



FOREST BRIDGES

Principles of Agreement

BOARD-APPROVED UPDATE – FEBRUARY 24, 2023



Introduction

Forest Bridges: The O&C Forest Habitat Project, Inc. (Forest Bridges) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with deep roots in collaboration. Founded in 2015, our goal is to bring people together as Friends of Forest Bridges, supporting our development of the Forest Bridges Principles of Agreement, along with detailed supporting information.¹ As the collaborating team evolves, it continues to include individuals and representatives of different, historically opposing viewpoints, while working to grow its partnerships with Western Oregon Indigenous tribes. We are committed to the inclusion of underrepresented and underserved people and communities.

Forest Bridges proposes a major paradigm shift in the program of sustained yield forestry driven by habitat outcomes, that also sustains the range of forest resources (soil, water, fish, wildlife, etc. as well as harvest), on the O&C Lands of western Oregon. (These lands are also known as the Revested Oregon and California Railroad and Reconveyed Coos Bay Wagon Road Grant Lands of Western Oregon.²) The work and proposals of Forest Bridges also include the O&C Lands managed by the US Forest Service, as well as Public Domain lands managed as forest land by the BLM in Western Oregon. Hereafter all of these lands in total shall be referred to in Forest Bridges' work as the "O&C Lands").

Current legislative and regulatory restrictions limit which of the O&C Lands can be actively managed. Forest Bridges is developing numerous proposals for a well-funded program of very long-term, metered and active forest management, with a sense of urgency to sustain forest habitats vulnerable to climate change and wildfire. The Principles of Agreement and proposals of Forest Bridges are intended to facilitate on-the-ground actions by providing context and supporting federal agency planning and project implementation processes.

All of the O&C Lands are included in the long-term strategic proposals of Forest Bridges, recognizing the importance of habitat sustainability throughout the O&C forests. Habitat sustainability includes legacy trees, forest stands and landscapes, and uses active management to renew, as well as to sustain, the forest by creating complex early seral and promoting other habitats. In our proposed model, all areas are evaluated for treatment or non-treatment periodically, based on their potential to become or remain a contributor to the diversity of wildlife and other biological habitats. As a result, the land management agencies would regularly and strategically select or bypass areas for active management, based on site-specific conditions for habitat growth, development and renewal (as part of future planning and project implementation processes).

Forest Bridges' proposal for a metered and active approach to habitat sustainability (through harvest, beneficial prescribed fire and other actions) calls for carefully defined guidelines intended to increase certainty around the extent and kinds of management based on site-specific characteristics. Management is active, creating new habitats regularly, yet metered in amount and monitored for effectiveness. Harvest and thinning, both with legacy retention, seek to emulate the range of historical conditions, and are limited to work which puts the forests of the O&C lands as a whole on a trajectory for regular habitat renewal as well as increased persistence, storage of carbon, creation of structurally

¹ For example, Forest Bridges is finalizing policy papers and story maps on the Dry and Moist Forests, which buttress the PoAs, providing more details on our forest management proposals for the O&C Lands. These will be living documents posted to the FB website Spring 2023.

² For more information and maps of the O&C Lands [click here](#).

diverse forest, resistance to fire, and sustained growth and development. We look to Cultural Burning practices, partnering and co-management with Indigenous tribes on their terms as also integral to these proposals.

Forest Bridges finds that certain legal, financial and regulatory barriers to forest management and habitat renewal also need to be addressed. Addressing these barriers is necessary for the amenities of these lands to persist, particularly in the face of habitat losses from climate change and wildfire. As a result of the western Oregon Labor Day Fires of 2020, a recent example of severe habitat loss, FB hopes that public urgency will aid in addressing the barriers to effective forest management and securing the necessary financial support.

These Agreements are brief summary statements of policy. As these Principles of agreement were developed, the collaborators asked themselves: "If we accept the legal framework and governance that guide the O&C Lands, what would we change?" This led to the goal of a comprehensive set of Principles of Agreement. Ultimately, all of these areas of policy need to be recognized or addressed for increased effectiveness and longevity of our forests. Supporting information that expands these statements is being developed for Forest Bridges' website, where we will post additional supporting policy information. These principles reflect the wisdom of Forest Bridges collaborators, who have contributed to these Principles since inception in 2015. Changes are infrequent, but revisions are made over time to clarify and fill in certain areas when new information or insights become available from monitoring, or after significant events like the Labor Day fires of Western Oregon in 2020.

What follows is the collection of the Principles of Agreement agreed to and endorsed by Forest Bridges³ for the western Oregon O&C forest lands. It is intended to be welcomed by parties with diverse viewpoints and serve as a framework for improved management. **Asterisks (*) mark areas that need further collaboration to reach broader consensus.**

Legal Framework/Governance of O&C Lands

1. The O&C Act (The Revested Oregon and California Railroad Lands Sustained Yield Management Act of 1937) requires that the O&C Lands "shall be managed... for permanent forest production... in conformity with the principle of sustained yield for the purpose of providing a permanent source of timber supply, protecting watersheds, regulating of stream flow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, and providing recreational facilities."

Forest Bridges is working to find a path that provides a sustainable diversity of wildlife and other biological habitats on the O&C Lands, as well as a multitude of services for the public including recreation, a source of wood products and revenue for the Counties through active harvest in a plan of sustained yield forest management carried out by the respective land management agencies.

2. In addition to The 1937 O&C Act, the O&C Lands are also governed as applicable by other Federal laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and other federal legislation.

³ Forest Bridges' Board has adopted an annual updating process.

3. Forest Bridges' work and proposals focus on the O&C Lands uniquely found across rural Western Oregon, which include lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the Department of Interior, and the O&C Controverted Lands managed by the US Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture.
 - a. The 1937 O&C Act applies to all of the O&C Lands managed in the Department of Interior.
 - b. The O&C Controverted Lands managed by the US Forest Service are subject to the disposition of revenues in accordance with the O&C Act but are also subject to management under the National Forest Management Act as well as the Controverted Lands Act of June 24, 1951. As O&C Lands, Forest Bridges is including the Controverted Lands in its proposals.
4. The O&C Lands are to remain in Federal ownership, managed by the respective land management agencies with applicable management guidance.
5. 50% of revenues from O&C harvests are to continue to be distributed to the O&C counties.

Vision of Management Outcomes on O&C Lands

6. The present condition of much O&C land differs greatly from precolonial conditions due to the removal of Indigenous people, fire exclusion, past forestry activities, and inactivity. These changes have contributed to increased combustible fuel, increased densities of trees and simplification of stands. There is a shortage of both structurally complex forest generally and regularly generated and complex early seral habitats. There are also over- and under-abundances of standing dead trees (snags)* (e.g., snag retention for habitat contribution vs snag removal to reduce fire hazard*), as well as shortages and excesses of some other forest communities*.
7. While continuing to enhance the potential for conifer establishment, reforestation practices that yield longer and more complex early seral stages of habitat development for certain plant and animal species will be used and will generally not include herbicides. The exception: current herbicide practices would continue to be used where prescribed by the agencies for the control of invasive and non-native or noxious weeds on O&C Lands to make room for native species.
8. The specific proposals offered by Forest Bridges are intended to provide continuing sustained yield forestry to renew sustainable forest habitats across the O&C Lands. These proposals also perpetuate dynamic ecosystem integrity and a full range of healthy/resilient wildlife habitats for the endemic native species (as they shift with climate change), while continuing to provide wood, non-wood and economic values. Managing under this paradigm to sustain the diverse range of wildlife and other biological habitats, over time and across the O&C Lands, is a sound basis for a sustained yield forest plan.
9. We believe that continuing active and passive management strategies can speed ecosystem restoration and fire resistance, to support the regular progression of forest aging and development while also adapting those strategies to climate change. The science of managing

for structural forest complexity is rapidly advancing and monitoring will help increase our understanding of the impact of actions taken and not taken.

10. Actions that create typically low, short-term risks or costs (such as thinning, smoke from beneficial prescribed fire, or other tools of fuel reduction) must be weighed against the potential for consequent long-term gains (such as the reduction of severe wildfire and avoiding protracted and hazardous smoke.)
11. Forest Bridges endorses agency management changes that mitigate for climate change and the risk of high severity wildfires through a combination of Cultural, professional and science-based practices.

Recommended Approaches to Improve Management on O&C Lands

12. Our challenge is to describe an approach to active, long-term management of the O&C Lands that is constructive and viewed as reasonable from the perspective of all our partners and interest areas: Tribal Nations, ecological and climate resilience, legacy forests, wildlife and other biological habitats, timber and wood products production, county revenue expectations, recreation and other material and non-material values of the community at large.
13. An effective forest management plan for the O&C Lands should begin with long-range landscape visions for the dry, transitional and moist O&C forest lands, following the principles of comprehensive ecosystem management.

13a. Dry Forests: Due to past fire suppression, ineffective forest management, and climate change, the dry forest is overstocked generally and needs immediate site-specific density and fuels management. This includes the reintroduction of prescribed fire and strategic thinning that sustains legacy, fire resistance, appropriate structural diversity, and the full range of wildlife habitats. (Will be further described on the website and is subject to refinement.)*

13b. Transitional forests: These forests are intermediate in geographic location, moisture and other factors between the dry and moist forests. They behave like dry forests in severe fire conditions and many areas need thinning and prescribed fire to mimic a less frequent low severity fire pattern measured in decades rather than years. Some stands are more appropriate for moist forest treatment based on site specific characteristics, including moisture, lightning patterns, etc. (New category For Forest Bridges management proposals, needs further refinement in our public communications.)*

13c. Moist Forests: A process to regularly create early seral habitat with legacy and to accelerate toward the goal of 50% structurally complex forest is needed to sustain a range of habitats and ecosystem functions in moist forests over time. (Will be further described on the website and is subject to refinement.)*

14. Adaptive management is critical to successful long-term forest sustainability. Adaptive management means applying the best Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Indigenous Science and Western Science to management actions; monitoring what was done and assessing the changes

over time; then comparing the results with predicted expectations. Future plans and actions are modified based on the comparison of expectations and results.

15. Prescribed fire, other fuel reduction practices, and management should emulate the role of low- and moderate-intensity fire on these O&C Lands, including the reintroduction and flexibility for increased cool season burning modeled after Native American Burning practices. These and other strategies are critical for landscape restoration and resilience. Fire will continue to be suppressed and managed as needed when it poses risk to neighboring properties in the checkerboard. (Specifics supporting increased cool season burning will be developed in partnership with Tribes.)*
16. Recovery and Restoration following wildfire: Future Forest Plans shall anticipate entry into burned stands following stand replacement wildfire. The Plans shall contain the flexibility to relocate multiple years of planned green forest harvest acreage allocations anywhere on agency O&C Lands in Western Oregon. These burned area restoration harvests shall use the same harvest and green tree retention standards as in respective dry, transitional and moist forest stands.

The purpose is twofold: a) address a severe burn area, where a stand replacement fire resulted in high soil burn severity or killed at least 90% of the forest crown area and b) to minimize green forest harvest when time-sensitive restoration and recovery of burned areas is a higher priority.

Harvest operations shall mimic the planned green harvest volume with respect to green tree retention. Recovery operations shall begin immediately after the fire, as substitute volume within a previously approved Forest Plan. Green trees in any severely burned unit scheduled for harvest should be prioritized for retention as legacy trees. Additional wildfire acreage burned above multiyear plan capacity shall be fast-tracked to capitalize on value, sustain habitats, including reforestation, and minimize future risk of reburn and landslides, using these same strategies.

In case of especially large conflagrations the reallocation of green forest planned acreage to burned areas should not preclude continued high priority restoration and resiliency projects in the green forests. These projects increase short term harvest but reduce the potential impacts of future wildfires. Such “doubling up” of harvest during one planning cycle would have to be considered in volume available for harvest in subsequent forest plans or amendments.

(New Principle, subject to refinement.)*

17. Achieving optimal watershed health requires management across whole watersheds, but this project focuses only on the O&C Lands as Forest Bridges’ area of focus and an achievable step forward. Future adaptive management will further restore and sustain habitats on the O&C Lands within these watersheds.

17a. Habitat improvements on non-O&C Lands within the O&C checkerboard, beyond the requirements of applicable existing law, would be voluntary and require funding for commensurate compensation.

18. The historic, extensive valley bottom and midslope road systems in these lands impede watershed health and ought to be improved over time while right-of-way road access continues.

The historical natural range of variability of stream channel conditions should be locally optimized.

Recommendations for Addressing Barriers to Improved Management on O&C Lands

19. Both before and since the Northwest Forest Plan was developed in 1993, adequate monitoring has not been achieved on the O&C Lands. Dedicated and sufficient monitoring funds for an evaluative program must be provided. A diverse multi-stakeholder collaborative group should operate long-term on the O&C Lands to support adaptive management by the land management agencies.
20. Liabilities: The Loss of neighboring property owner value in the course of diligently conducted prescribed fire and other fuel reduction activities shall be indemnified or fairly compensated by the responsible party for value lost. This applies to all landowners and agencies. Alternative tools to prescribed fire, to reduce fuels and the risk of neighbor exposure, would also be employed. (Specific proposals to be developed)*
21. Reallocations and additional appropriations for the managing agencies will be required to cover the cost of FB's new management programs, over and above the current level of agencies' funding. We call this additional funding, "Sustainability Funds." These include ongoing monitoring and associated research, increased legacy restoration, greatly increased frequency of fuel reduction such as thinning and beneficial prescribed burning, public safety and adaptive management programs (Costs to be determined.)*
22. Implementation of management activities will require a timely path through the legal system. Legal consistency standards among laws, plans, and proposed actions shall allow both legal challenge and a streamlined resolution process for timely implementation. (Specific proposals to be developed)*
23. Public access to the O&C Lands generally shall be a goal, supported by funding that includes on-the-ground human presence for increased public safety capacity. (Specific programs to be developed.)*

Principles of Inclusive Operation

24. Forest Bridges shall implement Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies throughout its organization and work. (This Principle is currently reflected in Forest Bridges' draft forest science policy papers and associated story maps (for public release via its website), as well as in its DEI statement, Bylaws, and human resource policies (currently under development or revision).*)
25. Recognizing the historical importance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (i.e., Indigenous Science) and use of beneficial prescribed fire/cultural burning as active forest management approaches to fostering a balance of forest habitats and sustainability of native species and cultures, Forest Bridges promotes their use in active forest management on the O&C Lands,

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integrated with current ownership, laws, professional experience and co-management opportunities with the western Oregon Tribes.

* While all principles are subject to periodic update, an asterisk (*) marks principles that need further collaboration to reach broader consensus in the identified areas.