

# Forest from the trees

Conversation focuses on peoples' relationship to forests

By Nancy McCarthy  
For the Cannon Beach Gazette



Mariah Acton

"Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Stewarding Our Public Lands," a lecture by Mariah Acton, at the Cannon Beach Museum and History Center. CANNON BEACH MUSEUM AND HISTORY CENTER

In Oregon, where the issue of forest management is a hot topic, Mariah Acton asks a personal question: What does the forest mean to you?

Acton, a former social science researcher for the U.S. Forest Service, recently led a conversation about the future of forest management with a group at the Cannon Beach History Center. She is studying for her master's degree in conflict resolution at the University of Oregon and works as a mediator for the state Housing and Community Services Department.

"I noticed no one was talking about their own identities as people living in the forest, as third-generation timber families, or as environmentalists or just speaking from their own values. I just felt this was a big part of the conversation that was missing," Acton said.

As part of a program sponsored by Oregon Humanities, Acton has traveled throughout the state to talk about what public forests mean to Oregonians.

"Every community has a different relationship to the land that surrounds them," she said. "This is a chance to explore those values and perspectives, the chance to be heard, to hear others and to reflect."

While most of the 15 participants lived in Cannon Beach, others were visiting from surrounding communities.

When Acton asked what forests meant to them, they cited the forests' importance for recreation, sustaining watersheds and their connection to the eco-system. Some participants talked about the beauty, solitude and peace forests gave to them and the need to protect them for future generations.

"When I look at a forest, I think of life," said Jan Siebert-Wahrmund.

Clatsop County Commissioner Lianne Thompson, who also was among the participants, noted that she lived in a forest clearing in Falcon Cove.

"Forests mean to me a place that I love, that I'm devoted to," Thompson said. "But as a public figure, my job is to create a moderate middle where there's a balance between what John Muir called economic development and conservation; they go hand-in-hand."

"In Oregon, our forests mean a lot of different things," Acton said. "We have a timber industry that is the economic driver of our state settling; there's no way around that. The economics part of it continues to fuel a lot of our communities across the state."

Forests also draw visitors, Acton noted. "People come here for nature, for finding the peace, the tranquility and the beauty of those trees when they're standing upright."

Half of the 63 million acres in Oregon is in forests, Acton said. "We have lots of different forests across our state, so when we talk about different types of forest policies, we're talking about lots of different types of trees," she added.

In eastern Oregon, conversations about forest management are different, she said. "They have to cut down a lot more trees to get the board footage to fuel their schools (economically) than over here. It's different environmentalism, it's different economics."

In addition, the type of ownership varies from region to region in Oregon. While federal ownership predominates on the east side, state forests are more common on the west side, she said. With the variations of ownership — city, state, federal, Bureau of Land Management, private holdings — come variations in management policies.

"We can't talk about forest policy as a monolithic; there's a lot of different nuance there," she said.

Policies also change with time. Acton talked about the influence of two early conservationists: John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, who sought preservation of forest land, and Gifford Pinchot, founder of the U.S. Forest Service, who promoted sustainable use of the forest.

Acton asked participants

to consider where they place themselves along the spectrum of conservationism and utilitarianism.

Thompson said she kept moving between "loving the planet" and taking care of "disenfranchised people who don't have any way of earning a living."

"I see people with adequate and stable incomes saying I want to have only park land and we shouldn't cut any trees and the money should magically come from somewhere. Tourism creates air pollution and traffic and the load on fresh water and wastewater," Thompson said.

But Betsy Ayres, of Cannon Beach, noted that automation is taking away timber-related jobs. She said government's priority should be to conserve natural resources.

"I personally don't feel like we are managing those in perpetuity. I think we're still stealing from our children's children for a profit," said Ayres, who would like to see more of the corporation-owned forests owned by families.

At the end of the gathering, Acton challenged the group to continue the discussion.

"Anyone can start these conversations," she said. "In this world of hyper polarization, we're afraid to talk to our neighbor these days. Be willing to start these conversations."

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# Remembering the USS Shark

USS Shark from Page 1A

Annie Von Domitz, of the Oregon Travel Experience, supervised the renovation of the historic marker, in the style of the state's historic wooden beaver markers. Arch Cape resident John Piatt played a key role in working on the text and drafts, with historical support from Trucke and Jeff Smith, senior curator of the Columbia River Maritime Museum.



R.J. MARK

Annie Von Domitz of the Oregon Travel Experience at the ribbon-cutting of a new historic marker along U.S. Highway 101 in Arch Cape.

restored at the marine archaeology department of Texas A&M University before returning to the North Coast. Today, a replica stands at the site of the historic marker. One carronade stands at the history center and two are on exhibit at the Columbia River Maritime Museum.

How did the Shark arrive here? Trucke provided an eloquent recounting of the ship's creation and its ultimate demise.

## 'Manifest Destiny'

The secretary of the Navy in early 1846 sent the vessel to the Pacific Northwest to join the Pacific squadron. The ship's role was to defend U.S. interests in the Northwest and to spread the concept of "Manifest Destiny" in the Oregon territory when there was doubt about whether it would be British or American land?

President James K. Polk sent the Shark to Oregon in August 1846. The ship, 86 feet long, was designed for speed and maneuverability to navigate the waters of the West Indies.

The Shark's impressive career saw it transport the naturalist James J. Audubon in 1831 to collect research specimens. The Shark was the first U.S. ship to navigate the Strait of Magellan in 1833 en route to Peru.

According to the "Arch Cape Chronicles," by David and Alma English, in the summer of 1846 Lt. Neil N. Howison received orders to carry supplies from Honolulu in readiness to ascend the Columbia River as far as the Willamette. Their reports would assist in formulating a decision on the location of the boundary between England and the American lands. Americans wanted the board to be 54 degrees, 40 minutes latitude, the reason for Polk's slogan, "54-40 or fight," immortalized in history books.

But due to a lag in communications, crew members were unaware that the U.S. Senate had already ratified a treaty with Britain making the U.S. border the 49th parallel, rendering the journey unnecessary. Some of the ship deserted, but the lieutenant in command was "impatient, naive and somewhat impetuous" in seeking his return south. He attempted to cross the Columbia Bar without a bar pilot. With a sparse crew and bad weather, on Sept. 10, 1846, the Shark was pulled directly toward breakers. While the crew survived, the ship was destroyed.

