



Butte Falls
Community Forest
Assessment Report
Oregon Solutions | May 2019

Acknowledgements

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1. INTRODUCTION

During summer 2018, staff from Oregon Solutions along with Regional Solutions staff from the Governor's Office, regional civic leaders, and staff from public land interests met with local leaders from the town of Butte Falls to learn more about their interest in acquiring 300 acres of privately held timberland from Weyerhaeuser.

A potential purchase of the Weyerhaeuser property creates an opportunity to get the lands into public ownership to support the economic and community development of the town.

Town leaders expressed interest in seeking help from Oregon Solutions to a) support a collaborative approach to outline support for a range of goals related to the desired forestland and b) secure a governor's designation, which will help bring visibility and support for the effort.

This assessment report is the product of that request. The goal for Oregon Solutions was to determine if there was enough substantive interest from stakeholders to work in a neutral Oregon Solutions-like process to look for ways to purchase this land and manage the land for multiple community goals. Another Oregon Solutions goal is to determine if this type of an approach could be replicable for other small, forested communities to own and manage forestlands for multiple purposes and benefits to small communities.

2. METHODS

This assessment report is the product of interviews conducted by Oregon Solutions with parties and stakeholders representing key interests related to the current Butte Falls Community Forest Project. Between December 2018 and March 2019, Oregon Solutions interviewed twenty-six individuals representing city, state, tribal, and federal governments, as well as civic groups, land trusts, tourism, and the philanthropic sector.¹

¹ Forty-four stakeholders were contacted and twenty-six agreed to be interviewed.

ABOUT OREGON SOLUTIONS

Oregon Solutions is the state of Oregon's program to help communities address community-based problems and opportunities through sustainable solutions. We do this by creating a neutral forum for collaboration where businesses, governments, nonprofits, community-based organizations, sovereigns, and other stakeholders can align resources and pool efforts to achieve desired results.

OUR PROCESS

Oregon Solutions' engagement starts with an assessment. When invited, Oregon Solutions begins an assessment to explore whether and how a collaborative approach might be structured to address a particular community issue. The assessment is composed of a series of one-on-one or small group interviews. If an assessment finds there is a project that can be conducted by Oregon Solutions, it will go before the governor for consideration of a designation as an Oregon Solutions project.

We made every effort to reach out to stakeholders with an interest in this project. Even so, not everyone responded to our request for an assessment interview. Our goal with assessment interviews is to have all interested parties feel that their perspectives and interests will be represented by those interviewed. A list of those interviewed and their affiliations can be found in appendix A and the list of core interview questions is in appendix B. Most interviews were held in person and a few by phone. Before each interview, individuals were briefed about the purpose of the assessment. All interviews were voluntary and lasted approximately forty-five minutes. Interviewees were informed that the final report would aggregate responses into key issues without individual attribution.

3. BACKGROUND

Butte Falls—a small town of 444 people² located in eastern Jackson County, Oregon—is interested in purchasing more than 300 acres of Weyerhaeuser timberland that surrounds the town. Negotiations are underway with regional Weyerhaeuser leadership to secure two parcels of forestland that include the historically significant Big Butte Falls mill site—the birthplace of the town—and Butte Falls itself.

A potential land purchase provides an opportunity for the town to manage the forest as public land that supports the town of Butte Falls. This effort aligns with the community's past planning efforts, including the *Butte Falls Mill Site Development Feasibility Study* (1999), which outlines the town's desired approach to restore the abandoned mill site and improve public access to historic Butte Falls, and the *Butte Falls Natural Resource Center Strategic Plan* (2015), which provides a mission and vision for the former state-managed fish hatchery now used as a community space where all "can learn about the geographic, history, biological, and recreational opportunities in the region."³

These past efforts have been updated and have evolved into what is now the community's Butte Falls Community Forest (BFCF) project. One goal of their project is to create an innovative approach to the stewardship of forestlands that would become a model for how rural, remote communities can use their forests to develop sustainable economies. The project also proposes the following goals:

- *Foster a sustainable economy* by promoting the health of the forest through economic opportunities in rural recreational and historical tourism, forest jobs, and thoughtful expansion of the town's enterprise zone.

² US Census Bureau Population Estimates, 2017, "Butte Falls/Population," available online at <https://www.google.com/search?q=population+butte+falls%2C+oregon&oq=population+butte+falls%2C+oregon&aqs=chrome..69i57j0.9457j1j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

³ Butte Falls Nature Resource Center Strategic Plan, p. 3.

- *Foster a sustainable community* by developing and adopting resilient forest management practices to ensure healthy and fire-resistant forests and guide the smart increase of the town's urban growth boundaries.
- *Create sustainable knowledge* through education and research in forestry and forest stewardship in cooperation with local schools and Southern Oregon University.

Sponsors hope that designation as an Oregon Solutions project will help bring together historically disparate stakeholders, and combine past efforts to organize a comprehensive project. These stakeholders include the logging industry, the US Forest Service, the US Bureau of Land Management, local governments, education organizations, land trusts, water resource advocates, regional tourism partners, local businesses, and town residents. (The Cow Creek Tribe, another stakeholder, has expressed a desire to be kept informed during the process, although they lack staffing resources to be at the table.) Sponsors also hope that a designation as an Oregon Solutions project will help stakeholders better align and integrate resources in order to realize the goals of the project.

4. BUILDING ON THE BFCF VISION THROUGH OREGON SOLUTIONS

The BFCF project's primary focus has been to purchase 300 acres of forestland surrounding the town and to manage the forest sustainably. Fires, like the 2018 fire, which destroyed the town of Paradise, California, have created an added desire to protect the town and residents from increasing forest fire threats. The BFCF project also intends to do the following:

- Allow for secure, ongoing, and sustained access to the Butte Falls on Big Butte Creek, a historical site for the current town on a fish-bearing tributary to the Rogue River.
- Improve roads, and build-out public infrastructure in the public space to ensure equal and safe access to the forest, the falls, and other historical, recreational, and tourist assets.
- Expand the existing Natural Resource Center Program led by the Butte Falls School District and provide a forest learning-lab for students throughout the region.
- Restore three-miles of train railbed in order to bring the original Big Butte Falls Mill steam engine back to town for scheduled historical activities and a potential train dining experience.

BFCF provides a great vision that can serve as a foundation for collective action. Implementation of this collective action will require a much larger table and diversity of players. An OS structured process would provide the kind of capacity to enlarge and engage a bigger table. This assessment explored whether there is collective support for and interest in working together toward implementation of this vision through an OS-like process.

A key driver for this project is the short timeline to purchase two of the forest parcels from Weyerhaeuser. The company has harvested the southern parcel, and the town's goal is to purchase both parcels prior to scheduled harvest of the north parcel in 2021. The company is offering the town the land at current market value which is reported at \$500,000.

5. ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

We find that there is agreement among stakeholders that a collaborative Oregon Solutions-like process would help bring key stakeholders to the table to work collaboratively on finding ways to leverage resources, heighten capacity, and effectively integrate the goals of the BFCF project with stakeholders and other interested partners.

- All stakeholders that were interviewed (land trust, education, railroad, forest service) expressed a willingness to participate in a multi-month planning process to help the project achieve its goals.
- Many stakeholders said this project is essential to secure the future of the town of Butte Falls. When asked what would happen if the project did not move forward, many said the town would continue to decline until it no longer exists.
- To date, the Office of the Mayor and the Butte Falls City Council have coordinated two committees to help move the work forward. Those committees are the land acquisition committee and the forest and parklands committee.
- Three meetings have been held between the City of Butte Falls and Weyerhaeuser to understand the company's interest in selling the land. To date, there are no funds coordinated to make the purchase.
- Given the remote location of the town of Butte Falls, available resources include donated time, shared equipment and services, expertise, and relationships. Regional funders are aware of the project and are interested in helping the project succeed. A coordinated effort of all these resources would be beneficial in helping negotiate mutually supportive terms for the land purchase.

5.1. Issues

5.1.1. Initial funding for the purchase of the Weyerhaeuser property is paramount for the project to succeed

The most consistently identified obstacle is low confidence that the low-income, rural community of Butte Falls can secure funding to purchase the land. Without the land, none of the other components of the project could be realized at this time. Additional assistance and facilitation resources may be needed to bundle resources while retaining the community-centered core vision and goals of the project.

Current resources include the time and expertise of the Butte Falls committees guiding the effort. No financial resources have been committed to support the group's work at this time. Some regional funders have expressed preliminary interest in providing technical and convening support to the project.

It is unknown whether the regional Weyerhaeuser representatives would be able to provide some support or adjustments to the purchase price to ensure that the community-centered project has the ability to prosper and serve as an example of effective collaborations around healthy forest management and use.

5.1.2. A land trust model is a potential approach

Securing the forest property in a trust would protect the 300 acres into perpetuity and, as some interviewees noted, potentially entice funders to invest in the property, because the land's health, legacy, and access will be protected for the public, industry, wildlife, stream health, and the environment. It would be essential that any easement would allow for the long-term plans as they currently are envisioned.

The Trust for Public Lands (TPL) recently underwent organizational restructuring and the position for an Oregon staff person was just posted this spring. Reports are that Weyerhaeuser is interested in partnering with TPL and that there may be some resources available. The Pacific Forest Trust is a regionally focused land trust organization that could be approached to provide support, independently or in partnership with TPL.

5.1.3. Coordinating a collaborative process that values the unique assets of the diverse stakeholders is important

To date, it appears that there is general agreement around the long-term scope and planning of the BFCF project. Some nuanced agreement seeking may be needed in later phases of the project as key components may need to be scoped and phased to take full advantage of the overall goal and available resources.

Resource integration is mostly needed to expand benefits through linkages and to address the need for interdependent actions. Given the scope of the entire project, there are multiple stakeholders that traditionally have not likely worked together on a focused, rural, community-based effort. Support to ensure that all the voices, agendas, and concerns are identified and managed will be essential in building the comfort and confidence for initial and ongoing support. An external, supportive, facilitator could be extremely beneficial to keep the project focused and collaborative, and to ensure broad expectations and needs are met.

5.1.4. Ongoing communications with the surrounding rural remote and connected tribal community is important

Due to the small size of the Butte Falls community, most residents have been at least partially engaged in the process to date. Given the historical divestment in the community due to economics, regionalization of public resources, and technology, the rural community is wary of large and complex endeavors with a broad timeline. Town leadership understands that ongoing and transparent community outreach will be paramount throughout the project.

There had been no outreach to the Native American tribes that have a connection to the Butte Falls land and the parcels in question. As part of this assessment, the Cow Creek Tribe

confirmed their geographic interest in the project and noted that the BFCF project appears to align with the tribe's values and interests. Specifically noted was the importance of maintaining a healthy and sustainable forest habitat for universal access and use. It is recommended that the leadership of the BFCF project make a meaningful connection with the tribe a high priority, should the project continue.

5.2. Recommended Process

An Oregon Solutions designation would provide a neutral forum to bring stakeholders to the table and would provide high visibility. There is strong support from those interviewed for an Oregon Solutions designation. This project also has merit as a model for other rural communities.

A phased Oregon Solutions effort would be essential as it is unlikely that the proposed programs and activities related to a Butte Falls community forest would be able to occur without the purchase of the forestland.

Project phases

- *Phase one.* Secure the purchase through potential land trust structures, public and private funding, and local community support.
- *Phase two.* Engage local stakeholders toward coordinated action around the proposed forest programs that meet the forest management plan guidelines and structures. Develop a declaration of cooperation related to this phase.

Participants to be invited

- The town of Butte Falls: mayor, former mayor, BFCF committee members
- Butte Falls School District's Natural Resource Center
- The Ford Family Foundation
- Ginger Springs water bottling plant
- Gordon Elwood Foundation
- Jackson County Parks
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Pacific Forest Trust
- Regional Solutions
- Southern Oregon Railroad Club
- Travel Southern Oregon
- Trust for Public Lands
- Local state representatives

Potential high-level convener

The obvious lead for the BFCF project is Butte Falls Mayor Linda Spencer. Both her position and esteem within the community are evident. Many stakeholders interviewed noted some connection and conversation with Mayor Spencer about the project. There were no mentions of concerns about her leadership, intent, or style of communication.

6. Timeline

Timeline

- Designate project—May 2019
- Phase one begins (first meeting)—June 2019
- Phase one ends—February 2020
- Phase two begins—March 2020
- Phase two ends—July 2020

It will likely take fourteen monthly meetings to secure a declaration of cooperation that is effective and meaningful for the overall project, and that is within the timeframe to purchase the forestland prior to the scheduled 2021 harvest. A meaningful declaration of cooperation would best be secured after the land has been purchased and actionable implementation plans are complete for the remaining components of the overall project.

The Ford Family Foundation's Ford Institute for Community Building has expressed potential interest in matching support for the initial coordination and facilitation of the project. Confirming that interest and completing a request for technical assistance support would be the next steps to secure funding.

APPENDIX A: BUTTE FALLS COMMUNITY FOREST ASSESSMENT ROSTER OF INTERVIEWEES

- Roque Barros, Director of the Ford Institute for Community Building at the Ford Family Foundation
- Paul Belson, Conservation Project Manager, Southern Oregon Land Conservancy
- Chris Bray, Manager, Butte Falls Public Works
- Kathy Bryon, Executive Director, Gordon Elwood Foundation
- Trish Callahan, President, Butte Falls City Council
- Alex Campbell, South Coast Region Coordinator, Oregon Regional Solutions
- Ben Dair, Senior Manager of Conservation Finance, Sustainable NW
- Cathy Dombi, Executive Director, Southern Oregon Land Conservancy
- Marc Ellis, Butte Falls Code Enforcement
- Jana Goodman, Former Mayor of Butte Falls
- Jeff Gorman, Fire Chief of Butte Falls
- Steve Lambert, Parks Manager, Jackson County Parks
- Chris Mathas, natural resources teacher at the Natural Resource Center, Butte Falls Public Schools
- Mike McLane, Oregon Representative, District 55
- Brad Niva, Executive Director, Travel Southern Oregon
- Katelyn Pay, Medford Chief of Staff for US Representative Greg Walden
- Mike Smeltz, Butte Falls Public Works
- Bill Smith, Wildfire Supervisor, Oregon Department of Forestry
- Linda Spencer, Mayor of Butte Falls
- Kaola Swanson, Oregon Program Director, Pacific Forest Trust
- Curt Tejcka, Owner, Cascade Mountain Spring Water
- John Vial, Director, Jackson County Roads & Parks Department
- Tim Vrendenburg, Director of Forest Management for the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians
- Ric Walch, President, Southern Oregon Railroad Club
- Eric Williams, Grant Program Manager, Oregon Watershed Conservation Board

APPENDIX B: BUTTE FALLS COMMUNITY FOREST ASSESSMENT CORE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Please describe your background and interest as it relates to the Butte Falls Community Forest Project plan?
- Have you been involved in any aspect of the project to-date?
- What do you believe are major topics or issues that need to be addressed related to this project?
- What do you think are the challenges or barriers related to this project? Do you have any suggestions for how they might be overcome?
- Do you see an opportunity for the community to work together around the development of this project? What challenges or hurdles might prevent people from coming to the table? What recommendations do you have to ensure broad community involvement in this project?
- What would success look like to you?
- What would happen if this project did not move forward?
- What additional resources are needed, if any, to help make this project a success?
- If a collaborative effort were to move forward, would you or your organization be willing to participate? Are there resources that you could bring to support a collaborative effort?
- Who else would you recommend be interviewed for this assessment?
- Is there anything else you would like to address that has not already been addressed?
- Do you have any questions for me about this project, Oregon Solutions, or this process?