

# Oversight needed of state forest division

You can be savoring an IPA along the John Day River after a long day of adventuring in Oregon's forests and honestly wonder if things couldn't get much better. But sometimes those charged with managing this beautiful state let us all down.

State government is not a place brimming with simple problems with easy answers. Still, The Oregonian reported last week the Oregon Department of Forestry's state forest division is "failing on almost every front."

The division manages approximately 745,000 acres of forestlands across Oregon. Its budget is a mess and getting worse. That's because, in part, it is funded solely by timber sales that aren't happening. That's led to cuts in staff. Fewer staff, in turn, makes it harder for the division to solve its problems.

On top of everything, the agency is facing a lawsuit from 14 Oregon counties who claim they have not been getting the revenue they are entitled to from timber sales. They say they've

been shortchanged \$1.4 billion. Legislators and Gov. Kate Brown have failed to provide adequate oversight of the division. Do you remember the special series of hearings called this past session by our legislative leaders to get to the bottom of this? Nope. They didn't happen. What are they going to do about it?

Even members of the forestry board have grown frustrated. Brenda McComb, a board member and former forestry professor at Oregon State University, has "repeatedly asked staff members for more information around the existing inventory of trees and whether current harvest levels are sustainable," according to The Oregonian. That's a fundamental piece of knowing how well any management plan would work. She has not gotten it.

Forest policy is going to be divisive. There is no shared, statewide vision of how a state-owned forest should be managed. That may help explain but does not excuse the absence of oversight and leadership from the Legislature and Gov. Brown in managing the state's forests.



## GUEST COMMENT Rural economic successes

It's often said "the only constant in life is change." Recent visits to new economic catalysts growing in Grant and Umatilla counties have shown me how both communities have embraced that adage to build on their traditional strengths to generate good-paying jobs in Eastern Oregon.

Lots of rural Oregon faces real economic hurt, which is why I wrote the Secure Rural Schools legislation that's brought more than \$3 billion over the years to those communities for schools, roads and public safety.

But earlier this month at Malheur Lumber just outside John Day, I also saw new shoots of economic success when I toured the new Restoration Fuels site. This plant taps innovative technology to take the biomass of small trees and convert it — via a process called torrefaction — into a non-fossil fuel energy source.

The technology is astounding. And so is the economic opportunity — I heard firsthand from plant officials how they're hiring people in this rural Oregon town at family-wage salaries.

These developments are a credit to farsighted leaders at Malheur Lumber such as company owner John Shelk who's committed to maintaining the sawmill in John Day. I was proud to team with Malheur Lumber, Iron Triangle and the forest collaborative to push for a 10-year stewardship contract that increased timber harvest and a steady, certain supply of biomass.

This forest restoration work isn't easy. It requires folks working together to find common ground, and it required local industry partners like Malheur Lumber, Oregon Torrefaction and Iron Trian-

gle to develop new markets for forest products that used to burn up in slash piles bigger than semi-trucks.

And I'm working to get even more biomass to support family-wage jobs by pressing the administration for even more fuels reduction and thinning on the national forests.

This torrefaction project in Grant County and the people behind it have shown the entire country all that can be accomplished with biomass — and provided a valuable job-creating model to learn from.

A similar good-news Eastern Oregon economic story is playing out up U.S. Highway 395 in Umatilla County.

This summer, I toured the Pendleton Airport hangar where the aerospace company PAE ISR has set up shop to work on unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

As at Malheur Lumber, the new technology developed by PAE ISR — and the jobs they support in Eastern Oregon — are impressive. In Pendleton, I met with PAE ISR workers earning six-figure salaries. And I met PAE ISR manager Ken Bisconer, who's passionate about creating new education programs so young people have the skills and training to work in this well-paid field.

UAV technology is hugely exciting for Eastern Oregon. I'm a privacy hawk, but I think we can thread the needle and support UAV technology for civilian uses like mountaintop rescue, precision agriculture, fighting wildfires and more without sacrificing privacy

protections. And just as in Grant County with biomass, these changes in Pendleton didn't happen by osmosis. They're a credit to local visionaries such as Pendleton Mayor John Turner, Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock, Pendleton Economic Development/Airport Manager Steve Chrisman and Oregon National Guard Colonel Alan Gronewald. Pendleton and Eastern Oregon can take justifiable pride in carving out a big part in the core of a growing industry that pays well and creates a whirlwind of fresh economic activity.

I see my job representing Oregon as setting the temperature for fresh new enterprises to grow in rural Oregon.

And I'm honored to have partnered with local officials to ensure new enterprises such as UAV test ranges could develop in Pendleton as well as in Warm Springs and Tillamook. We have extended operation of these test ranges through 2023, and I will keep fighting for these proven job generators.

Of course, there's no single solution to ensuring the rural Oregon economy can flourish.

But I believe these positive examples of smart change in Grant and Umatilla counties are significant shoots of success that should be celebrated. These examples — along with support for historic rural Oregon enterprises such as agriculture, ranching and forestry as well as new opportunities in areas like recreation and hemp — can continue creating new good-paying jobs for generations to come.

Ron Wyden, a Democrat, is a U.S. senator from Oregon.



## GUEST COMMENT Be a problem solver

Every customer who comes into your business has a problem, and they are looking for you to help solve it.

Perhaps they need a dress for their daughter's wedding or a special gift. They have a flat tire or need a specific tool for a project. Their faucet is dripping, their pick-up's engine light came on, their septic tank needs pumped, they need a loan to buy a house or are being sued.

What problem does your business solve, and how do you accomplish this more effectively than your competitors?

Have you thought about this, and do you need to make any adjustments?

Here are some basic things you may want to consider:

- Are you open when your customer needs you? (I know of a hair stylist who only works in the evenings and on Saturday and Sunday, because that's when her working clients and students are available and is something her competitors won't do.)
- Do you offer quality products or services at the right price point?
- Is your website complicated? (Remember, if it takes more than three "clicks" to find the information

a customer wants to know, they will leave your site — and likely won't return.)

When a customer calls, is there a complex automated system they must navigate?

In short, is it a hassle to do business with you or are you the first business they turn to when seeking an answer to their problem?

The answers to these questions sound simple yet are often the root cause for slow — or no — business.

On the other side of the equation, employers want employees who are problem solvers, not problem creators. I have addressed the importance of "soft skills" in a previous article, but the reality of this cannot be over-stated.

Employees, regardless of their skill set, are not employed long if they create problems. The number one complaint (i.e. problem) I consistently hear about from employers is they cannot find people who want to work and who will show up to work on time — or at all. Perhaps you don't consider yourself a problem creator but take a moment and

ask yourself these questions:

- Are you dependable?
- Do you cause strife in the workplace?
- Are you busy texting instead of looking around to see what needs to be done — and doing it?
- Do you complete your work on time? Does your boss have to come behind you and double check to make sure the task has been done correctly?
- Do you access resources to answer the questions you might have, or do you consistently interrupt the workflow of others?

Identifying a need whether as a business owner or employee and utilizing your unique skill set is one of the most important keys to success, profitability and longevity in the workplace. Being a creative problem solver is not just something beneficial in the workplace, but in society as well, and is something each of us can contribute to in some way.

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