



**Forest Bridges: The O&C Forest Habitat Project, Inc.
A Vision-Driven Collaboration Addressing Forest Health and Climate Change
Proposed Long-Term, Slow-Active and Light-Touch Management for Sustainable Habitats
and Fire Resilience across the O&C BLM Forest Lands of Western Oregon**

Executive Summary

The O&C BLM Forest Habitat Project (“the Project”) was formed in January 2015 as a collaboration of three individuals who continue to work intensively along with others to resolve differing perspectives among timber, conservation, and community interests. This current effort focuses on the Oregon and California Railroad Grant (O&C) and Bureau of Land management (BLM) lands. It has been shared with tribes, the scientific community, and stakeholders including conservationists, timber industry, and the O&C Counties. All share a common interest in further development of this proposal for BLM forest land management in western Oregon. Ultimately, federal action will be required.

The purpose of the Project is to conceive a habitat-driven, sustainable forest management approach to the O&C BLM forests, which can provide timber revenues to the O&C Counties as originally contemplated by the O&C Act while respecting and protecting the entire forest ecosystem, especially watersheds, also required by the Act. The Project proposes a long-term vision and strategies to sustain ecosystem integrity with habitat diversity for the BLM moist and dry forests. A transition period of at least 60 years will be required to begin to achieve the distribution of age classes and stand composition that we envision. Ultimate achievement of the project goals could take centuries. Rural jobs will be created.

Periodic forest management plans will be developed and implemented by BLM, based upon the vision and very long-term goals of the Project, which include:

- A diverse and age-distributed forest landscape that is approximately 50% structurally complex to meet habitat concerns;
- Adaptation to climate change including increased carbon sequestration toward achieving historic carbon storage patterns of moist and dry forests;
- Resilient watersheds supporting healthy populations of native forest species (plants and animals broadly) and providing dependable clean water supplies;
- Use of timber harvest and active management to emulate the natural effects of fire;
- Economically healthy O&C Counties, receiving sustainable timber revenues, and building strategic reserves;
- Respect for private holdings within the checkerboard of O&C BLM lands, and encouragement of mutual cooperation in seeking the long-term goals; and

- Comprehensive monitoring and adaptive management, based on peer-reviewed best science are essential, and shall be adequately and permanently funded through “O&C Sustainability Receipts.”

Context

Forest management will be ecosystem-based, including rigorous, sound habitat and watershed protection, largely requirements of current federal law. Management according to this vision will enhance habitat of the O&C BLM lands for the well – being of all forest species. A goal of habitat and watershed improvement and protection would also be to diminish the need for future listings of forest species under the Endangered Species Act.

Today the forest structure and age classes are out of balance on the O&C BLM lands, with a disproportionate representation of younger age classes with simpler structures. This proposal envisions slow/active light touch approaches, evolving the forest over time to an optimum balance of age classes and species. The aim is for little to no traditional clear-cuts nor large single age plantations on BLM land. Instead, multi – aged management, thinning, and variable retention regeneration harvest strategies would be carefully applied and tailored to reflect the different needs of dry and moist forest stands across all ages. Legacy trees would remain, while some older and larger trees would be harvested to make way for younger and smaller trees. The outcomes sought would include fire-resilience, quality habitat, and a healthy progression from early seral to structurally complex stands.

Habitat development on BLM land would take into account the realities presented by the checkerboard ownership of O&C and private lands. It would seek to cooperatively improve pathways for migration and other movement of forest species. The envisioned road system would be adequate for management and public access, yet one that minimizes interference with the forest watershed function. Finally, reliable funding of ongoing monitoring and adaptive management is essential for demonstrating that the BLM is on track to achieve the long-range outcomes of this vision, and to acquire and maintain broad acceptance of this proposal.

Governing Concepts of the O&C BLM Forest Habitat Project

The O&C BLM Forest Habitat Project proposes a very long-term (centuries), slow/active and light touch management strategy to sustain habitats across the landscape for the O&C BLM Forest Lands of Western Oregon, including the following:

Current Guidance

- The O&C BLM lands shall remain in Federal ownership, managed by the BLM agency.

- The O&C lands are governed by the O&C Act, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Clean Water Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and other federal legislation.
- The O&C Act specifies that these lands shall be managed for permanent forest production in conformity with the principal of sustained yield for the purpose of providing a permanent source of timber supply, protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, while providing recreational facilities.

Current Challenges

- The present condition of much O&C BLM land differs greatly from historic conditions due to human settlement, fire exclusion and past forestry activities. There is a shortage of structurally complex forest, natural pre-forest, standing snags, and other habitats. The present distribution of stand age classes is unnatural.
- Current herbicide practices and reforestation densities on non-federal lands preclude natural early seral habitat development for certain pre-forest species.
- The extensive valley bottom road system in these lands impedes watershed health and should be improved (design, condition and location) while right of way road access continues.

Goals

Our challenge is to describe an approach to active, long-term management of the O&C BLM Lands that is constructive and viewed as fair from all points of view: timber production, county revenue needs, and the ecological and other non-material values of the community at large. The O&C BLM lands must provide the full range of habitats for the historically endemic biota and maintain watershed health. Achieving optimal watershed health requires management across whole watersheds but this project focuses only on the Western Oregon O&C BLM land portion as an achievable step forward.

1. The science of managing for structural complexity in forests is rapidly advancing. We believe active management can speed restoration, support natural processes and help us to understand them.
2. Due to past fire suppression policy and continuing climate change, the dry forest needs immediate density and fuels management including the reintroduction of prescribed fire.
3. Land management shall consider adaptation strategies for changing climate, including the gradual increase of O&C BLM forest carbon sequestration over an extended period of time with the goal of achieving the pre-1750 historic patterns across moist and dry forests.

Management Strategies

1. Active, adaptive management plans shall be responsible for restoring and protecting watersheds with O&C BLM lands that have been degraded from past forestry activities, and is critical to a successful management plan. In this project adaptive management means: applying the best science to management actions; monitoring both what was done and, through time, what are the results; and comparing the results with predicted expectations and modifying future actions based on the comparison.
2. An effective forest management plan for the O&C BLM lands should begin with ecologically driven long range landscape visions for the Moist and Dry forests.
3. Managing for a diverse range of habitats is a sound basis for a sustained yield forest plan. For this proposal, sustained yield forestry means forest management that perpetuates ecosystem integrity while continuing to provide wood and non-wood goods and services.
4. Short term risks must be weighed against the potential for consequent long term gain.
5. Neighboring forest landowners should be incentivized to restore their portions of watersheds beyond basic state requirements where appropriate.
6. Historical natural range of variability of stream channel conditions should be ensured.
7. The natural role of fire will not be allowed on O&C BLM lands due to the unique checkerboard pattern of ownership and the fire exclusion policy of neighboring landowners. Active fuels management shall replace and emulate the role of fire to perpetuate ecosystem integrity.
8. Continuous creation of early seral forests with legacy (the “pre-forest” condition) is needed in moist forests to sustain a range of habitats and ecosystem functions.

Comprehensive Federal Action, Implementation and Revenues

1. Harvest and revenues will be allowed under the guidance of these management strategies. To the extent that the counties require additional revenues, other sources will have to be found.
2. Successful implementation will come through advocacy to public sector stakeholders, and will be built upon trust and broad social support for the health and sustainability of rural communities and landscapes.
3. Implementation will also 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 implementation.
4. Adaptive management and ongoing monitoring shall follow best science. Monitoring evaluates the ongoing adherence and relevance of the management activities. It adds relevant

data to assess legal consistency and inform future management activities under the Law and Plan. Measures of forest habitat, outputs, water and fire will be monitored.

5. 50% of revenues from O&C land harvests will be distributed to the O&C counties.
6. The remaining 50% of revenues, “O&C Sustainability Receipts,” shall fund ongoing monitoring of O&C BLM forest and habitat conditions, adaptive management, legacy restoration, and as well as restoration incentives for adjacent non-O&C BLM lands.
7. To emulate the historic role of fire, changes will be required to allow more frequent moderate prescribed fire events. This is necessary to decrease periodic high-hazard fire and smoke events while the 100-year backlog of dead fuels is consumed.
8. Forest Bridges shall implement Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies throughout its work.

For Further information see our website, forestbridges.org, and become a Friend.

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