together and promotes collaboration. We can get farther by working together than apart.”

“There is a lot of work that needs to be done, and no agency or organization can do it alone,” said Peña. “This Good Neighbor Authority agreement is a model for how federal and state partners can work together with communities more effectively—it’s a win-win for the health of our forests and Oregonians.”

“Building on Oregon’s innovative approach to advancing public values on federal lands, including millions in legislative investment since 2013, and local collaborative groups willing to roll up their sleeves and work on tough forest management issues, we’re already seeing results,” said Decker. “This agreement shines a national spotlight on Oregon and serves as the next level in continuing good work while helping rural communities, reducing wildfire risk and improving forest health.”

“As managers of Oregon’s fish and wildlife resources, we rely heavily on partnerships with public and private land owners to address important habitat issues,” said Melcher. “Formal agreements like this will further strengthen our partnership with the Forest Service and provide the flexible tools and resources necessary to boost stewardship and bring rural communities together.”

The Oregon Good Neighbor Master Agreement provides formal authorization for putting local projects into action as part of a statewide effort, allowing federal funds to be used by state agency staff or contractors to advance work directly on federal public land and leverage state and other dollars. The agreement allows the state, U.S. Forest Service, and local partners to work across ownership boundaries to focus on statewide results rather than jurisdictional or regulatory limitations.

The Forest Service, ODF and ODFW are already working on a number of projects with local forest collaborative groups and partners, and the Good Neighbor Authority provides a tool to enhance positive results. Two examples of these projects include:

- ODF will use seasonal firefighters and contractors to implement forest thinning—removing small, dead or diseased trees—on 200 acres of the Fremont-Winema National Forest outside of Lakeview. This work is critical for completing wildfire resilience treatments in the larger Crooked Mud Honey Integrated Restoration Project area. Receipts from federal timber sales will be apportioned to ODF to cover costs of this work.
- Malheur and Umatilla National Forest staff, ODFW, tribal representatives and other partners are working in the John Day River watershed to enhance fish habitat and water quality on public and private lands. Using federal funds, ODFW and the Forest Service will replace road culverts and reduce barriers to fish and other aquatic life while also installing screens on irrigation diversions to keep fish in the creek.