



Oregon Forest Industries Council

Managed access – 2010

Managing public recreational access to private forest lands helps cover landowners' costs and protects Oregon forests.

Overview

Forest landowners in Oregon and elsewhere continue to face intense marketplace pressures to maximize the return on the value of their forestland assets. Due to global competition and financial decline, the loss of manufacturing infrastructure, the cost of environmental regulation and other factors, the traditional way to maximize forestland asset value – the production of wood fibre – is becoming increasingly problematic. As a consequence, marketplace pressures are pushing forest landowners to look at monetizing non-commodity values where possible, or to convert their land to non-forest uses (development). Even in Oregon, where land use laws limit but do not preclude development opportunities, those pressures are strong and growing.

In addition to potential opportunities such as carbon markets, non-commodity attributes of private forestland include its value for public recreation. In the South, forest landowners have long recognized that value and have monetized it through the establishment of hunting clubs, leases and other mechanisms. In contrast, forest landowners in the West have traditionally allowed public recreational use free of charge. But that tradition is beginning to change.

While such a change may at the outset be socially wrenching to some degree, it is a transition that is probably inevitable and unavoidable. It is also a transition that lines up with the growing realization in the conservation community that, to maintain “working forests,” the economic values of forest land must equal or surpass the economic values of non-forest uses.

There are other factors that may help ease the transition. Due to increasing concerns with fire danger and problems with vandalism and other types of bad behavior, public access to private forestland in Oregon is already being limited – a trend that could be reversed using carefully-crafted managed access programs. Forest mismanagement and neglect of campgrounds, trails, etc, is diminishing recreational opportunities on federal forest lands, making private land an increasingly attractive option for higher quality recreational experiences. Also, the public is gradually coming to accept fees for a variety of recreational activities, and is looking, due to high fuel costs, for places to pursue such activities closer to home.

Exploratory managed access and lease pilot projects are being conducted by some landowners to evaluate revenue potential, operational feasibility, liability and public acceptance.

Position

Forest landowners have both a right and a marketplace-driven obligation to maximize both the commodity and non-commodity values of their land, including the value of recreational use by the public.