

# What Drives Oregon's Forests

## The Power & Money Behind New Federal Forest Plans

It's my analysis that the Trump administration's federal forest policies are cravenly servicing lumber mill power and money. Specifically, the policies boil down to servicing the corporate quest for profits. Unlike other western states, Oregon is not about oil, gas or minerals. Here in our fair state, it's all about timber and lumber—Oregon being the No. 1 lumber producing state in the nation.

Forest management in Oregon either helps or hinders mill business profits. As such, federal forest management directly impacts big lumber's profits. The simple frame of forests, logs, mills and profits explains the administration's agenda.

The administration's focus on serving industry comes into full view in the Forest Service and BLM management. Mike Boren, the Trump appointee over the Forest Service, has a financial disclosure statement listing **over forty pages of assets**. His boss, Brook Rollin, comes from the [America First Policy Institute](#) – a think tank with one mission – profits over people. Brook's husband is part owner in an Iraqi oil field.

Trump's pick to lead the BLM is former New Mexico congressman Stevan Pearce, who spent his political career attacking public lands. Last Monday, the U.S. Senate voted to advance Pearce's nomination, placing him one step away from confirmation.

Pictured below is Stevan Pearce at his Senate Hearing.



## Forests Be Damned

This year, the administration quickly scrapped the Biden draft revision of the Northwest Forest Plan and the BLM's current western Oregon forest plan and announced the reorganization of the Forest Service—intent on dismantling its research branch.

The outcome is straight forward: the Forest Service will issue a draft plan this summer, and a final plan in early 2027. The BLM will release its draft plan on June 8th for 2.1 million acres in western Oregon forest with a final plan this fall. And, a vastly reduced Forest Service research branch (called PNW Research in OR & WA) will be consolidated to Colorado.

The goal of both plans is to ramp up timber cutting by 1 to 2 billion board feet (bf) per year. Which means there will be a huge amount of mature and old growth forest destroyed. In fact, the BLM has stated it will increase timber output to the maximum productive capacity of the land.

## The Best Laid Plans

It is well known that the Trump administration's game plan follows the Heritage Foundation's playbook [Project 2025](#). Agriculture Secretary, Brook Rollin, spent the Biden years running the [America First Policy Institute](#) – a “think” tank to implement *Project 2025*. The Institute lined up over 500 safe executives to take power if Trump won the 2024 election.

Obstacles encountered during the first Trump administration, among others, were the rule of law and science. This time, the power and money behind Trump were not going to be held back. In short order, it was ***truth-be-damned*** coupled with scores of Executive Orders to implement pro-corporate policies. Inconvenient truths, such as climate warming, have been scrubbed from federal websites.

What shall we make of the administration's authoritarian turn? Adherence to any standard of truth is out the window, along with following federal law. People think crushing science or denying climate warming is due to Trump being a liar. Perhaps, but the Project 2025 agenda is grounded in a belief that the ends justify the means.

## Follow the Money

Big profits in the wood products industry occur in lumber milling and value-added manufacturing, not in forest timber sales. We can see the industry's profit picture in Weyerhaeuser's 2024 10K report.

### + Net contribution to Weyerhaeuser earnings (millions of dollars)

	Timber Sales	Lumber, Plywood, etc.	Energy & Land
2022	\$528	\$2,536	\$218
2023	\$488	\$709	\$211
2024	\$280	\$457	\$216
Totals	<b>\$1,296</b>	<b>\$3,702</b>	<b>\$646</b>

Discounting lumber's windfall profits post-covid, lumber and other value-added products still generate twice the profits of growing timber. Politically important, and little recognized, is the fact that the wood products industry is a **profit-poor industry** compared to other business opportunities. Why?

For one, timber and lumber are commodity businesses. There is no secret as to how they are made. Most importantly, the customer base for lumber is new home construction. In 1960 and 1970, a new home was built for every 285 people in the US. In 1980 and 1990, a new home was built for every 354 people. And in 2010 and 2020, a new home was built for every 786 people. In other words, **the end-use industry** for wood products, **home building**, is flat and reflects the declining income position of many US households.

In business, there are four things that reduce business profits: the purchase of materials, equipment, paying labor and taxes. Here's what I see in the lumber industry:

**1.** Moving away from traditional lumber products to glued products such as mass timber, glulam beams and other 'engineered' products. [Rosboro](#) in Springfield is one such company. They specialize in glued beams. And what do you know, in 2022 a majority of Rosboro's ownership was bought by One Equity Partners of New York.

**2.** The ongoing substitution of machines for labor & a never-ending quest for low-cost logs. Today, mills have reduced labor costs through automation. And Oregon's wood products industry won the battle of taxation as reported in the CRA's 2017 research.

**All that is left is to find some way to lower log costs.**

[Boise Cascade in their 2024 10K report](#) states “*In our Pacific Northwest operations, a substantial portion of our logs are purchased from governmental authorities, including federal, state, and local governments. As a result, existing and future governmental regulation can affect our access to, and the cost of, such timber.*” The company reports 'wood fiber' accounts for 39% of costs in its wood products division.

In Oregon there is **only one way** to dramatically lower log costs—**flood the market with federal timber**. Under Trump, that is exactly what the federal agencies plan to do. Oddly, only Weyerhaeuser does not buy federal timber because their timber land base is so large.

Setting aside Weyerhaeuser, the lumber industry in Oregon boils down to forty automated mills in fewer than a dozen companies. Almost all the lumber mills are privately owned firms whose financial reports are secret.

Most lumber mills are owned by billionaire families with direct access to Mike Boren’s office. This is how things currently work. **In effect, the mill owners are writing the new forest plans.**

## **Science be damned – the authoritarian mind**

All wannabe dictators have one thing in common. They build an imagined story about reality that serves their quest for power. Their disconnect from reality is often what gets them in trouble or, worse, causes untold suffering.

When the story being told does not make sense, **I look below the surface for private interests stealing public wealth.**

Forest Service research shops are being dismantled because they often produce forest science that causes trouble for logging.

The industry has built a wildfire and forest health story in support of logging. For example, the likelihood of forest wildfire **increases** with timber cutting and tree removal. But the industry argues “fuel load” must be lowered by logging. I bristle when I hear the notion of ‘fuel load’ applied to Coast Range wet forests!

## Four paths forward

**Unity** - The threats to forests from the Trump administration are so severe, I argue that conservation and climate organizations must unite as never before. To this end, the CRA is advocating for county-wide forest coalitions. Already, we have led in the formation of the **Benton County Forest Alliance**. Lincoln County is next for the CRA's unity strategy.

**Educate** - Because both BLM and Forest Service lands are up for grabs, the public needs quality information about federal forest management. We must explain the details of the crisis. And we can't let Trump sidetrack us when it comes to educating about the deepening climate crisis.

**Prepare** - Organizations like the CRA will lead for public comments when the draft plans are released. Analysis and comments on the BLM's draft plan will be submitted by the CRA. Will the BLM be influenced by our comments? Likely not. But a science-based record must be established to take the BLM into federal court.

**Advocate** - Crucial to forward forest defense is debunking industry stories often believed, sadly, by the **Oregon Congressional delegation**. This is not a moment, so to speak, to politically cut the baby in half. Wyden, Merkley, Hoyle and all other leaders must hear the hard truth – protect streams and native forest and understand wildfire science not industry stories!

With your continued support, the CRA will push forward with county-level forest alliances. We must empower volunteer activists to take the lead in forest defense.

This is a crucial year for state and federal forestlands. We'll get through this Trump era. And we'll work tirelessly to minimize the damage to federal forests. Please consider a generous donation to our work.

Stay strong, a better world is possible!

Chuck Willer  
Executive Director

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