

Companies Take Different Approaches to Recreation

BY ANDREA WATTS

In the Pacific Northwest, the abundant and accessible public lands managed by federal and state agencies are complemented by private timberlands. Several timberland managers, such as Weyerhaeuser, Port Blakely, and Hancock Natural Resources Group (HNRG), allow public access and contend with similar issues public agencies must address: how public access is permitted; how trash and security concerns are managed; and balancing access with management activities.

Unlike the Southeast and Northeast, where leases and permits are the model by which the public is granted access to recreate on private forestlands, the Pacific Northwest had a history, until the 1970s, of open gates and unfettered public access. Leases and

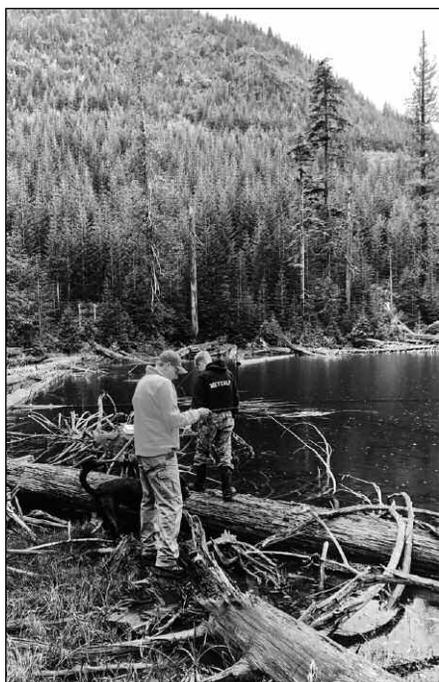


PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE METCALF

Weyerhaeuser recreational permits and leases include access for hunting, camping, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, berry and mushroom picking, and more.

permits are now commonplace in the Northwest.

“It’s surprising to me how long it’s taken for fee access to catch on here,” said Mike Warjone, vice president of operations for Port Blakely. “Pretty much the rest of the country is using that model...it can be a big part of your revenue stream if you operate a tree farm in the Southeast.”

The fifth-generation family-owned Port Blakely’s corporate approach to recreation and public access is providing free access to their timberlands. “I think it’s appreciated that people don’t have to pay to access the lands,” explained Court Stanley, president of Port Blakely, and Warjone added that “we get some emails and calls in support of that.”

That being said, Stanley shared that Port Blakely has changed their access policy over the years. “We used to just gate portions of our property and open our land for motorized access during hunting season,” he said. “But



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREA WATTS

An example of a gate on a parcel of Port Blakely’s timberland in eastern Grays Harbor County.

when the Forest and Fish law came in, we started realizing we were spending an awful lot of money repairing roads after hunting season and there was an increased risk of silt getting into streams, so it was going against our road maintenance policies.”

To that end, motorized vehicles aren’t permitted; people are welcome to walk, bike, or ride in on horseback. Picking mushrooms and berries is allowed, and cutting firewood is also authorized with a permit. Camping and campfires are banned, the result of seeing the aftermath of hunting season on a tract of land that was purchased in 2004. “After hunting season,

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

13th Annual Oregon SAF Golf Tournament

Friday, July 19, 2019

Join the Oregon Society of American Foresters at Trysting Tree Golf Course in Corvallis, Oregon, for a golf tournament to benefit the OSAF Foundation.

<http://www.oregon.forestry.org/content/osaf-golf-tournament>

Lots of Prizes & Contests!

*

Catered Lunch included after the tournament

FOR REGISTRATION AND/OR DONATIONS, CONTACT:
Jessica Fitzmorris at 541-990-7264 or Jessica.fitzmorris@yahoo.com

it was disgusting,” Stanley said. “It was a mess. With fire danger, I can’t foresee us allowing camping unless it’s structured and by permit. A free for all doesn’t work.”

In contrast, camping and motorized vehicle use is allowed on Weyerhaeuser lands by permit. In 2013, the company launched a pilot permit program in several areas, and the following year, it was unveiled across nearly two million acres of its western timberlands. Two types of permits are available. An annual motorized permit, which currently costs anywhere from \$225 to \$395, includes the option to camp, remove two cords of firewood, and partake in noncommercial picking of berries and mushrooms within the permit area. A non-motorized annual permit, which costs \$75, allows the permit holder to bike ride, walk, or go for a horse ride within one of the 18 permit areas.

“We chose the permit model because of our large blocked-up landscapes where we have huge ownerships with existing gates around the edges,” explained Michelle Metcalf, SAF member and northwest recreation access manager. “That worked better than dividing the area into individual leases like they have in the South, and it also gave an opportunity to get more people out on the landscape.”

Just as Port Blakely’s philosophy of public access has evolved over the years, so too has Weyerhaeuser’s. What used to be open-access roads became gated because of garbage dumping



PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE METCALF

Horseback riding is a popular recreational activity on forestlands. This equestrian is enjoying Weyerhaeuser’s St. Helens Permit Area.

and vandalism. Gates were then only opened during hunting season. Several years ago, in the Southern Timberlands Region, Weyerhaeuser’s recreation program started a recreation lease program, and “they had great success with it, so we rolled it into the West,” Metcalf said.

The fees collected from the permits and leases are used to pay security staff that daily patrol the units, provide gate and lock maintenance (new keys are issued each year), and supply permit packets that include a paper map and permit. Within the permit agree-

ment, it is made clear that that the permittee is responsible for their safety and surroundings, and Metcalf said that “we’ve been fortunate to not have any issues.”

The public access on Hancock Natural Resource Group’s 197,000-acre tree farm in Oregon’s coast range could be considered a hybrid of Port Blakely and Weyerhaeuser access models. When HNRG purchased the tree farm six years ago, Jerry Anderson, CF and SAF member, said that the locals feared their public access would be lost. “There was concern we would go to a lease-access only program, or no access,” said Anderson. “Instead, their worst fears weren’t realized.”

As the Region manager, Anderson and his team have discretion to set recreation policy, and he honored the recreation policies in place before HNRG assumed ownership.

“We want to have access for the public for a variety of reasons,” Anderson explained. “It might generate revenue, and it definitely creates goodwill. It’s easier to work with folks than against them.”

However, he cautioned that “having the public on your property does cost money. We have to maintain the roads, maintain the gates, and maintain the signs.”

To help offset the maintenance costs, HNRG pursued an Access and Habitat grant through the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). The program is funded through hunting licenses. Four dollars from every hunting license is diverted to the Access and Habitat grant program, and its goals are to improve wildlife habitat and provide access to the public.

It took over a year to work through developing the grant proposal and having it approved by the ODFW commissioners. With HNRG receiving \$190,000 each year for the next three years, the result for the public is: “Before the Access and Habitat program, our policy was to have open lands when it’s not fire season and then completely closed to all access during fire season,” Anderson said. “Now we open it up for year-round walk-in access and the public can

Before you decide, find out what you have! Affordable Timber Cruising.



Adam's Timber Service specializes in full harvest on all types of forest land, sustainable forest management, and reforestation.

**Professional Forestry Management
Accurate Timber Cruising / Appraising
Timber Harvesting, Layout, Permitting**

**Timber Sales and Log Marketing
Road Construction - Maintenance
Forest Land Management**

We purchase land and standing timber

(360) 636-7766

www.adamstimbervservice.com - Longview, WA - adam.timber@live.com

drive in on certain roads.”

For all three landowners, hunting, hiking, and horseback riding are common types of recreation that the public engages in on their landscapes, and they are willing to work with groups who want to use their lands for other types of recreation activities.

On Port Blakely's Morton Tree Farm is Dog Mountain, a world-famous hang-gliding site, according to Stanley. After purchasing the tree farm, Port Blakely continued the lease agreement with the local hang-gliding group. Not only is the group respectful, “they have our phone numbers and if they see smoke, they call it in,” Stanley said. “It's worked really well.”

“If there's an organized group of people who approach us and say, ‘We're interested in xyz,’ we're open,” Warjone said. “If they have insurance and we think it's not going to harm the resource or cause issues with sediment in streams or cause a fire danger, we'll entertain any idea.”

On a Weyerhaeuser parcel in Oregon's Multnomah County, Metcalf said the company's foresters work with a mountain bike club that is leasing the parcel to construct sustainable, safe trails that minimize resource damage.

The Baber Mountain ATV club originally had an agreement with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), Plum Creek Timber, and Green Diamond Resources. After ownership changes, the land is now managed by ODF, Weyerhaeuser, and HNRG. HNRG has continued business as usual. Since they had a good relationship with the previous owners, “we have honored their lease.” Anderson said. “I think it's been a pretty good relationship.”

A common theme mentioned by all



PHOTO COURTESY OF MONIQUE TAYLOR

Hang-gliders soar off of Dog Mountain, a 1,300-foot butte overlooking Riffle Lake. Port Blakely allows access to a local hang-gliding club.

the interviewees was that providing public access is complementary with being a good neighbor.

“We want our neighbors to be happy,” Stanley said. “We try to be good neighbors and good stewards of the community.” He added, “We've told all our foresters that if someone has an elk they're packing out, just throw it in the back of your pickup and help them out.”

With his 34-year career having been spent in the Oregon coastal region and seeing the transition from unfettered public access to highly restricted public access, Anderson is encouraged to see public access return. “When I first started, it was wide open. People could drive everywhere, do anything they want,” he explained. “This is the first time since I've been here that we've

reversed that trend a bit. Yes, the grant money helps offset the cost of the program, but in lieu of that, the public gets more access.”

Although Weyerhaeuser's permit program is only six years old, we've built a loyal customer base, Metcalf said. “People do appreciate the opportunity to get out on the landscape.” ♦

Andrea Watts is an SAF member and associate editor of The Forestry Source. She can be reached at 360-789-4068 or watts@safnet.org.

To learn more about Weyerhaeuser, Port Blakely, and Hancock Natural Resources Group recreation programs, watch for a more in-depth article in the July issue of The Forestry Source.



ARBOR INFO LLC
Providing information about trees and forests

Tom Hanson
Tom.Hanson@ArborInfo.com
206-300-9711
www.arborinfo.com



GeneTachs
Richard W. Courter Professional Forester

FOREST

- Management Consultant
- Inventories and Appraisals
- Genetic Tree Improvement
- Feasibility Studies

1600 NW Skyline Blvd., Portland, Oregon 97229 (503) 297-1660