

# Cow Creek Tribe takes holistic approach to forest management

By Emily Hoard  
The News-Review

ROSEBURG (AP) — The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians teamed up with Lone Rock Timber Management Company to create the sole proposal to buy 82,500 acres of the Elliott State Forest from the State of Oregon.

With the help and support of the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians and The Conservation Fund, the partnership hopes to manage the land for timber harvest while providing 40 jobs per year and protecting the environment and public access.

“Tribes have always had a large role in managing the lands,” said Michael Rondeau, CEO of the Cow Creek Tribe. “Tribes didn’t own the land, the land owned them, and it’s part of their harmony with the resources available to them. We belong to the land; we’re a function of nature.”

The tribes understand that people have an important role in the ecosystem and in nature, added Tim Vredenburg, director of forest management for the tribe.

When there’s something

special on the landscape, Vredenburg said, the Western conservation approach is to draw a line around it and stay away, but he sees the tribe doing the opposite. It is actively involved in managing the land and interacting with the ecosystem in such a way to preserve the habitats, old growth reserves and streams while allowing for resource extraction and fuel management, reported *The News-Review*.

“No matter what a Native American Indian tribe does in terms of forest management,” Vredenburg said, “they live with the consequences of those actions. If they were to create smoke, they would breathe the smoke, if they muddied the water, they’d have to drink it and if they created a fire-prone forest, they’d live in a dangerous place.”

While most public agencies will write management plans for a 10- to 20-year time period, the tribe’s sense of consequence spans for at least seven generations.

“The tribes have been here for thousands of years and will continue to be here. This is our home,” Rondeau said.

Evan Smith of The Conservation Fund added that

unlike other timber investors who might decide to pick up and move away, the tribes stay and are committed to the local community.

“They have this very patient, restorative approach to forestry that is rare to see in timber land managers these days,” Smith said.

The Cow Creek Tribe also takes on a holistic view of the forest that is not motivated by a short-term profit, according to Smith.

“Tribes look at natural resources a little bit differently than mainstream white culture,” Smith said, adding that while a lot of environmentalists see a stark divide between timber and natural resource protection, tribes see whole forests that they’ve been actively managing for centuries.

Dr. John Gordon, former dean of forestry at Yale University, said the general attitude shared by many tribes, including Cow Creek, is that they see the big picture and try to accomplish the best joint solution for resources, habitat, water and other factors.

“They see all the different facets together instead of trying to manage them separately,” Gordon said.

This holistic approach includes frequently burning undergrowth to control hazardous fuels, creating open areas for wildlife habitat and managing for sustainable timber production at the same time.

The frequent burns have historically been an important part of Cow Creek’s management to maintain a healthy forest where it is easier to hunt and gather. The tribe often burned huckleberries and other natural crops each year to improve production for the next season.

Historically, trees were spaced further apart with less dead material on the ground and undergrowth that could carry a fire up to the top of large trees.

“With the lack of that regular activity, the forest has become dense and overcrowded and less healthy, so now the tribes are looking at a much different forest today than 200 years ago,” Vredenburg said.

“When the fuels build up, it sets the stage for these catastrophic fires that can take the land out of commission for a generation,” Rondeau said.

In the Elliott, the Cow Creek Tribe and its partners

are required to manage for sensitive habitats, particularly in riparian areas to keep stream temperatures down and protect listed and endangered species including the coho salmon, marbled murrelet, spotted owl and bald eagles.

“They’re very aware of that, and I’m sure because of their tribal values, not just because of the laws, they will be very careful about that,” Gordon said.

Cow Creek’s practices are also meant to contribute to a quality watershed with healthy salmon populations and more fishing opportunities while creating sustainable forms of revenue to support programs like elder services, health and education.

The Cow Creek Tribe has a long history of managing forestland in the area where Douglas County now exists. In the Elliott, trees were sparse, grass grew head high and there were plenty of meadows for elk to graze.

However, the tribe was terminated in the 1850s and many of the traditional forestry practices were taken away with their land.

Now, Rondeau’s generation

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