



Help rural communities

Photo: Mike McMurray

A summary of “National Forest Health Restoration: An Economic Assessment of Forest Restoration on Oregon’s Eastside National Forests,” a report prepared for Governor John Kitzhaber and Oregon’s legislative leaders. The study area focused on all National Forests east of the Cascade Crest (excluding Mt. Hood National Forest) and the eastern portion of the Rogue River–Siskiyou National Forest.

Double the scale and pace of forest restoration

Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber and legislative leaders asked, “If Oregon doubled the average number of acres treated annually to benefit and restore forest ecosystem health on Oregon’s dry-side national forestlands, then what would that cost and what would be the benefit?” The National Forest Health Restoration report answers that question. Every \$1 million spent on restoration will generate \$5.7 million in economic returns.

“Doubling restoration activities can have a positive, lasting impact on the health of dry-side forests and rural communities. Now is the time to act.”

—John Kitzhaber, Oregon Governor

Equally important, the forests will become healthier. Oregonians depend on forests for clean air and water, wildlife habitat and recreation. Dry-side forests are overly dense and unhealthy. As a result, U.S. Forest Service-managed forests experience more and worse fires than usual. Forests, that in the past might have withstood low intensity surface fires, are now at risk of devastating crown fires.

Reduced management has decreased timber supply and hurt many families in eastern and south central Oregon; one in five people live in poverty. Between 2006 and 2011, food

stamp use and welfare payments tripled to \$298 million. In 2010, Oregon distributed \$470 million in unemployment insurance claims to people in the study area.

In dry-side communities nearly 1 in 5 people live in poverty.

As of September 2012, the average unemployment rate in the study area was 10.8%. Doubling restoration would create or protect some 2,300 jobs.



Devastating crown fires put firefighters and communities at risk.

Photo: National Wildfire Coordination Group

Create change in dry-side rural communities

Oregon's congressional leaders, governor, legislative leadership and rural residents recognize that something must change to improve forest health and economic activity in eastern and south central Oregon. Many USFS-managed forests in this region are dense and overcrowded, and at risk of unnaturally severe wildfires.

Restoring resilient forest ecosystems:

- Protects clean air, water and wildlife habitat
- Attracts tourists who buy from local businesses
- Creates jobs by generating raw material for mills

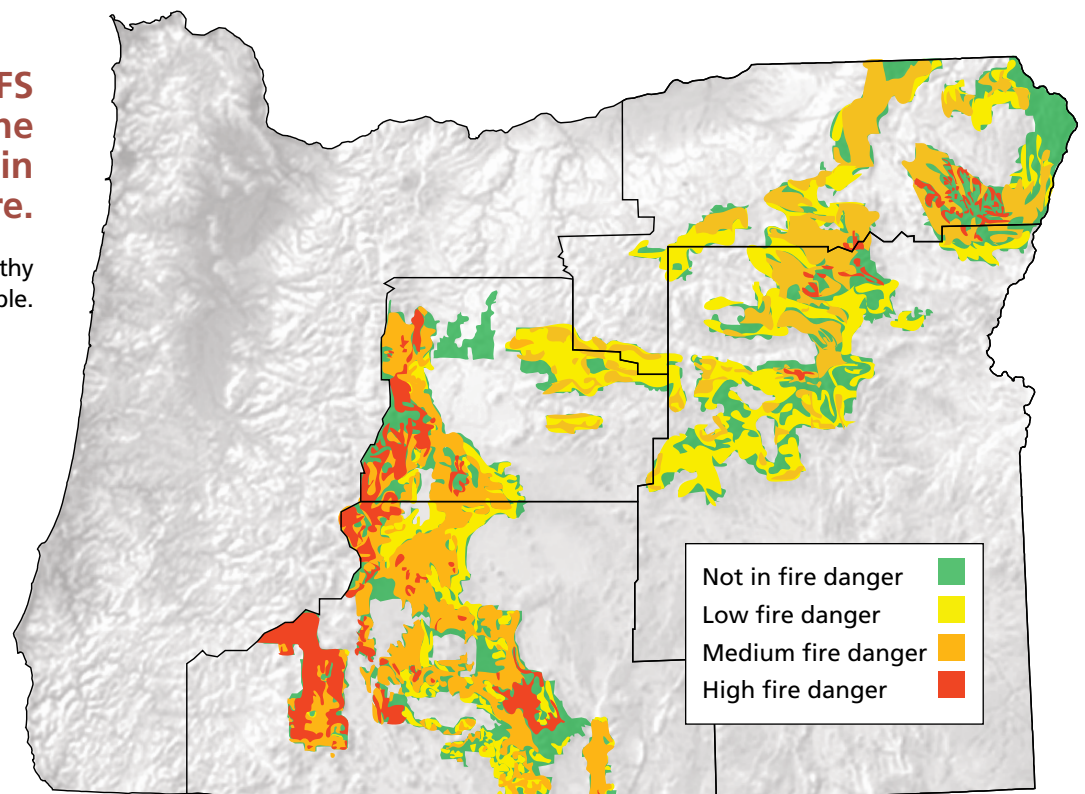
"The Lakeview Stewardship Group has saved our local mill twice. We make a difference in Lake County, where the federal government owns 78 percent of our land." —Jim Walls, Executive Director, Lake County Resources Initiative

Across the region, eight community-based collaboratives are bringing together people with diverse interests, from environmentalists to industry leaders to local government officials. Working with the Forest Service, they design, implement and monitor a variety of forest treatments. Collaboratives create the social agreement necessary for the National Environmental Policy Act planning process to succeed. This can reduce the frequency of appeals and litigation, which in turn reduces USFS planning costs.

Mill owners depend on a predictable flow of timber to keep mills running and people employed. Dependability is key to future investment. Restoration activities can provide the predictable supply that mills need.

Much of the USFS forestlands in the study area are in danger of fire.

Restoration can reestablish healthy forests and employ people.



Crown fire potential on Oregon's dry-side national forests

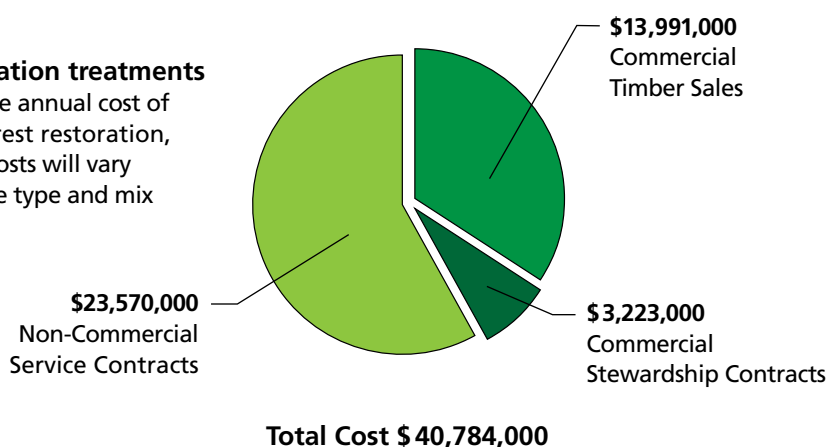
INVEST IN OREGON'S FUTURE THROUGH RESTORATION

Some restoration work happens now, but it isn't enough to make a long-term difference. Doubling the number of treated, dry-side acres from 129,000 to 250,000 would require an investment of about \$82 million annually, given that the USFS currently spends \$40.8 million. However, the cost of that investment could be largely offset through fire avoidance and less strain on social services.

Considering the rising costs of fire suppression and social services, state and federal leaders need to weigh the expense of current management policies against the potential savings of investing in forest restoration and determine which would better serve society and the environment.

Costs of restoration treatments

This is the average annual cost of USFS dry-side forest restoration, 2007-11. Future costs will vary depending on the type and mix of treatments.



GENERATE ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Doubling the investment in restoration can reinvigorate rural communities, reduce poverty and restore forest health, providing wildlife habitat, clean air and water.

Additionally, restoration can reduce fire suppression costs, because a treated forest is less likely to experience severe fire. Based on current average fire suppression expenses of \$780 per acre, the USFS would incur about \$100 million in fire suppression costs each year if 129,000 acres were left untreated and burned by wildfire. Government can save millions of dollars by investing in restoration, as severe fires are less likely in treated forests. A restoration investment would ultimately reduce costs associated with fire suppression, protect clean air and water, and keep firefighters out of harm's way.

TREAT AVAILABLE ACRES

According to the Institute for Natural Resources, the USFS manages 9 million acres of forest in the study area that have moderate to high crown fire potential. Accelerating treatment of these forests to 250,000 acres or more annually for the next two decades will restore forest ecosystem health, create or protect an additional 2,310 jobs, and generate an additional \$3.6 million in annual state tax revenue.

"Unhealthy forests increase the risk of catastrophic wildfires and compromise water quality, wildlife habitat, and the socio-economic vitality of rural communities. We need to restore our forests to healthy conditions."

—Mark Webb,
Grant County Judge

An investment in forest health restoration has the potential to save millions of dollars in state and federal funds by creating jobs and by avoiding costs associated with fire suppression, social service programs and unemployment benefits.

Restoration makes sense

“It is undeniably true that an increase in forest restoration and overall timber harvest will provide a firmer foundation for current jobs and help the region to grow economically in the future.” —Dr. Tom Potiowsky, Director, Northwest Economic Research Center, Portland State University

SUPPORT OREGON’S FORESTS AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Oregon can make restoration a priority and return forests and rural communities to sound health. Collaboratives are working successfully throughout eastern and south central Oregon, rebuilding trust around forest management. Supported by sound science, collaboratives are harnessing local knowledge and building consensus around treatments that meet the needs of the community and rebuild forest resiliency.

PRESERVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Regions with robust, integrated infrastructures capture more value than those with limited manufacturing capability. Mills need a predictable supply of sawlogs to continue operating and secure new investment. When mills close, high haul costs stall restoration work, further jeopardize forest health and put forests at greater risk of massive, costly forest fires.

PROTECT FOREST ECOSYSTEMS

Effective fire suppression for more than 50 years has made Oregon’s dry-side forests unnaturally dense and at risk of severe crown fires that destroy millions of acres of forests annually. Restoration work rebuilds natural spacing and resiliency, reducing vulnerability to catastrophic fire. Decreasing the fire risk protects wildlife habitat and sources of clean water.

Many of the fire-prone forests have 1,000 trees per acre, while the natural and historic rate was 75 to 100 trees per acre. When this excess biomass catches fire, Oregonians lose a natural resource and an opportunity to grow the state’s economy.



Fire-prone forest



Resilient forest

Economic Assessment Team that produced the report: Mason, Bruce & Girard, Inc.; Forest Econ, Inc.; Institute for Natural Resources at Oregon State University; and Northwest Economic Research Center at Portland State University.

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Access full report at: http://www.oregon.gov/gov/docs/OR_Forest_Restoration_Econ_Assessment_Nov_2012.pdf