

avored the Forest Service. My guess is that judges admire what they see in this uniquely American problem-solving tool we call collaboration.

Where strong leadership exists at the regional and supervisory levels, the Forest Service is moving beyond its fear of being sued by serial litigators. I credit the collaboratives with helping restore the agency's faith in its own ability to do good, legally defensible work. The spirit and intent of these projects underscores our nation's conservation ethic, the necessity of citizen resolve, and a "can do" attitude that has been missing from federal forest management for too long.

Communities at the core

We still have some hurdles to cross concerning wildfire suppression funding, post-fire timber salvage harvesting, "green" timber sales, future Wilderness designations, and funding for rural timber towns devastated by the collapse of the old federal timber sale program. These towns are surrounded by national forests. They can't reinvent themselves in some new and dramatically different likeness. They are what they are: old timber, mining, and farm towns. Amazon won't be building its new campus in Kettle Falls or Lone, and New York's Metropolitan Opera won't be moving to Colville anytime soon.

But these communities have something in them that you won't find in New York, Seattle, or any other metropolitan area in our country: people who know how to care for forests. Some are professionally-trained foresters, biologists or engineers, but many of our neighbors know what they know because they've lived in forests all their lives. They are hands-on people with generational knowledge who know how to get things done. They work with nature every day of their lives. They are the heart and soul of northeast Washington.

Who better to help the Forest Service care for the Colville National Forest than the people who live in it and depend on it for their every use and necessity? It belongs as much to them as it does to every American. They are the rural links in a human chain that stretches south to Spokane and west to Seattle and Portland.

There are countless thousands of us

who are, in one way or another, socially, spiritually, culturally, or economically dependent on the wellbeing of the Colville National Forest: Wilderness advocates, hunters, loggers, fishers, sawmill workers, conservationists, native Americans, snowmobilers, retail merchants, school teachers, elected officials, hikers, campers, skiers—and lumbermen, like me.

It has taken us years to really get to know one another, but we've persevered in our shared belief that we could accomplish more by working together than we could by going our separate ways. And we have, mainly by being patient and respectful of one another's differing points of view.

We don't always immediately agree on the finer points, but we do stand on common ground and we are committed to helping the Forest Service find ways to treat more acres annually. Coalescing change in a centralized bureaucracy as large as the Forest Service isn't easy. The decision-making process is slowly migrating to the local level, where it belongs, but restoring resiliency in our national forests requires that we also restore public confidence in the whole idea that managing forests is a better option than watching them burn.

Big wildfires provide teachable moments, but as soon as the smoke clears, the news media and public lose interest. Out of sight, out of mind. That's the bad news. The good news is that the collaborative piece of this story—the human-interest element— isn't dying between wildfire seasons. Even the most hardened journalists seem to see collaboration for what it is: a forum open to anyone who shares our interest in protecting our national forest heritage. We remain a work in progress, but we have come a long, long way in 15 persistent years. ♦

Duane Vaagen is a third-generation Northeast Washington lumberman. His grandfather operated portable cedar mills before and during World War II. His father, Bert, and uncle, Bud, started Vaagen Brothers Lumber Company in 1952. Today, Vaagen Brothers owns mills in Colville and Usk, Washington, and Midway, British Columbia.



Policy Scoreboard

Editor's Note: To keep SAF members informed of state society policy activities, Policy Scoreboard is a regular feature in the Western Forester. The intent is to provide a brief explanation of the policy activity—you are encouraged to follow up with the listed contact person for detailed information.

OSAF Approves Updated Position Statement on Active Management to Achieve and Maintain Active Forests.

At the February 2, 2019, OSAF Executive Committee Meeting in Troutdale, an updated version of our position statement entitled "Active Management to Achieve and Maintain Active Forests" was approved by the ExCom. Only minor changes were made to the existing position. The core position states that OSAF "supports active forest management prescribed by professional foresters to achieve and maintain healthy public and private forests, consistent with land management objectives. To accomplish this, a wide range of proven forest management strategies and tools must be available to forestry professionals. These include carefully planned uses of forest thinning (sometimes removing trees over a wide range of sizes and ages), approved chemicals (e.g., fertilizers and pesticides), prescribed burning, sanitation and salvage of designated dead and dying trees, regeneration harvesting (e.g., clearcutting, shelterwood, selection) and mixed species planting as appropriate. Many federal forests in Oregon now have an especially acute and long-term need for active management that will require diverse strategies and tools, including road access and administrative flexibility to effectively expand and maintain such management. Broad benefits, from wildlife to recreation to forest products, can be achieved and sustained through active management on public and private forestlands." The updated statement can be found at: www.oregon.forestry.org/oregon/policy/general. Contact: Mark Buckbee, OSAF Policy co-chair, buckbeefamily@msn.com. ♦