As I sit in my home office and write this, I’m looking out my window at a fresh dusting of snow with daffodil bulbs starting to break through the earth. Spring is a time for renewal and growth, and I think we all need that more than ever this year. Take advantage of this extra time at home and on your land to be inspired. It’s the perfect time to tackle projects that can improve the health of your forest and rejuvenate both you and the land.

Maybe you want to encourage more wildlife on your property. On page 3, there is a great article covering elk and how you can promote them on your land. You might be thinking that it’s time to get out and survey your roads or property boundaries. There’s an app for that! Read more about it on page 6. February is the perfect time to plant seedlings in Western Oregon. Check out page 7 for a great reforestation reference and page 11 for a little tree identification lesson. And if you’re considering selling logs soon, check out page 9 to read about common challenges when marketing timber.

We also have an article detailing a new research project looking into redwood in Oregon (page 8). If you have coast redwood or giant sequoia planted on your property, we’d love to hear about it. Please contact us so you can participate in the upcoming survey.

Whatever projects and opportunities await you, take some time to renew, refresh, and enjoy our beautiful Oregon forests. Happy spring!

Alicia & Lauren
Douglas & Lane County Extension Foresters
Upcoming Events

Feb. 6  LANE COUNTY SMALL WOODLANDS ASSOC. ANNUAL SEEDLING SALE. Doors open at 8am, but folks start arriving up to an hour ahead of time. Alton Baker Park (Eugene) on the east end of the park off the Day Island Rd. entrance. Seedlings are sold on a first come first serve basis and the sale ends at noon or when sold out. Prices per seedling vary. Bare root/plugs: incense cedar, grand fir, coastal redwood, giant sequoia, western redcedar, Douglas-fir, Willamette Valley ponderosa pine, noble fir. Native plants: Oregon grape, nuka rose, snowberry, mock orange, thimbleberry, pacific ninebark, cascar, Douglas spirea, red flowering currant, & ferns. Cash/check only.

Feb. 11  LAND STEWARD PROGRAM. This is an online course that combines 9 self-paced modules with 3 instructor-led webinars. The 3 webinars feature resource experts from your region. It is designed for busy adults who enjoy online learning, want to create goals for their land, & learn how to achieve them. Topics covered include: forest/woodland management, wildfire preparedness, wildlife habitat, stream management, healthy soils, pasture management, rural water-systems, rural economics/enterprise, & how to find resources/get help. Class fee is $150. Register by Feb. 9th. For more information & to register, visit https://beav.es/JQQ.

Mar. 9  CHRISTMAS TREE OUTLOOK. Virtual presentation. 6pm – 7:30pm. Join us with OSU Extension Christmas Tree Specialist, Chal Landgren (he will be retiring soon) & Research Technician, Judy Kowalski to get the latest updates relevant to growing Christmas trees. Topics include trends in the industry, outlook for future, & current research on tree varieties and cultural techniques. FREE. For more information & to register, visit https://beav.es/JQx.

Mar. 16  CARBON IN OREGON’S MANAGED FORESTS. Virtual presentation. 3pm – 4:30pm. Mike Cloughesy will give an overview, including a look at the recent “Oregon Forest Ecosystem Carbon Inventory & the Role of Wood Products in Carbon Storage.” Edie Sonne Hall will discuss “Managing Forests to Increase Their Carbon Storage, Productivity & Resiliency.” David Ford will discuss “Current & Future Markets for Carbon & Co-Benefits from Oregon Forests.” FREE. For more information & to register, visit https://beav.es/JQN.

Tree School Online

All sessions are offered from 3pm – 4:30pm

Feb. 16 BIOLOGY & MANAGEMENT OF OREGON WHITE OAK. This course will review the biology & management of OR white oak including regeneration, thinning, removing conifers around/above oaks, & predicting growth.

Mar. 2 CHOOSING THE RIGHT FORESTRY PROFESSIONALS. An experienced forestry professional can generate better financial returns, enhance the long-term value of your forest, & help you attain your management objectives. This session will share resources and lessons learned to assist landowners in thinking about how & when to hire forestry professionals to provide important services.


April 6 NATIVE TREES OF WESTERN OREGON. This session will give you all the tricks of the trade to identify common native trees in Western Oregon – even the look-a-likes! We will also discuss the tree’s life characteristics, so you know how to give your trees what they need to stay healthy.

April 20 TREES ON THE MOVE: MIGRATION OF TREE SPECIES IN RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE. Learn where tree species are growing today & where they’re expected to do well in the future—they’re not necessarily the same. Learn how you can make wise tree planting decisions—even with climate change.
Wild Wapiti, Ornery Elk

By Thomas Stokely, OSU Extension Forestry Agent – Central Oregon  |  thomas.stokely@oregonstate.edu

North American elk, originally and more aptly named wapiti, are an iconic and treasured species of the American West. You may have heard their bugles in the distance, or maybe you’ve been up close and personal on a hunt. Perhaps you’ve witnessed them taking a peaceful stroll on the beach, or slip away like a ghost into the dense forests they often inhabit. These massive creatures are more than just a majestic animal to observe, or a steak for the dinner table. They are a key part of western landscapes, often having substantial influence on ecosystems due to their voracious appetites and ornery nature.

TAXONOMY AND RANGE

Wapiti (Cervus canadensis) are classified as ungulates (i.e., hooved animals) from the deer family, closely related to black-tailed and mule deer. Two subspecies inhabit Western Oregon, Roosevelt elk (C. c. roosevelti) and Rocky Mountain elk (C. c. nelsoni), occurring in different geographic areas, but overlapping and interbreeding where their ranges overlap. Roosevelt elk are known for the coastal and cascade rainforests they inhabit, ranging from Northern California to the BC Coast Ranges. They are the third largest native land mammal in North America, with bulls (i.e., mature males) weighing up to 1200 lbs! Rocky Mountain elk, the smaller and more nomadic subspecies, range from the Cascades throughout the Intermountain West and in reintroduced areas across the Eastern US, utilizing a variety of forest and non-forest ecosystems.

BIOLOGY

Wapiti are ruminant animals, meaning they have a multi-chambered stomach with a “rumen” chamber which contains a community of bacteria and fungi that help digest a variety of plant matter, such as cellulose that makes up the tough cell walls of plants. Considered both grazers (i.e., consuming whole herbaceous plant parts) and browsers (i.e., consuming just the buds and foliage of perennial plants), wapiti consume a variety of plants, including grasses, forbs, shrubs and small trees. Once consumed, plant matter is fermented in the rumen chamber, regurgitated, chewed again, swallowed and eventually passed on to the other three stomach chambers, in a process called rumination. This strategy also allows them to quickly consume mass amounts of forage in the open and then move to more secure locations where they can rest and carry-on rumination, which they spend the majority of their life doing. Especially crucial for females (i.e., cows) carrying young, these walking fermentation machines must consume enough forage in the summer to build a fat reserve that lasts until the spring. Wapiti differ from black- and whited-tailed deer in that they are less selective about what they eat, also differing from deer in that rather than bounding to escape predators, wapiti trot and run with their heads held high to spot incoming predators.

BEHAVIOR

Wapiti are considered herd animals, travelling in small or large social units, called “gangs”, often aggregating into larger groups during the winter. Gangs are generally comprised of a harem of cows, calves, pre-breeding-age males and often a bull that vies for breeding in the fall. Non-dominant bulls are often either solitary or travel in bachelor groups, following the rest of the herd in their seasonal movements and competing with dominant bulls during the breeding season. Such a herding behavior is also advantageous for predator avoidance, taking advantage of “sentinels”, or individuals that keep watch for approaching predators while the herd is foraging or resting. Although only bulls will bugle, wapiti use vocalizations and olfactory cues to communicate, and interestingly, also “crack” their knuckles as a
cue to inform other wapiti of their presence in dense vegetation. Although westside wapiti often occupy the brushiest of areas, they also seek out open areas so they can more-easily spot approaching predators from afar. Rocky Mountain elk are migratory in behavior, roaming to higher-elevation meadows where forage is prolific during the summer, and back down to lower-elevation forests and valleys to avoid deep snow in the winter. Roosevelt elk on the other hand, are generally non-migratory due to the more-temperate climate of the coastal forests.

FOREST INTERACTIONS
Wapiti utilize a variety of forest types throughout their lives. Forest openings contain an abundance of broadleaf and herbaceous forage plants, and historically, wapiti would seek out forage in meadows and disturbed areas affected by fire, flooding and windthrow. Dense, closed canopy forests contain little in the way of forage, but serve as cover to evade and hide from predators and to stay cool in the summer and warmer in the winter. Structurally-diverse old-growth forests also provide a variety of cover types for wapiti, especially when those forests contain dense hiding cover, large canopy gaps for foraging, and open-mature stands with clear site lines. Due to their need to consume enough forage to support such large bodies, wapiti can have substantial influence on forest vegetation. In cases throughout the west, abundant herds have altered forest succession by selectively browsing their favored forage plants, and in some cases reducing the abundance of broadleaf cover that other wildlife require, such as migratory songbirds. These large herbivores can also promote nutrient cycling via scat inputs to the soil, and their meat is an important food source for a variety of carnivores and scavengers. Although they were almost hunted to extirpation in the late 1800s-early 1900s, wapiti have made a substantial comeback in certain areas with the aid of conservation efforts, now taking advantage of harvested forest stands to seek out forage. In this way, wapiti can become a problem for forest management activities when they browse and uproot young planted seedlings. In some cases, wapiti can clear our freshly-planted stands, sometimes uprooting seedlings without even taking a bite! In other cases, you may notice that wapiti tend to prefer deciduous shrubs, forbs, and grasses, and recent evidence suggests they can help control competition with conifer saplings. Ornery bulls also rub their antlers on young trees in territorial disputes, often girdling the them, while both sexes will even eat away at bark in the early spring to get at the sugars flowing within.

MITIGATING WAPITI DAMAGE IN FORESTS
Controlled hunts have been widely used to control damage on private forestlands. However, active culling doesn’t mean that damage won’t occur, as forest openings will continue to provide forage and attract these hungry herbivores. If damage is a problem for your reforestation efforts, contact your local Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife office for information on damage and landowner hunting permits. Protective measures, such as cages, tubes and fencing are often effective in allowing seedlings to become established and eventually grow above browsing height, although these measures may be costly and require some maintenance. Repellants can also be applied to deter browsing, but must be applied repeatedly in rainy conditions. Although you may notice browsing occurring, vigorously-growing trees in Western Oregon often store enough energy to eventually grow above and escape browsing, given low levels of competition with other plants.

WAYS TO PROMOTE WAPITI
Since wapiti have a high societal value, being hunted as big game and sought out by wildlife enthusiasts, people often have many reasons to keep them around. Promoting forage openings while maintaining hiding and escape cover can be critical for wapiti throughout Oregon. Thinning operations may be insufficient for releasing their favored forage plants, so creating large
canopy gaps (>1/2 acre) in combination with variable-density thinning has potential for providing a range of conditions for them to utilize, including dense patches of un-harvested trees. When preparing harvested areas for reforestation, consider seeding some areas with native forage species or retaining patches of naturally-regenerating vegetation during site-preparation treatments. If you live by an open water source, maintaining native vegetation cover and retaining riparian corridors can greatly improve the suitability of your property for wapiti. Wapiti typically avoid active road systems, so creating foraging openings away from open roads and limiting traffic in overwintering areas is also often critical for their survival. To avoid unnecessary mortality of these majestic creatures, clear your property of items that can entangle antlers and hooves (e.g., loose wire, hammocks, rope) and consider using wildlife-friendly fencing to allow them to easily pass over or under. Poaching continues to be a major problem for deer and wapiti populations; if you suspect a poaching case has occurred, immediately report it to the Oregon State Police TIP line.

REFERENCES & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION


USDA OFFERS NEW FOREST MANAGEMENT INCENTIVE FOR CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

If you have land already enrolled in the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), then you are eligible to participate in the Forest Management Incentive (FMI). The FMI is a cost-share program for landowners to thin forests already enrolled in CRP.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is making available $12 million to forest landowners enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) who want to implement healthy forest management practices. Landowners can now sign-up for the Forest Management Incentive (FMI), which provides incentives to landowners with land in CRP to encourage proper tree thinning and other practices.

Right now, less than 10% of land currently enrolled in CRP is dedicated to forestland. But these nearly 2 million acres of CRP forestland, if properly managed, can have enormous benefits for natural resources by reducing soil erosion, protecting water quality, increasing water quantity and diversifying local farm operations and rural economies.

Only landowners and agricultural producers with active CRP contracts involving forest cover can enroll. This does not include active CRP contracts that expire within two years. Existing CRP participants interested in tree thinning and prescribed burning must comply with the standards and specifications established in their CRP contract. CRP participants receive the incentive payment once tree thinning and other authorized forest management practices are completed.

The incentive payment is the lower of these two options:
1. The actual cost of completing the practice; or
2. 75% of the payment rate offered by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), if the practice is offered through NRCS conservation programs.

More on CRP
Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended primarily to control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits. The program marks its 35-year anniversary this month.

For more information, contact
Georgina Kennedy  |  Douglas Soil & Water Conservation District – CREP Technician  |  USDA
Georgina.kennedy@usda.gov  |  541-378-3535
Digital Mapping Tools: Part 1, the Basics

By Norma Kline, OSU Extension Forestry Agent – Coos & Curry Counties & Alicia Christiansen, OSU Extension Forestry Agent, Douglas County

Are you interested in digital mapping tools for your smart phone or tablet? Here are a few resources to help you get started or improve your skills. First, let’s make sure you are getting the most out of the map app that came with your smart phone or tablet. When you open your map app you will see a dot showing your present location, which is determined using a combination of GPS satellites and cell phone towers (this technology is called Assisted GPS). This location dot shows up on a basic map layer displaying roads and waterways.

You also have the option of switching the base layer to satellite imagery by using the small icon in the top right of the screen. In Apple Maps this is an “i” symbol and in Google Maps it is a little box-like symbol.

Satellite imagery is a great tool for looking at landscape features on your property. Zoom in to see the difference between conifers and hardwoods and even different sizes of trees.

Pins, or marked locations, are a useful feature as they allow you to save the location of a point of interest on your property for future reference. You can do this by holding your finger on the screen at the desired point and follow the pop-up menu options to give the point a unique name. In Apple Maps a “save to” menu option will appear. In Google Maps, you’ll be prompted to sign in to “save” or “label” the dropped pin location. You might drop pins at culvert locations or in an area with a root rot pocket. If you are taking stocking surveys to measure reforestation success, drop a pin at each stocking survey plot. Just remember, the accuracy of your phone GPS is not as high as the better-quality GPS units but it should be good enough to allow you to find the point again. To re-locate the point, select the dropped pin and follow the general navigation directions back to the point. Make sure to carry a paper map and compass if you are not familiar with the terrain.

A number of apps are available to download from your trusted App store if you would like to explore additional digital map options. Avenza Maps is an example of a free app that gives users access to a map store where they can download a wide range of map resources including recreational road maps, trail maps, topographic maps, and maps with aerial imagery. Many maps in the Avenza Maps store are free while others require purchase. Once a map is downloaded to a device, Avenza Maps does not require a cell signal or internet connection to function, making this a very useful feature for many forest management activities.

There are a variety of ways that you can utilize Avenza Maps to help manage your property. Maybe you want to map general locations of trails, roads, property boundaries, or harvest unit boundaries to help you better understand the layout and features on your property. Using the “record GPS tracks” feature, you can record the path that you walk or drive and as you travel, the GPS will be enabled and record your tracks on the map. For example, while you’re out on your land, you might come across a feature not displayed on an aerial photo, like a recent patch of blowdown. You can turn on GPS tracks and walk the boundary of the blowdown patch. Later, you can use the “draw and measure” tool to trace your tracks around the blowdown to calculate the total area of the patch (note that in the paid version of this app, Avenza Maps can calculate area based on your tracks, saving you a step). You can store multiple tracks as different layers on a map, allowing you to see all the different features where you traveled on your property. Recording your tracks will also allow you to record total distance, average speed, and elevation changes while you map out property features.

Another useful tool Avenza Maps provides is the ability to draw and measure on the map. You might want to measure the distance between two points if you’re out on your property and wondering how much farther it is to the next ridge, property corner, road, or other feature you’re looking for. Using the “measure distance” tool, you can find out just how far it is to your destination. Avenza Maps also allows you to draw on the map while you’re in the field. This can be used similarly to the “drop
Continued from page 6 (Digital Mapping Tools: Part 1, the Basics)

pin” feature, where you can note areas of interest. Avenza Maps also has a “plot photo” feature that allows the user to link a digital photo to its geotagged map location. This would be a great way to record the images of various projects like thinning, planting, or erosion problems.

For more information on Avenza Maps, visit https://www.avenzamaps.com/ or download it from your smart devices’ App Store.

Stay tuned for our next article in this series where we will explore more mapping apps and how to use them.

Trade-name products and services are mentioned as illustrations only. This does not mean that the Oregon State University Extension Service either endorses these products and services or intends to discriminate against products and services not mentioned.

Tree planting & care guide updated

The Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) collaborated with Alicia Christiansen with OSU Extension to update a guide for Western Oregon forest landowners. Establishing and Managing Forest Trees in Western Oregon offers practical information for family forest landowners to help them care for their forestland. This includes descriptions of common trees found in western Oregon, as well as tips for establishing tree plantings, protecting new plantings from competing vegetation and animals, and tending to young trees. It also includes information on forest management planning and resources where Oregon forest landowners can get assistance with forestry projects.

Print and digital copies of Establishing and Managing Forest Trees in Western Oregon are free and available to order or download here: https://beav.es/JP7

Were you affected by the 2020 wildfires? Do you need to plant trees on your burned land? Have you ordered the seedlings you need?

If you need to plant trees and have not been able to find seedlings, please fill out this online survey form. Consider signing up to be included in a new program to provide seedlings at fair market prices for landowners affected by the fires.

Due to the wildfires, along with previously planned reforestation demand, availability of tree seedlings and tree planters is expected to be far short of what is needed over the next few years. OSU Extension is working with the Oregon Small Woodlands Association, Oregon Department of Forestry, US Forest Service, and other partners to assess the reforestation need and develop extra capacity to produce seedlings and plant trees.

We want to know who needs trees (and how many and when they’re needed) in order to set our targets for aggregated seeding orders for people who have not been able to find trees. We are working on an order for 2021-2022, to be followed by longer range nursery orders to meet expected demand over the next several years.

If you are interested in ordering seedlings through this program, please use the survey form to get on our list and we be in touch with you to confirm details (click on the link below to take the survey).

Reforestation Assistance Survey Link: https://beav.es/JPA

If you have questions about this survey or this reforestation effort for fire affected landowners, please contact Glenn Ahrens at glenn.ahrens@oregonstate.edu or 503-655-8631.

Planter using a hoedad to plant on the Modoc National Forest for the Miller Fire Project. Photo by Pacific Southwest Forest Service, flickr.
Extension foresters note trend in redwood plantings, plan needs assessment

By Kim Pokorny, OSU Extension Public Service Communications Specialist
Story Source: Alicia Christiansen, OSU Extension Forestry Agent, Douglas County

CORVALLIS, Ore. – The majestic redwood tree – iconic to California’s northern coast – is becoming more prevalent in Oregon.

“We have landowners in western Oregon growing redwood trees for one reason or another,” said Alicia Christiansen, Oregon State University Extension Service forestry specialist. “There’s everything from something that’s cool in the yard to small woodland owners who plant several acres.”

Christiansen and her colleagues started to notice a possible trend and decided it was time to do a needs assessment in order to identify who is planting redwoods and why. She, along with OSU Extension forestry specialists Dan Stark, Norma Kline, Dave Shaw, Lauren Grand, Glenn Ahrens, Steve Fitzgerald and Jon Souder, formed a Growing Redwoods Group and plan a survey in February.

Once they collect information, the foresters will determine where to put energy as they work with landowners. Christiansen stressed that the group is responding to the needs of a growing number of Oregonians interested in redwoods, not promoting the planting of this species outside its native range in Oregon.

After the survey is completed, the Growing Redwoods Group plans to hold a symposium for Extension forestry faculty and partners to learn about the tree from people who work in various aspects of forestry, including forest health, ecology and fire issues.

“From that point, we will bring the information back to landowners,” Christiansen said. “Our end goal is for people to understand the pros and cons to growing it. It’s a very cool tree, but there’s a lot to think of if you’re going to grow them.”

Redwoods, which are native from the central California coast up to just a bit over the Oregon border, can grow taller than a soaring 350 feet. Very few in the forestry industry grow redwoods outside their native range, but there are some who planted them many years ago and are still waiting for the trees to grow large enough to harvest. It’s not a fast process, Christiansen said.

But in their native habitat, redwoods grow four to five feet a year. The trees thrive near the ocean, where they take in moisture from the fog in their upper canopy. Because water is so important, they don’t grow as fast inland or get as tall unless planted in a homeowner’s landscape where they get supplemental irrigation. Homeowners should think carefully before planting redwoods near homes, roads and septic tanks as they can become a nuisance.

Not only that, whoever is growing them has to be sure there’s a mill close enough that’s equipped to handle redwoods. She knows of only one and it’s in southern Oregon, a long way from most people who would – or already are – growing them.

“If you’re not in it for the money and have the right site, it’s a nice thing,” Christiansen said. “If you’re looking for profit for you or your heirs, it depends on when you’ll be able to harvest and how you’ll get it to a mill. That all adds up. They’re not going to waste all those acres of wood.”

An easy-to-grow tree with few pest or disease issues, redwoods are very profitable if grown near a mill, Christiansen said. More profitable than Oregon’s Douglas-fir, redwood is highly valued for its color and ability to wear well, which is why it’s so often the choice for outdoor decks, arbors and other structures.

As beautiful and profitable as they are, redwoods are non-native to most of the state, which brings up the question of what kind of impact it might have on the ecology where they are planted.

“Any time you’re growing a tree of any species outside of its native range there’s always some unknowns about what kind ecological impact it will have,” Christiansen said. “If a landowner transfers to redwoods from Doug-fir, we don’t know the survivability of the species or impact on the site.”

Many questions remain, and the group is anxious to start doing case studies, especially of private landowners who have been growing redwoods for 20 or 30 years. There’s a lot to be learned.

“It is a really pretty tree,” Christiansen said. “There’s a lot of appeal about growing redwoods. It’s an emotional thing. It’s not hard to see why someone would want to grow them.”
Common challenges to consider when marketing timber on the Westside

By Lauren Grand, OSU Extension Forestry & Natural Resources Agent, Lane County; & Francisca Belart, OSU Extension Forestry & Natural Resources Timber Harvesting Specialist.

Marketing is the art and science of selling timber at a price as close to its true market value as possible. Effective marketing is one of the most valuable tools a landowner has for selling timber and maximizing profit.

Timber marketing success relies on a good understanding of local timber end products, a good estimate of what a landowner has for sale and distance to the manufacturing facilities, an understanding of yearly market fluctuations and trends, and competition between buyers for the products. Timber is a valuable forest product, so each of these concepts should be researched well. Despite being vigilant in your research, landowners on the Westside of the cascades can often face some common challenges. In this article we’ll discuss common marketing challenges and offer some suggestions on how you might be able to avoid them.

LANDOWNERS ARE MARKET TAKERS

Timber prices respond to market demands, policies and tariffs, pests and fire events, wood product international trading, and how manufacturing facilities respond in preparation for weather. These fluctuations are what affects the inventory at the mills and therefore the prices that small landowners are quoted. Collectively, small landowners make up less than a quarter of the total timber harvest in the Pacific Northwest. This means they don’t have enough volume individually or collectively to move the market when it comes to prices. As a result, landowners are subject to those quoted prices with little flexibility. This is why they are often referred to as price takers, because they must accept the current prices as quoted and do not have enough volume to affect the flow of supply and demand the way larger companies or other countries do.

For this reason, researching market fluctuations is important. The trend is for early spring prices to be the highest and summer to be the lowest, but foreign policy, tariffs, and other external factors can change the usual course of the prices. For example, local mills might want to stock up before fire season, but may acquire too much inventory which can lower timber prices, this and better access to harvest units usually leads to lower prices in the summer. The wet season, early to mid-spring, is often the best time economically to sell logs and timber. This is however, the hardest time to access the trees. Depending on how much volume and quality of timber there is to sell, making the investment to rock roads may help the woodland owner capitalize on stronger markets.

MARKETS FLUCTUATE QUICKLY

It is ill advised to rush into a timber sale without knowing current log values and how they fit into seasonal trends. While planning a timber sale, investigate the market’s strengths and weaknesses by contacting the local log buyers, a consulting forester, or the local Extension agent to learn prices and what species are in demand. These prices change rapidly, and repeat calls may be necessary to keep up with fluctuations. A strong (or weak) timber market in general does not necessarily correlate with the strength of markets for specific species or products. For example, sawlogs may be in demand with high prices while the chip market is in a surplus and offering low prices. For these reasons, it is important to call multiple log buyers that represent manufacturing facilities or sort yards with a diversity of end use products. The disparities between general and specific market conditions can complicate marketing activities, but they also provide tremendous opportunity for woodland owners willing to invest the time and resources into knowing what they have in the forest, what products can be produced from their trees, and which products different market segments are willing to purchase.

Once you have a purchase order in place, play special attention to the expiration dates. Your purchase order will be for an agreed upon price, by the log buyer and landowner, for a fixed period of time, usually one or two months. Many small landowners get into a situation where they are still harvesting beyond their purchase order’s expiration date. Because the market will continue to fluctuate, landowners should communicate with their log buyer throughout the harvest time to update their purchase order to reflect the most accurate price. Not communicating with your log buyer can result in huge price
A timber cruise can offer a simple way to not only estimate the volume of wood, but identify the product types and tree quality. Photo by: Lynn Ketchum, OSU Extension.

reductions if their inventory is full, if they are looking for different products, or if their prices increased, but the landowner didn’t update the purchase order.

The goal of a good marketing strategy is to diversify products to extract the highest value within the harvesting time frame. Having a written plan does not ensure success, but it helps landowners focus their energy on harvesting the logs that are currently at the peak of the market. When all log sorts (species, size, and quality) are mixed together in what is called a camp run sale, the revenue potential may be decreased. However, there are some cases when it is possible that sorting and selling to multiple buyers will generate less revenue than selling all logs to one buyer. This is due to additional logging and hauling costs, the need for larger landings, and the possible cost of logs being shipped to the wrong mill.

Lastly, good loggers are hard to come by for small landowners, so you can imagine they are like unicorns in the enchanted forest when prices go up. With a plan, landowners can have most of their homework completed including the marking and cruising for units coming up for sale, current price history for their logs, and loggers they’d be willing to hire identified. With all this pre-work completed, the landowner just has to get a purchase order and schedule the logger, saving them time before the market busts.

LACK OF PUBLISHED INFORMATION

While current prices are published for most widely traded commodities, only past pricing is available for timber. This is because of the variation in species and products, as well as proprietary information within the industry. With the exception of high-value export logs, prices are typically determined by the local timber buyers and the demand for lumber products at that time. Most natural resource government agencies have a website where they post past prices, but these can be from as much as two years behind. There are some Extension blogs and paid newsletters that are available and offer price information as little as a few weeks to one month behind. However, the best source of current prices are the log buyers themselves. Building a relationship with a buyer and inviting them out to your property or working with a forestry consultant is the best way to get the most accurate prices for your timber.

UNDERSTANDING THE NUMEROUS MARKET OPTIONS

Today, most log mills can only use specific log sizes and species needed to manufacture the specific wood products they sell. As a result, not all species, sizes, and qualities of logs will be used by any given mill. Large timber owners manage their forests to grow trees that match their mill specifications, but this is rarely the objective of a small landowner. For this reason, we often see mismatched trees-to-sawmill specs, which is what creates price differentials among species and qualities of logs. To get the best prices, landowners should be looking for mills whose log requirements match most closely the characteristics of the logs they plan to sell. This is the reason it is recommended that you sell logs to more than one purchaser to get the maximum value for your logs. Additionally, there are numerous categories of growth rings, insect damage, crook and sweep in the log, and a host of other factors. Pay special attention to the specifications on your purchase order to see if any common defects in your logs have a disproportional reduction in the prices compared to other mills. Remember you will be paid on a net scale, although your purchase order will have gross prices per thousand board feet. That means, the mill will take deductions on your timber price after the scalers determine defect.

A timber cruise can offer a simple way to not only estimate the volume of wood, but identify the product types and tree quality. This is likely best done by a professional forester with the training and experience to designate product types of standing trees. A comprehensive cruise helps landowners match what they have with the right mill, sort yard, or product line to receive premium prices for their logs.

When a landowner is selling trees or logs, they are entering a competitive market aiming to earn the best possible price. If a landowner is in need of cash, they may be tempted to accept the first offer from a log buyer and not seek additional bids. This rarely results in the best deal for the landowner. Likewise, when a landowner receives multiple offers, it may seem appropriate to accept the highest bid—but a high price does not automatically result in high profit. When evaluating offers, consider not only the price, but also how the distance to the mill will affect hauling costs, and any special requirements of the
Continued from page 10 (Common challenges to consider when marketing timber on the Westside)

bidder that may be difficult to achieve (e.g., a unique log manufacturing specification).

ECONOMIES OF SCALE

All timber harvests have costs associated with them. Costs that a landowner might incur as part of the sale include logger services, moving equipment, replanting, road maintenance, taxes, trucking to the mill, etc. If your timber harvest consists of mostly low quality timber, a small volume, or a few trees near structures and power lines that require time and expertise, then it might be difficult to get the enough revenue to cover all the costs. Additionally, a small harvest can make marketing to multiple facilities difficult, especially if there isn’t enough of one type of product to fill a log truck. The minimum for most log buyers is one log, but it is only worth it to send the log truck to the mill if it is full, especially if you are trying to cut costs. In low volume situations, selling at camp run prices, selling to a sort yard, or selling as a stumpage sale (buyer does the marketing), can be an alternative to merchandising to multiple buyers. Each type of sale has pros and cons, and significantly affects the extent to which the selling and harvesting process needs to be structured and managed.

We mentioned above that loggers are hard to come by. This can be especially true in the summer when most small landowners are harvesting. This is the busy season and they often have a lot of options for landowners to work with. If you have a smaller harvest, it makes your job less attractive to loggers who might have opportunities to work on a larger job that might bring in more income for their business. In this situation, building a relationship with your logger can help mediate getting passed over. You may also consider working with a neighbor who might be ready for a harvest as well. When working with your neighbor, you can split the fixed cost of getting the equipment to the property and the job is more attractive to a logger because they have the potential of making a profit.

Buying and selling timber is a business transaction and a critical step in implementing management specified in your management plan. If you are aware of the common challenges landowners face when marketing timber, then overcoming these challenges can be easily planned for. Profitable and successful timber harvests can be an important opportunity for landowners to earn income from their forestlands. Proper marketing techniques can help maximize those income opportunities making sound management more accessible into the future.

Meet Your Trees!

Red alder (Alnus rubra)

**CHARACTER:** This fast grower can reach 120’ tall and 3’ in diameter. The sapwood of red alder takes on a reddish stain when freshly cut.

**IDENTIFICATION:** Look for leaves that are large and egg shaped with coarsely and bluntly double-toothed edges. The edges tightly roll under, creating a distinct green rim on the underside of each leaf. The bark is grey-white with black patches.

**DISTRIBUTION** It is the most common broadleaf tree in W. OR. It’s rarely found on the east side or on major valley floors (valley alders are usually white alder). It is found in cool/moist environments and grows in dense/dark stands on the coast.

**USES:** The large, straight logs make red alder valued for cabinets, furniture, and pallet lumber. Small and crooked logs are used for toys, novelties, firewood, and pulp. Red alder is also planted in Douglas-fir forests with root rot zones to help sites recover and fertilize the site, as their roots are nitrogen-fixers.

Do you enjoy the Meet Your Trees section of this newsletter? Then you might consider ordering a copy of the book where all this information comes from. The newly updated 70th Anniversary Edition of Trees to Know in Oregon & Washington is now available! This edition expands its scope, covering even more species of trees — including several rare species native to southwest Oregon. It also updates scientific names and adds a new section on how Northwest forests are likely to be affected by changing climates. Along with all the details on native conifers, broadleaves and more than 50 ornamental trees, readers will find:

- More than 400 full-color photos and 70 maps depicting habitat, range and forest type.
- Easy-to-follow identification keys.
- Handy guides to help distinguish one variety from another.
- The story of Northwest forests — past, present and future.

TO ORDER A COPY OF THIS BOOK, VISIT: https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1450