

## What is the Oregon Forest Resources Institute?

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**Jim Paul:** Yes, we're an industry and a sector advocate, but we are doing this in the context so that the public is aware of all of the benefits they accrue from having a forest industry that's strong and vibrant.

**Chris Edwards:** Welcome to Forestry Smart Policy, a podcast produced by the Oregon Forest Industries Council for policymakers and other thought leaders influencing decisions in Oregon. I'm Chris Edwards, your host and president of OFIC. In this episode, I sit down with Jim Paul, who was hired as executive director of the Oregon Forest Resources Institute, or OFRI, in September of 2023. We talk a bit about Jim's background and experience, and then explore OFRI's three primary program areas of K-12, public, and landowner education, including how the program areas are structured, funded, and executed. We also discuss similarities and differences between what OFRI does and what other forestry education or support entities do, including Oregon State University Extension and the newly-minted Small Landowner Office at the Oregon Department of Forestry. Along the way, we also discuss some criticism that's been leveled at OFRI, namely the response to Governor Kate Brown's request for a performance audit by Secretary of State Shamina Fagan in 2021 and the implications of a bill to modify OFRI that is currently under consideration in the 2023 Oregon Legislative Session. Without further delay, here's my discussion with Jim Paul.

All right, today we're talking with Jim Paul, the Executive Director of the Oregon Forest Resources Institute, also known as OFRI. Jim, how are you doing this morning?

**Jim Paul:** I'm doing pretty well, Chris. Appreciate being here, and kind of excited to do my first foray into podcasting. So this should be fun.

**Chris Edwards:** Well, we're just going to jump right into it today. So tell us a little bit about your background professionally and how you ended up at OFRI.

**Jim Paul:** Sure. I'm not one of your typical stories around someone who's gotten into the forestry field. I was actually grew up, spent my whole childhood and teenage years in Hawaii and with parents who both were born or raised in California, my first exposure to sort of the outdoors and forest lands was really through recreation, family vacations. We'd go rafting, we'd do hiking, we'd do camping. And that got me really excited about the outdoors and forests. And in college, I came out to the Pacific Northwest, went to Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, and got my degree in political science. And that's where I really got excited, started to get excited about forestry, clearly, just strictly from the political science perspective. I graduated right around the time of the Spotted Owl Wars,

the timber wars, and was just fascinated by the whole dynamics of what was going on and what was happening to the timber industry and just the social science side.

But after getting that degree and thinking I sort of wanted to pursue forest policy type of work, I realized I needed probably to have some more scientific background and knowledge about the industry before diving into it. So I went back to school and got a master's degree in forest hydrology from the University of Washington. I actually spent a year at Duke University's College of Forestry to start out my graduate work and then transfer to the UW. And from there, once I got my degree in 96, I started working for the Department of Forestry and spent the first 14 years of my career there, doing all sorts of different things, starting out with the monitoring program. Some of you really familiar with forestry and the department might remember our landmark landslide study that we did back during the 96 floods. I was part of the monitoring crew that hiked probably 100 different landslides and debris flows. That was an amazing experience.

But from there, I went on to do policy management. I was the state hydrologist for the agency for about four or five years and then decided to check out the management realm. And eventually, by 2006, I promoted into the assistant state forester job for state forests. I did that for a couple years and then actually did the same work within the private forest division that was called at the time. Went to diversify my career a little bit by moving over to the Department of State Lands and oversaw their land management division. The state lands division, they have quite a bit of, they have about 1.5 million acres of lands that we managed. Only a small percentage is forestry, but most of my work there actually, in fact, was around controversies around the Elliott State Forest. So kept forestry with me in my work and eventually rose to the level of director of that agency. Before taking a slight detour for a few years, I was approached by agency director at Department of Corrections who had a position she really thought would suit me well, and I decided to try something completely new and different, but realized that forestry is really where I enjoyed being and wanted to be. And when I saw the opportunity at OFRI, oh, almost a year ago now, it looked like it could be the right fit and a really great way for me to get back into forestry and contribute to forestry in Oregon, and was fortunate enough to be offered the position in the last September and have been just past my six month mark. So it feels like a year probably has gone by, but it's been a busy six months for sure.

**Chris Edwards:** So you really bring both the public policy and the forestry chops together. I think it's, I mean, that's perfect for the role at OFRI. I think it's interesting that you were recruited because clearly there's not a whole lot that's very similar between forestry and corrections, but it really speaks to your management skills in the public sector. So I think that speaks quite a bit to your qualifications. But let's shift a little bit to actually OFRI. I

mean, you guys are known for the quality information that you put out about forestry and forests in Oregon. At OFIC, we certainly have our favorite pieces of information that you put out that we use, just to help ground public policy conversations and facts and facts and figures. But you really do a lot more than that. So could you give us a sense of all the things that OFRI does?

**Jim Paul:** And one of the first things I always like to do is to pull up the actual enabling statutes to get grounded in what is the purpose of this organization? What is this fundamentally about? What is the legislative intent? And when I did that with OFRI, when you look in their statutes, which I'd encourage anyone who's interested to actually read them, and they're only about six pages long, but in the legislative finding sections for OFRI, there's a sentence that really jumped out for me that really aligns with a lot of my background. And that is the last sentence in a paragraph that talks about the importance of the forestry sector to Oregon and how much of the forestry contributes to Oregon and how essentially the legislature wants to make sure we continue to support this industry because of all of the good it does for Oregonians. The final sentence there says that the purpose of OFRI is essentially to support our forest products industry and the wise stewardship of natural resources for the benefit of Oregonians. And a personal thing for me is that it allows me to do something where I get to combine my, you know, my passion and my experience around public service, also with my passion and interest in forestry and get to essentially promote both. Yes, we're an industry and a sector advocate, but we are doing this in the context so that the public is aware of all of the benefits they accrue from having an industry, forestry industry, that's strong and vibrant.

However, obviously, OFRI is much bigger than just that one sentence. So that kind of sets the context and the purpose. And for that, you look at the general authorities. And there are four general sort of the major authorities around OFRI. One is increasing the public understanding of forestry, and all of its public benefits. And that is the majority of what we do in many different ways, which I know we're going to have a chance to talk about here today. The second is supporting education within the forestry sector. And the statutes, it's fascinating, because that is the only specific authority where it goes into five subparts, subcategories of that authority, what that means and what OFRI is supposed to do in terms of executing that authority. And then the last two have to do with research, conducting research and making sure we're facilitating continued improvement and use of wood products and the development of wood utilization, improvement of wood utilization. And then finally providing publications and other materials that are related to all of our work in any of those categories.

How do we do that? Well, we do that by essentially, we run three major programs that do all of our work. And we have a general public education program that is really geared towards providing information to the general public, helping making sure the general public is informed as possible and that we have resources available to inform the public. Public education is the most forward-facing and most funded, that's the largest part of our budget. We have a K through 12 education program where the focus, again, that comes under our public education piece, but it's a stand-alone and very focused program where we target education in our schools, in Oregon public schools, basically, in many different ways. And then finally, of course, we have our landowner, our landowner education program, our forest landowner education program, where we reach out to the forestry sector and do that support for education piece. That's so important. And again, all these programs are statewide in nature. So we attempt to reach or potentially reach Oregonians across the entire state.

**Chris Edwards:** So you've got public education, K-12 education, and landowner education are kind of your three program areas. I want to pivot back to something you specifically said that the public education and advertising is the biggest part of your budget. How big is advertising that you're doing?

**Jim Paul:** Sure, it is in terms of our, those three major programs, it is about close to 50%. If you look on average over the last five or 10 years, it's between 45 and 50% of our budget. However, for public education as a whole, the entire bucket of public education, which goes well beyond our public advertising. Our advertising and the media advertising we do is just a part of that. That's maybe only half of what that program does. Our budget hovers between 3.5 to \$4 million a year. Our advertising specifically has run, averaged at about \$800,000. What that comes out to is about 17% or so of our budget is the advertising. Now there's also, obviously there's some cost to producing the materials. We have a contractor we work with, an advertising agency we work with, that we pay to do a lot of the work around those materials. But that adds a few percentage more. So we're in the 23 to 25% range when you look at all of our costs. So like I said, only about half of our public education budget is that. And that's only, like I said, about a quarter of our entire OFRI budget.

**Chris Edwards:** Let's talk a little bit about the type of things that are contained in your advertisements. I mean, I know historically, it's been just getting out some of the basics and facts, like we replant after harvest. A lot of Oregonians don't know that. Maybe they're driving to the coast and they see a harvest unit and they say, oh, there aren't any trees there. And they don't realize that five years later, that hillside is going to look a lot different because it will have been replanted and reestablishing and growing and flourishing and all

that. But if you didn't grow up in a community where forestry and forest operations were really a part of the core of that community, you might not know that.

**Jim Paul:** Sure, yeah, absolutely. And that's why there are three themes that we focus on over time with our advertising. One is the reforestation and replanting. It's amazing because we do post ad surveys to see how much it's potentially changed people's understanding, and we do that over time. And we find that this is a continual need with Oregonians, both because people's memory spans can be short and also because the demographic changes in Oregon. I think I've heard something like 80% of the population growth in Oregon over the last 30 years is from outside of the state. Yeah, so we repeat these themes over time. Reforestation is a big one for the reasons you said. A lot of times, the seedlings are so small for the first two years that when you're just driving by at 60 miles an hour, it just looks like a bare ground, right? The other two are water resources, clean water, and the third one is wildlife. Those seem to be the three themes that repeatedly we hear are the most important things in general to the public that are the less informed public about forestry. So we spend a lot of effort just making sure to put those issues in front of the public and make sure they understand, like you said, the basics of forestry.

And on the seedling issue specifically, talking about, I mentioned earlier that that program does a lot more than just run ads. One of our most popular programs that we do is we offer signage, replanting signage, to any landowner that would like to have it. And these are signs that say planted in a given year or thinned in a given year that are large enough, depending on where that is and its aspect to which roads are going by. We will offer those to landowners to post so the public can see that, yeah, these are replanted. And those are signs that will show replanted in a year that was just immediately happened to replanting signs that might be from like 1980, 1990, where you see these, what some folks would think, well, that's a big forest, because that must be a really old forest, and maybe that's the original forest. Well, actually, no, this was a forest that has been harvested and replanted and will someday be harvested again.

**Chris Edwards:** Yeah, there are thousands of acres in Oregon that have been harvested and replanted, harvested and replanted, harvested and replanted at least three times around. But okay, so let's pivot back to one of the other buckets, your K-12. You talked about how that is a foundational program. It seems to me to be important to understand a little bit about how you develop your curriculum and how that's distributed.

**Jim Paul:** Sure, yes. And actually, that curriculum, we've had that program running for over 20 years now. In fact, one of the original staff that developed that program is still with us. And she came from an educator background. She didn't come from a forestry background. And the other staff person in our K-12 program, she's been with us for about eight years,

and she also came from an education background. So these are people that are educators at heart, and that is why I believe they're hired and why we count on them. And our starting point for that curriculum, as we maintain it over time and keep it current, is actually with the Oregon Department of Education and the State Board of Education standards. So they have very specific standards for what is required of any kind of curriculum that will be offered in Oregon's K-12 schools. So we first and foremost make sure we are meeting those standards.

We also use a steering committee of about 30 different people, mostly educators, also other state agencies that are involved in some level of forestry education to get feedback and input on that curriculum. We also just do ad hoc communications with educators around the state as we do minor updates and tweaks to that curriculum to make sure that we're getting some objective feedback on what's in there and making sure it's of a format and nature that works for educators. And then finally, a really important piece of this is we, it is a lot of work. We work with a contractor, actually, that does the actual writing and creation of the material itself. This is a contractor out of Portland, Leslie Combs, Writing for Education, or one of many clients of hers. We're not her only client, who helps us actually develop the final material and update those materials. So it's been a, you know, if we had to start over and redo it again, it would be a very big endeavor. Maintaining it over time obviously isn't as big, but we try to make sure that we are serving the public interest, that we are accurate in the curriculum materials and content, and that it's serving the purpose it needs to, which is making sure we are educating and informing our K-12 students.

The final piece, I think I would add, is that we do also where it makes sense and it fits in with the curriculum and the subject matter. We use a lot of the OFRI materials and publications that we produce for other purposes for the public, because we do invest a lot of time and energy and expertise in what's in those materials, so the extent that we can translate that very easily into any type of K-12 format, we do that as well.

**Chris Edwards:** Right. So a 30-person steering committee, I think it's important to understand how many people are involved in the materials that are being distributed in the K-12 system.

**Jim Paul:** The other piece that I didn't mention is that our entire K-12 program and everything we do is guided by our Oregon Forest Literacy Plan. This is a plan that was originally developed in 2011, again, by a very diverse group of educators, academic professionals, as well as natural resource specialists. We, at the time, put together a two-day meeting for this group to talk about and come to consensus on a common vision for what should be taught in Oregon schools around forestry. And then that plan was updated again in 2016 and again in 2021. And this plan is actually anchored in the larger Oregon

Environmental Literacy Program that is run by, at Oregon State University, by the Oregon Natural Resource Education Program. It's mandate is to cover all of the different topics under environmental education in Oregon. Our piece of this, our Oregon Forest Literacy Plan, is designed to satisfy the forestry-specific pieces of that broader statewide plan.

**Chris Edwards:** Okay, so it could nest inside of the broader Environmental Literacy Plan.

**Jim Paul:** Correct. It's intended to actually be the forestry piece of that plan. And in fact, we contract with ONREP to implement that piece, that plan that we maintain, the forestry piece of the plan, that is nested within the broader Oregon Environmental Literacy Plan.

**Chris Edwards:** What does ONREP do then?

**Jim Paul:** So ONREP's primarily role for us that we contract with them to do is to teach the teachers, train the educators. We reach about a thousand teachers a year, either in person or via online training courses. Their task is to make sure that those teachers are, have the curriculum that they need, have the training they need to feel confident.

**Chris Edwards:** So what type of feedback do you get from educators, teachers that are using the curriculum?

**Jim Paul:** Oh, we get incredible, incredibly positive feedback. I mean, we are sending out publications weekly. We offer, as part of our K-12 program, reimbursements for busing costs for schools that want to give tours, take their kids out on tours on forest lands. A lot of times we've discovered quite a few years ago that this was one of the biggest barriers, ironically, given all of the funding that schools have for everything that they do. A few hundred dollars for that bus can be the difference between taking kids out to actually be in the woods versus sitting in the classroom and having to just look at materials about forestry.

**Chris Edwards:** I love that, because with school budgets being tight, and there's all so many competing priorities, and just to be able to remove that barrier, to be able to provide access for kids that might not otherwise have that opportunity just to get out in the woods and actually see what they're learning about. Yep, I love that. Definitely. Yeah, so it's a great, it's one of my favorite, because it's one of those things that's just very tangible. It occurs to me that a little bit of discussion about how OFRI is funded is relevant to this discussion. So maybe you could talk a little bit about how OFRI is funded. Who's paying for it?

**Jim Paul:** Sure, yes, and this is actually a place, a topic that often there's misunderstanding about. Our funding specifically comes 100% from a dedicated harvest tax that is approved by our board on an annual basis. And currently, it's \$1.12 per thousand board feet harvested in Oregon. And it doesn't matter who's doing the harvesting, where the forest,

where the land is that the harvesting comes from. In fact, about 25% of those revenues come from trees that are harvested from state and federal lands. The other, about 75%, come from trees off of private lands. That tax is connected directly to when there is a harvest. There's a calculation made around the value, and the tax is applied.

**Chris Edwards:** So if you're just a member of the general public, and maybe you own some trees, but you're not harvesting them, you're not helping to pay for OFRI. That is just the harvest of trees.

**Jim Paul:** That is correct. Yes, there has to be an actual harvest, and money changing hands, and the tax gets applied. Department of Revenue collects those monies, and then it gets deposited into a state treasury account that OFRI uses to fund our operations.

**Chris Edwards:** Okay, so it's clear that there's no general fund in the funding of OFRI.

**Jim Paul:** That is correct. It's all funded by a harvest tax.

**Chris Edwards:** Let's pivot to talk about the Small Landowner Education Program, because if there's one thing that I've learned around here, is that small landowners love OFRI. So tell me a little bit about that. What benefit does a small landowner get from OFRI?

**Jim Paul:** Yes, we do. We hear the same thing. And as I mentioned earlier, our primary focus tends to be on small private landowners. What that means, the way we think of that, is about the 75,000 or so Oregonians that own less than 5,000 acres. 75,000 owners, which make up by our estimate 3.6 million acres of Oregon's forest lands. So that's more than 10%, I believe, if you do the math, distributed amongst those types of landowners. So that's obviously a big part of our stakeholder group that our landowner education is geared towards. But we have two other audiences, two of our three primary audiences, and those are the professional foresters out there that many of these landowners actually hire, because the smart landowners, oftentimes we find they're doing this for the first time since they inherited the land, or maybe they're doing it for the first time in 20, 30 years and have not even thought about the practice of forestry in that time. So they do oftentimes need help, professional help in doing what they want to do on their property. And the third audience is forest operators. So we have programs and training and tours and workshops that are individually catered to those three audiences. Sometimes we have very general types of workshops or publications that all three can take advantage of.

**Chris Edwards:** And real quickly, for those that are not as familiar with the industry vernacular, forest operators are?

**Jim Paul:** Forest operators are, well, the way I would describe them are those contractors, those workers that actually do the work on the ground in the forest, whatever that might be.

We are very broad in scope. Yes, we do have resources, as you'll see if you look into our materials on forest laws and regulations, but we are not just about educating about forestry laws and regulations. We're here to provide any kind of resources. An Oregonian who has forest land is looking for, be it to how do I, what's involved in replanting? What if I want to maximize my revenues? What if I am not worried about revenues, and I just want to grow some really nice habitat and some big trees? Whatever their goals are, sometimes regulations aren't even part of the equation that they might be having to work on. We are here to either help give them the information they need to do what they want to do or connect them with those people or those organizations in the state that can better help them with what they want to do.

**Chris Edwards:** That's a super, you're being a very valuable part of the educational and regulatory ecosystem, if you will, in Oregon. Because with 75,000 landowners, you're not going to have one management objective. All sorts of landowners are going to have different needs, different objectives. And like you said, could be wildlife habitat, could be stream restoration. There's always a need out there that's left unfulfilled. So we do what we can. So how does that differ from what perhaps OSU Extension could offer for small landowners?

**Jim Paul:** I would call it a complementary relationship where OSU Extension has a certain number of specialists in the field that are there to provide support. They only have so many hours in the day as well. So I think some of the services we provide overlap, but I use the word complementary because, like I just said a few moments ago, there's such a great need out there that the more expertise, the more services we're able to offer landowners, the better outcome, I think, for the forests. Another thing that's unique about our relationship with Extension is that one of the programs under Extension is called the Master Woodlands Manager Program. This is essentially a volunteer program for Oregonians that want to know more and have more expertise in forestry. They can take some classes and get certified as a Master Woodlands Manager, not to necessarily become a consultant as a profession, but to simply as more of a hobby where they can then be a resource to their neighbors or their friends, and again extend and leverage that knowledge from Extension to others. OFRI provides the sole support for the Master Woodlands Manager program. So without OFRI funding, OSU would not be able to leverage that resource to Oregonians to again make sure we are reaching as much of that 75,000 people that are out there that need our support.

So that again, how well we are able to support and help forest landowners manage their land, I believe has a direct impact on the quality of our forests in Oregon and the benefits that come out of those forests that obviously will primarily accrue to that forest landowner,

but that also impact the public, impacts neighbors, impacts water quality and wildlife. So Oregonians as a whole do derive a benefit from that investment.

**Chris Edwards:** Yeah, it's been my observation to speak to one of the differences between OFRI and Extension. It's been my observation as a participant in natural resource policy and budget writing for a decade, a decade and a half. OSU Extension, unfortunately, funding for it becomes a political football during the legislative session. And it's always underfunded, and then at the end of session, miraculously, some funding is usually put toward OSU Extension. And I'm not going to get too partisan here. Don't need to do that, but it's not reliable. It's not, and it's just not reliably funded. Whereas OFRI, through the harvest tax, is an ongoing entity that makes sure that this type of education is always available to small woodland owners or large forest owners or consultants or whoever it is that's working in that ecosystem. Because the needs for that type of education and planning don't ebb and flow with the politics of Oregon. We just need to make sure that that's that's funded steadily. So that's just an observation that, and you don't need to comment on that, Jim. But that's my observation from somebody that's from the seat that I had for a decade in the legislature and then working on these issues for years since I left the legislature. But I digressed. Let's get back to some of the differences between OFRI and we talked about OSU Extension. How about what the Department of Forestry provides for small landowners?

**Jim Paul:** Yes. And the only comment I'd make on your previous comments there is actually a reminder. I'm glad you brought this up about the large landowner community. OFRI is, of course, here available for any landowners in Oregon. And as you know, as well as anyone, Chris, the larger a landowner gets, the more substantial their holdings in their company and their resources are. Oftentimes they are more able to provide for those needs and that education. So the demand on OFRI becomes less and less. The larger landowners get just to use a very broad generalization. However, I think, as you said, occasionally they can call on us as well. Any landowner in Oregon can call on us for support. We just, because of the nature of the business, we tend to spend the majority of our support on those landowners with 5,000 acres or less.

**Chris Edwards:** And we just went through a major rewrite of the Oregon Forest Practices Act in the Private Forest Accord. And there's a whole lot of education of foresters and landowners of all sizes that is happening and retraining and educating and updating of all the forest law and knowledge, the rules and regs in Oregon. And certainly OFRI has been a part of helping to educate.

**Jim Paul:** Absolutely, yes. Which actually gets us back to the question you just asked around what are the differences between OFRI and our functions and our purpose and,

let's say, the Department of Forestry. And I think specifically you mentioned the Small Landowner Office that's recently been created. It is relatively new. It was created within the Department of Forestry. And again, I would characterize to use the same word, we are complementary. And I think if you look at the statutes around, again, OFRI's governing statutes, as I mentioned at the beginning, and you look at the enabling legislation around the Small Landowner Office, I find it becomes pretty clear the difference that are there. That office, it appears by its mandates to be primarily focused, I think, on what you just summarized a few moments ago, Chris, this new need and pretty significant need to help Oregon forest landowners understand these new laws, the new changes in the laws, the new rules that are some of the most significant, someone argues since the founding of the Forest Practices Act, or at least going back to the water protection rules that was the next significant change in the early 90s.

And as we talked about earlier, part of OFRI's work, yes, involves helping landowners understand the regulations, but we go well beyond that. And as far as our understanding is, this small landowner office is not specifically built to cover those broad questions about how forest landowners manage their lands, but it's really to make sure that these changes that are a result of the recent private forest accord that are coming into effect, to make sure that those first and foremost are understood, landowners have information they need, and that those will be successful in their implementation. Again, which is just a piece of what OFRI does.

The other piece I would say we're complimentary is that OFRI has been doing landowner education and outreach and having that be a focus and develop the expertise and materials for decades, literally decades. And this office is brand new. I understand they're still bringing on people, training people. The type of work that OFRI does, you don't develop these expertise materials overnight. It isn't like flipping a switch and now you've got it. Regardless sort of of how one sees the mandates of this small landowner office versus OFRI, it is a very new office with new people that are learning this work. And we see part of our role and our complimentary role to help them learn how to do that part of their work because we have been doing it, have been so effective for so many years. And we are actively reaching out to them, as I said, and trying to make sure we are coordinating.

**Chris Edwards:** Some folks have explained it to me that the small forest landowner office is largely going to be engaging with landowners at the time of harvest. If you're a small woodland owner, you may not be harvesting it all at once. There are planning considerations, and you need to understand how much you can harvest, and where you can harvest, and with the rules changing, and it's too late, potentially, at the time of harvest, and you find out, oh, these new regulations don't allow all of this portion of the

property to be harvested. And that could be a big shock, could be perilous even to a small landowner to learn that and not have planned for it. So, you really do play a different role than ODF. And you spoke about the complementary nature of what OFRI does and ODF. And that brings to mind the book, the book on the regs, Oregon's Forest Protection Laws, that book that really boils it all down and spells it out for landowners.

**Jim Paul:** It does. It does. And in fact, it's one of our two best sellers, as we call it, that have been around, both of which have been around for about 20 years. One is the Forest Facts that I know you're very familiar with. But the other is, yes, our illustrated manual around Oregon Forest Protection Laws, the book. The book that's so popular. In fact, we get requests from ODF whenever we've come out with a new edition. They order their own copies and make sure they have it on their shelves. And what this book is, it's something that started about 20 years ago, where OFRI recognized that while ODF does provide, of course, a summary of the rules and updates that summary, it's in a format that is not always easy to digest. Some folks might need to hire a consultant to help them understand it. And OFRI thought, here's where some place we can add value. And we developed this book, actually in partnership. We work with ODF staff to make sure that the content is accurate. We work with OSU Extension. We also did some work with AOL, Association of Oregon Loggers, because there are lots of illustrations in this book.

It's a book that's fundamentally communicating the same information that is in this very dense sort of rule, bureaucratic type of document, into plain language with diagrams, image explanations that makes it digestible and understandable to hopefully most anyone that is looking to manage their forest land. And we're into the third edition right now, and we are starting to work on our fourth edition. And those of you who haven't seen it, it's a fairly thick book. It's laminated with very robust paper because it gets taken out in the field and flipped through and taken in the rain. And as I said, it is one of our two most popular publications that we produce.

**Chris Edwards:** And speaking on behalf of large landowners, we love that you produce this. I mean, our folks use it, small landowners use it. And we want everybody to be on the same page in practicing sound forest practices, following the rules, following the regulations, because it doesn't do anybody any good to have a misunderstanding of how the rules ought to apply to their land. It doesn't do any of us good to have folks that aren't as educated as they should be about the rules and regulations and or are bad actors. So that's important to us as well. So let's start to head down the homestretch toward a summary. So we've talked about three big buckets, K-12 education, landowner education, public education. Is there anything that we're missing?

**Jim Paul:** I think the only piece that's missing, a small piece, but I think is a significant piece and one that actually illustrates our ability to, our uniqueness, our unique niche, and our ability to act in a timely way and take advantage of opportunities is a small program that we call New Opportunities. Every year, we set aside a chunk of money, maybe 5% or so of our budget to be available for what we call new opportunities. So that in the course of the fiscal year, if we have some partners approach us or some new issue pops up that any one of our programs feels like this is important, this is aligned with our mission, we should jump on this and put some resources towards it, then we have some monies to do that. And that's fairly unique in the world of fixed budget for two years, and you're pretty constrained if you haven't planned ahead with some foresight. So I think that's, again, a small but I think significant because we definitely utilize that program, that piece of our budget every year.

**Chris Edwards:** So could you provide us of an example?

**Jim Paul:** The very recent one that we did with a demonstration forest called the Hopkins Demonstration Forest that we're seeing, that has about, by their estimate, I think they get about 15,000 visitors a year now, actually jumped up during COVID that are primarily from the Portland area, outside the Portland area that people are just looking for a place to actually recreate and bring their dogs, I guess, who knew it's becoming harder and harder to find a place to take your dog to city parks in the Portland area. And it's an experimental forest that's actively logged, that has signage throughout the whole forest and access to the whole forest, and it's free and open to the public. And they are a completely volunteer organization that relies on donations. They occasionally reach out to us and make requests to help them with their signage, update their signage. So we recently provided some money through this program to update their signage around actually water resources and wetlands, this piece of their property that they've had to protect under the rules and under just their management philosophy. So that's a nice example that we didn't have the money necessarily planned for, but are able to enhance that place. And it's also a place that we have partnered with in the past as well. So we do have an ongoing relationship.

**Chris Edwards:** So in summary, OFRI does quite a lot. And I mean, I just don't understand how you get all this work done. How big is your staff?

**Jim Paul:** Well, our staff is a whopping eight people right now. That includes me. I call them small but mighty. And actually, it's one of the things that sort of really attracted me to the job, frankly. They are a fantastic group of people. And if you want to actually see them live, you can go on to our website. We have an about OFRI video. It's about five minutes long that features all but one of our staff, who's a little camera shy. But you can see who we are, like literally, that this is who we are, the eight of us. You know, we do, we rely, obviously, as I've

referred to a few times, on leveraging our resources with other organizations to have the reach that we have across Oregon.

**Chris Edwards:** So let's talk a little bit about some criticism that's been leveled at OFRI. In 2021, I want to say it was summer-ish of 2021, the Secretary of State, Shamia Fagan, issued an audit report, as they do for a lot of state agencies. And there were some critiques and recommendations about how OFRI was operating, or what OFRI ought to do to make some changes, some recommendations. Could you tell us a little bit about what you've done?

**Jim Paul:** Sure, yes, very happy to. So, yeah, the audit came out, as you said, in, I believe it was July or August of 2021. And before I came on, I've been on with OFRI since September of last year, but even prior to my arrival, OFRI did an initial response to those recommendations by the Secretary of State, I believe in May of last year, that addressed some of them. There were five recommendations in total, some of which had many sub-recommendations. A lot of those recommendations were around ensuring we document processes and procedures, around public engagement and public review, around quality information development, really around sort of assuring that the agency is following its statutes, is following the laws, a reference to Ethics Commission training. And again, these are things that are not atypical, actually, in audits that every agency period gets. This one was maybe a little more extensive than others, and probably because I don't believe OFRI had been audited before. So in some respects, it was welcome, I would say, just in terms of the outcome of a lot of these recommendations and our response to them, I believe has actually benefited the agency, made us stronger.

So we issued another update that we, as requested by the Secretary of State in November of last year, and we have fulfilled or started work and are in the middle of meeting all of those recommendations. Two major pieces that are still left involve our strategic plan. We haven't had an update to our strategic plan in six years. We actually are just starting work on that and project to have that done by the fall. And the other piece is a lot of the documentation around our policies and procedures, a lot of which we did not have documented. We did have standard practices we would utilize, but we realized through the audit that we didn't have those sort of in writing and written down to ensure they were continued to be consistent and robust. So that is a whole other body of work documenting those policies and procedures and then keeping them updated over time. We have an additional position in our budget to grow our agency from eight to nine. And we are actually, once we have that resource on board, we will be fulfilling that final piece of the audit recommendation. So I think we're in a good place with responding to that audit. Again, as I said, I believe all things considered as audits should do, I think it has benefited the agency

to make these changes that we've had to make because of the audit. And we're looking forward and moving forward.

**Chris Edwards:** Well, that's great. And I do want to take this opportunity to do a little myth busting from my perspective. That's what I will call it. In a recent legislative hearing on House Bill 3019, antagonists asserted that cutting the OFRI budget by two thirds would essentially right size OFRI. Right size OFRI. What's your response to that?

**Jim Paul:** This is actually a great question. What agencies do have to do with, I believe every bill that goes to a work session, they get a request from the legislative fiscal office that asks them to provide information on what is the fiscal impact of this to your agency. If this bill were to pass in its current form, that is required of agencies. That's public record. And then what the legislative fiscal office does is they put together a compilation, and they publish that, and they provide that to the committees. So that of course happened in this case. We were requested to do a fiscal impact statement, and then they issued a comprehensive summary statement.

So what I would do is simply sort of, if you don't mind, I would just read a few passages from what's documented in that fiscal impact statement. And what it says here, which is again from information we provided as requested and required as part of the legislative process, OFRI anticipates that this measure would cause a loss of revenue totaling approximately 2.4 million annually. This loss of revenue will likely require reducing staffing from nine positions to three. I mentioned that we're about to hire on the position, which would make us go from eight to nine. So consistent with your comment about a two-thirds reduction, it would, if passed in its current form, reduce our staffing from nine to three. This also may require elimination of programs that fulfill their current statutory mandates, such as annual statewide education media campaign on forestry and Oregon's forests, forestry and natural resource education programs in schools, the landowner education program, and public education programs such as publications, tours, and commissioning reports. These actions will be subject to the approval of the OFRI Board of Directors. So that simply mentions that this is an analysis of potential outcomes. If a two-thirds reduction in the budget were to actually happen, there would of course be a OFRI Board of Directors discussion that would ultimately decide how and what would have to be reduced. But that would be the magnitude, that sort of expresses kind of the magnitude of the change it would cause.

**Chris Edwards:** And that information that you just cited is from the legislative fiscal report produced by legislative staff. And it says 2.4 million going from eight or nine positions down to three, elimination of programs. So what some people would call right-sizing, we would call just is basically gutting OFRI. You don't have to, you should respond Jim, but I'm not

gonna force you to respond. It completely turns OFRI inside out and just renders them unable to fulfill their purpose.

**Jim Paul:** From a clearly budget perspective, as you pointed out, for any agency to take a two-thirds cut would significantly change how that agency can function. And I believe in the response we provided to the legislative fiscal that they then used for some of this report, we did point out that this would be a significant impact that could result in having to reduce down to even a single program, either at least reduce one program and significantly reduce the remaining two, or potentially just end up with an agency where we are only able to support one program, and as ultimately would be a board director's call if it came to that. But yes, right, it's significant.

**Chris Edwards:** Yeah, and that's fair, and we're just asking for it. Yeah, I mean, really, we're just presenting the facts. So, and we won't get into what other things proponents of that bill would like to shift landowner harvest, you know, harvest tax dollars too. That's, you know, that's really not for this discussion, but I'm feeling really good about where you're leading OFRI right now. And it sounds like, you know, you've addressed the audit and the items in the audit. You, you know, you've got new things under development. What's your vision for OFRI in the coming months? I mean, you haven't been, you haven't been at the helm that long, you know, once this legislative session is done and you're looking forward into the future, what's in store?

**Jim Paul:** Yeah, I mean, the vision question is a big one, important one, and one I've actually thought a lot about. And I'm actually excited that we're starting into a strategic plan update, because ultimately that will articulate our vision. OFRI has the potential to be the first source that Oregonians think of to go to when they want to know something about forestry in Oregon. It doesn't matter what. Something pops into someone's mind, I want to know what's going on here, I want to know more about this. Gosh, where should I call OFRI? I know, I should call Oregon Forest Resources Institute. They'll know. And that we should be able to either answer those questions directly, or we can direct those people to where they need to go to find out those answers or whatever services they need. That we have the credibility and the resources and the reach and connections and partnerships where we can be that one stop source.

We also come from a place of a lot of high credibility around the forestry sector, and that what we share and what we promote and support around forestry and try to help Oregonians understand about forestry, it holds that credibility so that we are effective in that role as well, which is a critical role. And I think that role is as critical now more than ever. I mean, back in 1991, those visionaries that saw the need for OFRI already saw what was happening with demographics in Oregon. Fewer percentage of the population that was

exposed to were involved in the forestry sector, which was making more disconnected to the value of that sector. We're seeing that continue and it will continue out in the future. So the need to make sure that Oregonians are aware of how important a healthy forestry sector is is as great as it's ever been.

And for us to do that, the most effective way to make that happen is for that kind of information to come from an organization that has that credibility with the public, that generally is not questioned from the majority of public. You won't be able to say that about everyone, but that's life, right? But that we have a reputation that we're a trusted source of information, and people know that if they call us, they will get help, whatever it is that they need from us or directed to where they need to go. And that's actually a vision that I've started to work on, and I've noticed staff has already actually been doing it. When I tell stories to staff around, I got this phone call today, and it was from a person who didn't really know who OFRI was, but something was going on in their world, in their forest, and they needed help. I called them back, or I made sure a staff person called them back. And when I talked about that with staff, they said, Oh yeah, Jim, you'll be getting lots of those calls. This is what we do. So that made me feel good, too, that we have been in that place before, and we need to stay in that place or grow in terms of that place of being the go-to source. So it's a big vision, just given how relatively few Oregonians know about OFRI by name. But I think, as with any good mission, it's something you strive for, that you may have trouble ever really getting to, but you have to shoot for high standards to elevate what you do and to serve a greater purpose. So that's some of what I've been thinking about vision.

**Chris Edwards:** I love it, Jim. And you're the person to do this. I mean, you're experienced. You're a steady hand at the helm of an agency that clearly serves a mission that's dear to your heart. And I'm just really excited about the future. So thank you for joining us on the OFIC Forestry Smart Policy podcast. And maybe we'll have you back again in the future to talk about things as they develop.

**Jim Paul:** Well, thank you, Chris. It's been a pleasure and I'd be happy to come back anytime.

**Chris Edwards:** Great, thank you. I hope you enjoyed this episode on the Oregon Forest Resources Institute. Be sure to check back for new content coming your way soon on the Forestry Smart Policy podcast. And as always, if you have a question about this episode or something else, just drop us a note at [podcast@ofic.com](mailto:podcast@ofic.com). And in a future episode, we may just address it.