



OSU's 'Woodpecker' harvest removed many old trees (up to 150 years of age) near the popular Peavy Arboretum and Loop 36 Trail – photo by V.S.

What OSU Still Doesn't Get About Forest Planning

(by Doug Pollock, Founder, Friends of OSU Old Growth – www.friendsofosuoldgrowth.org)

Monday night's planning meeting for the McDonald-Dunn was the fourth public meeting in OSU's multi-year process to come up with a new management plan for these public forests. One would think by now that the leaders of the College of Forestry would have fine-tuned their process for public engagement, but the litany of complaints from frustrated citizens showed that they still have a lot to learn. The unwelcome involvement and comments by the dean of the College created further discontent with OSU's planning process.

Approx. 70 people (including more than 40 people on Zoom) took part in the 2-hour meeting. The first half of the meeting was filled with a lengthy technical presentation about OSU's latest round of forest modeling. Associate dean Holly Ober, who has been leading OSU's planning efforts, presented charts filled with percentages allocated to their five "management strategies" for the forests, along with the various "modeling scenarios" (which have now been expanded from five to twelve).

It is both alarming and telling that nearly all twelve of OSU's "modeling scenarios" still involve a significant amount of clearcutting (termed, "rotational forestry"). On average, OSU's twelve scenarios dedicate roughly 40% of the McDonald-Dunn to clearcut forestry. That's not including the "variable retention harvests", which are often little more than clearcuts (with a few trees left per acre). Under the *least regressive* scenario (E), 19%

of the land would be allocated to both “managed reserves” and “ecosystems of concern” (which includes riparian areas, oak savanna and meadows). This clashes fiercely with community interests. Most people want to see a substantial portion of the McDonald-Dunn protected from industrial forestry. It is important to note that more than two years into the planning process, OSU has not released a single map showing how any of these scenarios would actually impact the forests. Repeated requests from the public and members of the stakeholder committee for access to OSU’s (GIS) forest inventory have been ignored. So much for transparency and responsiveness!

OSU’s entire planning process reflects a mechanistic and decidedly extractive way of managing these public lands. The prospective slicing and dicing of natural resources is at the core of OSU’s “working forests” scheme promoted by the dean and his staff. The fact that they are dealing with living, complex ecosystems on land that was stolen from the original Native American inhabitants doesn’t seem to be a major consideration in either OSU’s approach to planning or forest management. The industrial forestry practices they teach and promote are at odds with both ecological forestry and holistic forest planning.

These glaring deficiencies contrast sharply with how the public perceives and values these cherished forests, as we saw in Monday night’s meeting. Many participants expressed long-standing resentment and anger over OSU’s destructive forestry practices, as well as the planning team’s reluctance to incorporate past public feedback. The audience pummeled College leaders with their criticism, while only a single person (a recent timber program graduate) had anything positive to say.

One person summarized concerns shared by many as he described the lack of adequate notice and time for review:

“You are requesting our input and giving us two minutes, which seems like a violation of just how people process information and the public process...It took several months to get the question and answer document from the last meeting...Why not give out information a month in advance or several weeks?...We’re bombarded with very technical information and the human brain just can’t process that on the fly and then make thoughtful comments all in one short span of time.”

A former member of OSU’s “Stakeholder Advisory Committee” (SAC) shared a compelling explanation of why he resigned from the committee:

“From the beginning, I questioned the college’s requirement that this research Forest management turn a profit. What century are we in? The plow and ax have driven extinctions and the climate crisis across the globe to the last bastions of native forest, yet the college is determined to continue to demonstrate, to research, and to teach unsustainable forestry methods that brought us a global crisis because that is what their financial supporters rely on...”

Before the second modeling the SAC was asked what it would like to see modeled. One scenario, M, was to eliminate any acreage allocated to even-aged, short rotation forestry because it gives the college and all of forestry a black eye. Well, that was deep-sixed before the modeling started...so it tells you, ‘we can’t even consider that’...

This summer, the planned woodpecker Harvest stripped away another opportunity to expand the reserve which is west of Peavy Arboretum. And, as others have said, there’s not a single map resulting from this long-winded planning exercise. So it is impossible to know what is actually possible on the landscape, for wildlife, for wildfire preparedness, or for climate mitigation. And still the college refused to share the GIS data, which I think the public really want to see.”

Another person complained about the survey OSU used to gauge the “recreational acceptability” of various management options:

“I couldn’t answer any of them [the questions] because it was a really bad study. It was like intentionally...marketing. This isn’t a forest study! I was trying to find the fine print of where this was a marketing department, because there’s no way that you’re thinking any of these [options] are acceptable...”

Healthy relationships...all fail in the same way and one of those is contempt...and that’s seeing something as valueless or beneath you and that’s really how I feel today. Based on the faces and how people have coped with stress up in front of the stage...we’re not valued and the actions speak louder than words. Talk is cheap.”

An esteemed professor from OSU’s Fisheries and Wildlife Department called on the planning team to prioritize the protection of biologically-diverse ecosystems:

“You can get an answer [to your questions] just from the public comments: we want the one [scenario] that will maximize the number of old trees and minimize the amount of logging...[Stop] using “biodiversity” as an excuse...I can maximize biodiversity by destroying the whole damn forest!”

An 18 year-old student spoke with passion about his disappointment over OSU’s forest management:

“...I hope to attend college at OSU in the next year. I’ve always thought that universities like this one are at their core supposed to be representative of the future...to educate the next generation of engineers, doctors and scientists, of thinkers and advocates,...to make the world a better place. This is why standing in front of you, I now feel completely betrayed.

OSU has shown throughout the past couple of years an entirely callous and ignorant disregard of the correct and moral way to manage our public forests. At times like this, looming climate change and environmental destruction represents one of the greatest collective threats in recent human history. Cutting older forests is the physical equivalent of spitting in the face of human progress and hope. With each subsequent stand of older trees that you felled...with each grove that is uprooted from the ground, you will be dooming my generation’s future with backward thinking and antiquated ideas...It’s time for you to realize the trees are worth far more standing than cut down. Because if you don’t, then your children and your grandchildren certainly will.”

Another person chastised the dean and his staff for vilifying people they don’t agree with. She described the planning process in sorrowful terms:

“It’s very demoralizing after doing this for many years coming to these meetings. To have the feeling that one is beginning all over again, it’s deadening, it’s dehumanizing. I don’t know what it’s teaching your students in the College of Forestry. We’re waiting, we’re waiting for someone in the College of Forestry to lead. To lead a college that could be the top in the world, to actually address what is happening to our world, in a serious manner. And instead I hear the same kinds of things, greed and the feeling of betrayal.”

The most controversial part of the meeting was the active participation by the dean of the College of Forestry, Thomas DeLuca. His dismissal of community concerns and mischaracterization of this summer’s logging of older forest near Peavy Arboretum (i.e. their ‘Woodpecker’ harvest) has earned him the ire of many conservationists and recreational users of the forest. Several participants felt the dean’s presence at the front

of the meeting room biased the proceedings. *“Just seeing him sitting up front, glaring at certain speakers made me angry, like I couldn’t express my views without being judged”,* one person explained after the meeting. *“Why was he even allowed to take part in the meeting?”*

Near the end of the meeting, the dean gave long-winded replies to a couple of questions from the audience. He spoke for more than eight minutes alienating many participants with the tone and substance of his remarks. When asked whether there is any old-growth remaining in the McDonald-Dunn, DeLuca answered in a way that was demonstrably misleading and inaccurate:

“There’s very little true old-growth forest on the McDonald-Dunn. The McDonald-Dunn has pockets of old trees that would be considered old-growth stands and we protect those stands. The term being used today for ‘old growth’ has been a bit loose..it’s a difficult thing to just put a label on and say, ‘this is old growth’.

The dean’s response to concerns about OSU’s plans to change old-growth reserves to “managed reserves” (which will allow cutting for “aesthetics” and “public safety” reasons) was not convincing:

“[the intent] is to give us the latitude...to do any intentional management to retain those oldest trees, not to enter the stand for the removal of those oldest trees. It’s easy to hear that and say, ‘Well, why would we trust you?’ Because apparently, trust has been a problem in the past, and with certain occurrences..”

In 2019, College leaders justified cutting 16 acres of old-growth forest by falsely claiming the trees presented a safety risk to recreational users – despite the lack of any trails in the vicinity.

When DeLuca was asked how it felt to hear so much criticism of OSU’s forest management, he spoke for nearly five minutes on a variety of topics that clearly bug him. He described how painful it was to listen to the comments, but then proceeded to set the public straight saying, *“...the fact of the matter is the McDonald-Dunn Forest has been managed by the College of Forestry for the last 100 years...[it] is a product of 100 years of management by the College of Forestry...Nobody likes to see a clearcut, as we’ve heard today over and over again, yet when you stop and take a glance out in the clearcut...where you have enough opportunity to look across landscapes..people say, ‘Actually it’s not that bad!’”.*

The dean also pushed back against logging criticism, explaining, *“It’s really easy to be smug and say, you know, ‘You’re a timber beast, of course you think you should cut!’ We export our problems all over the world. Climate change is one example. Not being able to manage sustainably for timber here in the Pacific Northwest means we’re pushing it to the Global South. Look at the numbers. It’s absolutely true. We have to be able to produce sustainably, we’re trying to learn how to produce timber sustainably and promote that with industry here in the state.”* His rhetoric sounded more like industry talking points than words of a public university dean.

But previous testimony at last night’s meeting revealed that the average harvest age in the McDonald-Dunn for the past six years was 83 years of age – more than TWICE the industry average. It’s hard to reconcile the dean’s claims of sustainability when OSU routinely cuts forests of an age class protected by the US Forest Service since 1994. Widespread slash-burning and herbicide use across the forests also violates basic principals of ecological forestry.

The dean also echoed the same tired threat that generations of his predecessors have made about public access to the forests. He said the forest, *“...is surrounded by parcels of university land that are posted, ‘No Trespassing’. You’re not allowed on them. You can say it’s a public forest and totally accessible for your use, but look at the other university lands that are right next door. They are posted for no entry. It doesn’t have to be*

open to the public. It's open to the public because the dean of the College of Forestry some 40 years ago made that decision to open the forests for the public."

The dean apparently fails to understand the differences between the McDonald-Dunn Forests and OSU's agricultural lands (most of which are accessible to the public, so long as livestock and crops are not disturbed). It is remarkable to hear the dean of a public university once again making an implied threat that he could choose to bar Oregonians from public university lands.

The dean's statement that, *"We pay for the research on the forests, we pay for the management of the forests, we pay for the recreation on the forests with timber receipts."* seemed to ignore previous testimony which showed that only 1.6% of timber revenue supported "research" and 1.2% went toward "recreation/education/communication" in the McDonald-Dunn*.

After the dean finally stopped talking, he was sharply criticized by a member of the audience:

"As a therapist I talk to people for a living and I think how you just spoke to us is a really great example of partly why we don't trust you. You referred to our comments as 'smug'. You stated that, 'apparently trust has been an issue', when it is something we've repeatedly brought up. So, I think the way you're speaking to us is showing a really disheartening sense of close-mindedness. We came here to speak to you, to collaborate with you, and we're really frustrated and we used intelligent language and we took time to come talk to you. And it [your response] was really dismissive. I just want to share that's partly why we don't trust you. This is an opportunity for you to listen to the community and to collaborate."

It remains to be seen whether OSU's forest planning team is willing and able to incorporate public input to any meaningful degree. At Monday night's meeting, the community soundly rejected both OSU's forest management and its approach to forest management. **When will OSU learn that proper stewardship of these forests begins with rebuilding public trust?**

(* OSU's Financial data for the McDonald-Dunn Forests, obtained through a public records request, showed that 1.6% of timber revenue (or approx. \$59,000/year) went toward "research" and 1.2% (or approx. \$46,000/year) went toward "recreation/education/communication" between 2017 and 2019.)