

Travis Joseph: The greatest threat, it's not logging, it's not grazing, it's not mining, it's wildfire at scale. These mega fires are deforesting your land and my land. And we shouldn't accept that and we don't have to accept that. We need to change the system because we're not going in after fires and recovering them, restoring them, and replanting them. That's unacceptable.

Chris Edwards: Welcome to Forestry Smart Policy, a podcast cast produced by the Oregon Forest Industries Council for policy makers and other thought leaders influencing decisions in Oregon. I'm Chris Edwards, your host and president of OFIC. All right, today's episode is unique because it covers a topic outside OFIC's portfolio that is Federal Forest Management. Because of that, and just because we like them, we're recording this episode jointly with American Forest Resource Council. So, you'll find the same episode over on their podcast channel as well. On the podcast with me today is Travis Joseph, president and CEO of the American Forest Resource Council. AFRC focuses primarily on federal forests and public lands across the West, while here at OFIC, we spend most of our time on private forest land issues in Oregon. So, Travis and I work on different aspects of many of the same issues. In this conversation, we started out talking about Oregon's historic 2026 wildfire season and the Grasshopper fire burned on the Mount Hood National Forest. You might have heard of it. And there's quite a story behind that fire. It involves four years of work by a local diverse collaborative to develop a forest restoration project only to get slapped with a lawsuit from an activist group that delayed the project. And then a wildfire burned through the very landscape they claimed they were trying to protect. From there, we get into the bigger question. Why is it so hard to actively manage our federal forests? Well, we talk about litigation, collaboration, wildfire, climate change, and whether environmental laws and policies written decades ago are still delivering the environmental outcomes we want today. And then we get into the politics. Now, Travis and I both come from Democratic Party political backgrounds. And we have a pretty frank conversation about the party, the environmental movement, and the timber industry, including some uncomfortable questions about whether old political alliances and frankly old ideas about forestry are getting in the way of better outcomes on the ground. This is definitely not scripted conversation. It's more like one Travis and I might have had over a beer and we just happen to have microphones in front of us this time. So, without further delay, here's my conversation with Travis Joseph.

Chris Edwards: Today, we're doing the podcast a little bit differently and I'm really excited for this one. We've talked about a lot of great topics on our podcast, but today we're doing this with our colleague and my peer Travis Joseph. He's the president and CEO of the American Forest Resource Council. Travis, why don't you tell us a little bit about AFRC, what you do, and to set the context for our discussion today about wildfire in Oregon and across the West, but in particular here in Oregon, what's happening in our national forest this wildfire season and what led to it. But first, a little bit about AFRC.

Travis Joseph: Well, Chris, thanks for the opportunity. I appreciate the partnership and the collaboration. And AFRC and OFIC have a great relationship, working relationship,

and I'm honored and privileged and I know that my team is as well to be working with your team on these important and challenging issues for our forests and for our communities. So, yeah, I run AFRC. I've been here for almost 11 years, which is hard to believe. Before that, I was a staffer in Washington DC as a congressional staffer. I worked for former Congressman Peter DeFazio. I worked on the House Natural Resources Committee and I worked on the House Committee on Transportation Infrastructure and I worked for Democrats on those committees. I was really inspired by these issues through that work on Capitol Hill and really got exposed to what's happening on our national forest and public lands through that work in Washington DC and knew that I wanted to be a part of this. To my surprise, also found myself aligning with and learning a lot about these issues that I hadn't previously been disposed to around what conservation really is, what it means, and how we can do a better job managing our natural resources and public lands for current generations. But also of future generations. And so at AFRC, we focus exclusively on federal lands. We work on forest service lands and BLM lands in western Oregon. We also do DNR, Department of Natural Resources lands in Washington state. And our mission is to grow the public timber supply to support the infrastructure that is essential to stewarding our forest. I think that's a really important point that folks forget and something that I've, you know, learned, um, certainly as a staffer. is this connection between the mills, the people, the workforce, the knowhow, and the equipment that is absolutely essential to stewarding our forest. When you lose that, you lose your ability to steward our forest. And so, I really believe our mission at AFRC, as I said, is about public timber supply, but it's about protecting and preserving the people and the infrastructure that are critical to managing our public lands and delivering all the incredible environmental benefits that Oregonians and Americans deserve and want from their lands.

Chris Edwards: Well, that's inspiring what you guys are working on. And I'm still stuck back on the fact that we have two Democrats in the room here, both of whom run natural resource trade associations charged with the sustainable management and utilization of natural resources. Uh I think there's a story there.

Travis Joseph: I actually think that that is why I do these issues. I think is informed by my politics. You know, I think that there's a huge disconnect here and I and I hope that we do get a chance to talk about that and we We're going to talk about the grasshopper restoration project, what's happening on the Mount Hood, what's happening with wildfires, and if you really care about our forests, if you really care about clean water and clean air and healthy wildlife populations, which I don't care about your politics, I think all Americans care about those things. If you care about recreation and access and passing on something that's better for a future generation, we have to think about what's happening right now. What are the policies, laws, and regulations that are impacting those outcomes? And what we need to do to do something different. And if you're a Democrat, a Republican, or independent, I think that the answer is the same.

Chris Edwards: Hell yeah, it is. But before we get into the specifics of the Grasshopper fire, and we're going to talk a little bit about that, let's uh set the stage by just talking

about the historic nature of this year's wildfire season. What can you tell us about what's happening here in Oregon right now?

Travis Joseph: Well, as we know, it's devastating and unfortunately, it's historic. 2.5 million acres have burned in the state of Oregon. That's a record. That's an unfortunate record. An extraordinary cost to the state of Oregon, at least \$160 million that the state of Oregon is going to have to cover. That doesn't even mention the cost to the federal government that's fighting fires across these landscapes as well. What I think is really interesting about those numbers is that of the 2.5 million acres, only 8% of those fires are burning on ODF protected land, Oregon Department of Forestry lands. What does that mean? That means that ODF, which is responsible for state forest, but they're also responsible for fighting fire at the local level on private lands. So, in other words, 2.5 million acres are burning, 8% of that is on private lands. The rest is on, you know, public lands, federal lands. A lot of that, of course, is on Forest Service lands. I think that's a disconnect that a lot of Oregonians have is, you know, folks think that humans cause the most fires. Yeah, that's true. Human cause wildfires cause the most starts, but they don't burn the most acres. And that's a really important distinction because has implications for policies and response and cost and what we do about it. 97%—I know I'm spitting out a lot of numbers here, but these are important. Numbers are important for context. 97% of all of the acres that have burned in our state over the last 10 years have come from and started on federal lands. So that that's the important piece is yes, human-caused fire is significant and we can do something about that. Maybe we can talk about what some of those things are. But a lot of these fires are lightning caused fires and they're out in remote areas on federal lands that then spread and grow into mega fires, impact our environment, impact recreation, impact our air, our water, our health, and of course have huge socioeconomic impacts.

Chris Edwards: That's right. And the reason that our members of OFIC care about this as private forest land owners is because fire knows no boundaries. Fire doesn't care about who owns the land. And when our neighbors, whether it be the BLM or the Forest Service, have fires that start on their land and slop over onto our land, our acres are put at risk. And we have a very robust, complete, and coordinated fire suppression system in Oregon led by the Department of Forestry that includes the participation of private forest land owners and not only participation with boots on the ground and equipment and air resources, but also we pay a lot of that, hundreds of millions over the last, you know, many years. We pay a lot of that out of our district level assessments through the forest products harvest tax. So, we contribute a lot to the system. And as you noted earlier, 97% of the acres burned, whether it's on private land or federal land, come from fire that originate on federal land. That's why we care deeply about what's happening on our federal lands. Besides the fact that we're just all Oregonians, we like to recreate on those lands, too. I was backpacking last week in a wilderness area here in the Pacific Northwest. Our first 10 miles was a long pull through a burn scar. No shade, nothing but manzanita. Nothing but manzanita. And a number of folks that were with us on that trip, a few of them were commenting about, man, imagine what it would be if it was forested. It would be beautiful. It used to be beautiful. It's not beautiful anymore. Now it's just hot and barren.

Travis Joseph: You're also touching on a really important point and distinction between private and federal lands about fire and what happens after fire. You know, one of the leading causes of deforestation in our country is wildfire. I mean, that's what's going on. People aren't making that connection on private land. If you're on private industrial land in Oregon and a fire hits your forest stand, you're going to salvage it, you're going to sell those logs, you're going to take them to a mill, you're going to make wood products and sell them on the market and then you're going to replant. That is not what the federal government does. You know, people don't realize that when a wildfire hits Forest Service land and potentially wipes out that entire forest, the Forest Service is not required to replant national forest. And they don't because they don't have the money. One, they don't necessarily have the people. But maybe even more importantly that we're missing here is that the Forest Service is not going in after a wildfire and removing the dead and dying trees which are going to burn again so that they can safely go in and replant. That is what we're seeing across federal lands in Oregon. So when you see a wildfire and all the trees are dead and dying, I can guarantee you that that is not private land. That's federal land. That's our land. The land that we own collectively. Yes, the government manages it for us. It's our land. And I think that it's appalling, frankly, if you really think about it, about people who love our forest. You love our national forests. I love our federal lands and federal forests. We're not stewarding them. And the greatest threat, it's not logging. It's not grazing. It's not mining. It's wildfire at scale. These mega fires are deforesting your land and my land. And we shouldn't accept that. And we don't have to accept that. We need to change the system. And that involves the laws, the rules, the regulations that literally prohibit the federal government from stewarding our lands and delivering better outcomes for future generations because we're not going in after fires and recovering them, restoring them, and replanting them. That's unacceptable. We have to change that. That is unacceptable.

Chris Edwards: So, let's talk a little bit about some of those efforts in the past and how it's playing out on the landscape today and even this fire season. So, there exist these things called collaboratives and maybe you could tell us a little bit about what collaboratives are, the work that they do and then one project in particular that's in that's in the headlines uh this season because it's burning.

Travis Joseph: Yeah. Well, collaboratives, let's start there because that's really important and I think maybe there's a misunderstanding about what collaboratives are. There's maybe like the big C collaborative and little C collaboratives, right? Through existing public laws and regulations, I consider our federal laws on national forest to be the little sea collaborative meaning this is the government's attempt to engage the public on what we're doing on national forests. They go through the National Environmental Policy Act, they have to consult under the Endangered Species Act. I mean there's processes that are established that really is collaboration—public disclosure, public information, we want to hear from you, the public. So, that is part of the process already that's baked into our system is an interaction between the land manager, the Forest Service, and the public because these are the public's lands. But then there's this big C collaborative and that's when people think about collaboration,

there are collaborative groups and there are dozens through the areas that we work. We work in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California and we have a member in Nevada. So we work in six western states and we engage in AFRC and our members in over 50 collaboratives. So if there's a collaborative, our members are engaged in it. Either AFRC staff or our members do. It's volunteer-based. You know, you go to these collaboratives to try to flag and identify where there are potential issues or disagreements and you work together to come to a conclusion to do what's right for the forest and the communities that are impacted by those lands. That's what the goal of a collaborative is is look, we're all coming from different perspectives. We're coming from different experiences. We maybe have different values and outcomes that we want from these lands. How do we work together? That's what a collaborative is intended to do. And so AFRC spends its time—the timber industry is investing in collaboratives to sit at the table with diverse interest groups to figure out all right where where's the common ground. How do we design projects that make sense for this local area and then how do we work together to implement it? That's a collaborative. Now, what we're going to talk about is one specific collaborative. Frankly, it's one of the strongest collaboratives in the Pacific Northwest, and that's the Wasco County Collaborative. It's an incredible group of people, and again, these are folks that work on a volunteer basis. And here are the folks that are involved, just to give you a sense of the spectrum of interests and voices and investments of time and money in this collaborative. That includes the Oregon Department of Forestry. It includes the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. It includes the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, a rural fire district, the local watershed council, recreational interests, a conservation group, the timber industry. The school district even has a representative on the collaborative for the Wasco County Collaborative. So, this is a really diverse group of interests and they meet, they go out into the woods together and they try to find that common ground and common interest to support projects to better care for our forests, to reduce wildfire risk, to improve habitat conservation, to improve recreation, to improve access for firefighters and first responders on our public lands. So, on the Mount Hood National Forest, this collaborative is actively engaged in helping the Forest Service manage the Mount Hood National Forest.

Chris Edwards: So the collaborative gets together, they have their meet. I have no idea how long these processes take to develop, and my understanding is that the collaborators will develop a treatment plan, a landscape scale treatment plan that involves, you know, thinnings and things like this across the landscape, chunked up piece by piece. Is that more or less?

Travis Joseph: Exactly. Let me drill it down into the real world now. Exactly. So, we've talked about what a collaborative is, what their goals are, how they come together. They're all different, you know, they all have different interests and, you know, try to meet the moment and meet what that local need is. So, I described the Mount Hood collaborative. In 2019, Mount Hood National Forest, so this is the Forest Service, came to the collaborative and said, "Hey, we want to work with you to implement fuel treatments to address insects and disease issues so that we can identify together and work together to implement projects that meet our collective interests." That was back

in 2019. Now, it's important to also highlight that the Forest Service is bound by rules and regulations and laws. Like you can't just go do whatever you want anywhere you want. Like that's not how it works. As you know, we have the Northwest Forest Plan. The Northwest Forest Plan governs how 24 million acres of national forest from Washington down to Northern California, west of the Cascades. It governs how we do forest management. It puts more than 85% of the land base of our national forest off limits from active management at all.

Chris Edwards: 85%.

Travis Joseph: Already. So you're starting from a perspective of you really can't do much if anything on 85% of 24 million acres in the Pacific Northwest. So that's your starting point. That's your foundation. Then the Forest Service looks at its individual forest plan which is tied to the Northwest Forest Plan, and that forest plan for the Mount Hood dictates what you can do, how you can do it, where you can do it, right? We put lines on a map of the Mount Hood National Forest that tell us what's even possible. Even if there was a disease outbreak on the Mount Hood National Forest, if it doesn't fall within a category that allows you to do active management, you can't do anything about it. An example of that is wilderness. If you're in a wilderness area on the Mount Hood National Forest, you cannot do anything in that wilderness area. Period. You cannot go in there with a chainsaw to clear trail. You can't go in there and remove dead and dying trees that are going to create huge issues in the future. That's off limits. So, we're talking about a tiny fraction of the land base that's even allowed to be managed under the best available science. So, then the Forest Service goes to the collaborative and they said, "Hey, here's our forest plan. Here's our money from Congress. Here's what we're allowed to do where. How do we work with you to identify based on this limited land base where you think we should go?" And the groups and folks that I just named that are part of that collaborative work with the Forest Service, go out into the woods on field trips, have meetings, and work through those issues. And that collaborative came to consensus and supported a specific project called the Grasshopper Restoration Project. The Mount Hood National Forest is 1.1 million acres. That's the total size of the Mount Hood National Forest. The Grasshopper restoration project was 5,800 acres. Just I want to pause and just like let your listeners and my listeners think about that for a second. So, we're talking about a million plus acre forest and this project supported by the Forest Service and the American taxpayer through congressional appropriations that scratches the surface of what's even allowed for active management supported by the collaborative is 5,800 acres. That's what we're talking about. The collaborative worked through this for not a couple weeks, not a couple months. It took them years to come to consensus and for the Forest Service to go through all the paperwork and process to approve that project. It's not like the Forest Service can just say, "Hey, that makes sense to us. Let's draw up the contract and go out to the public and bid it out." No, they have to go through the National Environmental Policy Act. Then they have to go through the Endangered Species Act to consult with other agencies and other biologists from other federal agencies. And then if they can get through all of that, then they have a project that they make a decision on and then it goes out for a competitive bid. But that's not the end of the story. That's what the Forest

Service did in 2023. So I mentioned we started in 2019. So now we're actually spanning two presidential administrations, four years of work, the investment of time and resources, the engagement with the collaborative to do 5,800 acres of restoration treatment. And the project was focused on insect disease, hazardous fuel treatments, habitat, wildlife improvement, and access for the public and firefighters. That's what the project was about. Yeah, it was going to generate timber volume for one of my members that they were going to, you know, make American wood products that are used to build houses that we all live in. How crazy is that?

Chris Edwards: And store carbon in the process.

Travis Joseph: And store carbon in the process. I don't know what really there is to object to about that. But that's where the collaborative got. That's where the Forest Service got. And one group who was invited to participate in the collaborative, Oregon Wild, decided not to participate in the collaborative. And they filed a lawsuit to block that project. The Forest Service, to protect the integrity of the collaborative—as you can imagine, these are volunteers. Like someone from a school district is volunteering their time to come talk about forestry on the Mount Hood with a water district and a tribal representative and a timber industry person and a conservation group. They're all working together. They get to a yes. That's not easy. Then after they get to yes and the Forest Service goes out and says, "All right, it's time to get to work." One group that didn't want to participate—for someone's going to have to ask them and explain why they didn't want to participate—file a lawsuit, didn't go to the collaborative and say like, "Hey folks, like we got these really serious issues and how do we work through this together?" No, it was an "oh, we'll just file a lawsuit." And to again protect sort of the collaborative and the work of the collaborative, the Forest Service settled the lawsuit with Oregon Wild and they modified the project by 2%. They dropped two units. Oregon Wild claimed that these were old growth stands that were going to be clear-cut. Kind of strange that a conservation group on the collaborative, Bark, who monitors the same forest who's funded by the same funders apparently greenlighted clear-cutting old growth through the collaborative. Odd. Someone's not telling the truth here. Oregon Wild settled the case with the Forest Service. The project was modified barely and incredibly they were awarded \$55,000 in attorney fees under a statute called the Equal Access to Justice Act, EAJA. EAJA is a well-intended statute ensures that folks who petition the federal government have adequate legal representation. It really started to make sure that social security recipients and veterans benefit recipients had access to lawyers when there was a conflict and they weren't getting their benefits. That makes sense to me. I'm sure that makes sense to you. I don't want to mess with that. Absolutely. Those folks should have representation, access to lawyers, and if they win their lawsuits against the federal government, yeah, their lawyer should be paid. These activist groups have used that statute and used that law to build a business model where they file litigation, they win on a technicality, a paperwork issue, and then the taxpayer pays for their attorneys. And that's what happened on this Grasshopper restoration project. They filed a lawsuit, they settled it, they changed it barely, they got \$55,000 from the Forest Service. That comes out of their budget. And it delayed the project enough so that it was never implemented. Those treatments that the collaborative worked for four years

on didn't happen. And of course, as we now know, the Grasshopper fire is ripping through the Mount Hood National Forest. It scorched at least 90,000 acres. But that project has been destroyed. As you peel back the layers of the onion of the story, it becomes more disappointing, more frustrating as you really understand what's happening with these issues. Let's just start with the issue of—from my perspective, I can't even imagine filing a lawsuit, frankly, against a local collaborative where you've got consensus from the folks that I just talked about who've shown up for four years to do this project. Just think about that for a second. That's wrong. I'm going to just call it out. That's absolutely wrong. Like, we at AFRC, we don't agree with the Forest Service on every issue. We don't agree with the BLM on every issue. We don't agree with collaboratives on every issue, but we show up, we participate. We try to get to yes. We do our best. To sit on the sideline, to watch this play out, to let them get to yes, and then to come in and disrupt that process, that's profound.

Chris Edwards: Well, they knew full well. They knew full well what they were doing. They sat on the sideline so that they could preserve their license to file a lawsuit, to litigate.

Travis Joseph: This is the wild part. I'm going to be using that word a lot. Wild. This is pretty wild. So, in the 2025 Oregon Wild report card that's publicly available, on the second page of the report card, what did they tout as their greatest win of the year? That they protected 5,000 acres of old growth by stopping the Grasshopper project. Right? So, they filed the lawsuit. They barely changed the project. And then they went out to their funders and said, "Look what we did. We protected old growth from being clear-cut. We're not going to talk about the fact that it was supported by the collaborative and experts and biologists and scientists and all these folks that have put in their best effort to get to yes. We don't want to mention that. But hey, look, we've protected these 5,000 acres from clear-cut logging on the Mount Hood National Forest. You're welcome." Well, as we know, those 5,000 acres are now going up in smoke. And even worse, the Badger Creek Wilderness that's right next door that really does have old growth, that really does have critical habitat, listed species, it also went up in smoke. And so this idea that they came in on litigation to hold the agency accountable, that this is about accountability and transparency and protection, I think we just see through the outcomes that we're seeing that that is just not true.

Chris Edwards: It seems like what's happening on the Grasshopper fire and that Grasshopper project with this collaborative is a pattern. And I'm guessing that this is not the first time that this has happened, and I don't know what the future holds, but maybe you could talk a little bit about other examples.

Travis Joseph: Yeah, unfortunately it's not an anomaly. This is happening in every state we work in. We have even another example on the Mount Hood National Forest from the same group. You know, after Oregon Wild settled this lawsuit and got this EAJA award in July of this year, Oregon Wild filed a notice of intent to litigate additional collaboratively supported projects on the Mount Hood National Forest. And these projects were specifically for insect and disease treatments under a bipartisan legislation that offers the Forest Service efficiencies called the Healthy Forests

Restoration Act, HFRA. So these are HFRA authorities that Congress has supported for more than 20 years. The Forest Service attempted to use those authorities on four separate projects. The other one was for a fuel break. And Oregon Wild, not a part of the collaborative, did engage in the process and filed a notice of intent to sue the Forest Service in late July. So that was two weeks before the Grasshopper fire. Those projects have been impacted or destroyed by the Grasshopper fire. Unfortunately, that's not the only example, nor is it the only example with Oregon Wild. On the Willamette National Forest, there's a collaborative out of Oakridge. We know this community well, you and me, right? I mean, this community is surrounded by federal forests. It literally is within what's called a late-successional reserve under the Northwest Forest Plan. I mean, you're not allowed to do a lot of work in this area and Oakridge has been on the brink multiple times of being impacted severely by wildfire.

Chris Edwards: They've had a lot of bad fires the last decade around Oakridge.

Travis Joseph: They have. And again, a collaborative, a local collaborative that works on the Willamette and is working very diligently, too, with the mindset of "how do we protect Oakridge from potentially these catastrophic events?" supported a project, helped the Forest Service develop a project. Oregon Wild actually was engaged in the collaborative, verbally agreed with the collaborative on what the outcomes were going to be. The project moved forward. It was awarded and Oregon Wild sued the Forest Service on the collaborative project called Youngs Rock that's now in litigation. I'm pleased to report that actually we were successful in defending that project, but it's actually still pending because it has to be approved by another judge and that could take a long time. So, in the meantime, the city of Oakridge, the town of Oakridge, this small community is going to have to just wait and see whether or not we're going to be able to actually implement this work. And so again, you have collaboratively supported work, years of investment, years of time educating the public, doing field trips, making sure that people are in the right spot on this project, and then you have a veto power from one group that just doesn't agree with this and doesn't want it to happen. But that's just Oregon. I mentioned we work in multiple states. There are collaboratives that AFRC is a part of in every western state or our members are a part of them and collaboratives are regularly challenged in court. There's this concept and I think this is really important to make the audience aware is that there's this idea in Congress that if you're in a collaborative, that's the best way to avoid litigation. You know, I've walked into these offices of United States senators and said, "Hey, we've got real issues here. Litigation is a real problem. How do you help us?" And the answer is, "Well, you guys should collaborate." It's like, well, we're engaged in over 50 collaboratives and they are litigated even when they're collaboratively supported. So this idea that you get a bunch of people together, you work really hard, you get consensus and you're somehow protected from delay and challenge and lawsuits—no, you are not at all. There's nothing in the law that protects collaboratives. So this is an ongoing issue. I think some of these groups have just decided they don't need to participate in collaboratives because they have a veto power and if they don't like it and they don't get what they want, they can just walk away and file a lawsuit. And that's happening and it's happening throughout the West and it has really severe consequences. It undermines collaboration in general,

if you can imagine. I mean, why would you continue to show up at a collaborative if you're just going to get a lawsuit at the end of the day by some group that just doesn't want to participate? It undermines the process and what it does to what the Forest Service is now required to do to get a project implemented on the ground. These NEPA documents, these environmental analyses, those are for you and me. They're for the public. They're for people to understand when the government takes an action, we have to disclose to you what those impacts are. That's what the law says. That's NEPA. Now, these have become multiple thousand-page documents. Do we really think that that serves the public's interest? Like, that's accountability and transparency for more complex documents that have appendices that run hundreds of pages, that like my parents, my friends, my colleagues, they aren't looking at these documents because they've become so obscure and just so much information that it's actually no information at all. Part of what's going on is a weaponization of these well-intended statutes that actually is undermining the very values that these groups claim to support—public participation, transparency, accountability. You don't achieve that through lawsuits.

Chris Edwards: Does AFRC ever participate in a collaborative and then file a lawsuit afterward?

Travis Joseph: Never. We've never done that. And if that were ever prompted, I would have serious personal moral objections to those issues. Like look, sometimes there's going to be disagreement. Sometimes AFRC is not going to like the outcome of the collaboratives. We've dealt with that. We oftentimes are defending the collaborative in court. Our members have a legal program where we have internal lawyers and we have a team of lawyers that are playing defense for the agencies. Whether it's a Democratic administration, a Republican administration, it doesn't matter. We are defending the agency's expertise in court and showing up in court to try to protect collaboratives in addition to engaging in them. So, literally...

Chris Edwards: That's wild.

Travis Joseph: It is wild. I mean, to me, it's wild that the timber industry is funding legal defense of the federal government. That is what's happening. We are in court to protect active management and to protect collaboratives and you have these other groups that are actually just filing offensive lawsuits to drive an ideology. That's wrong.

Chris Edwards: That is wrong.

Travis Joseph: And it's not only to me a moral issue, like truly. Like I really try to think about like, okay, let me try to put myself in their shoes. Let me try to think about like how do I get there logically? You know, how do I get to the point of where I could make sense of this? I'm really struggling, Chris. I really am.

Chris Edwards: Well, it's natural, Travis. It's natural. It's nature's way. Nature burns. I mean, isn't that part of the narrative?

Travis Joseph: It is. And I think you're hitting on the fundamental ideological worldview differences. And I think that that is really at the heart of some of these conflicts and some of this litigation. And I feel like sometimes I'm trying to logically get there, you know, like, hey, maybe we can work together to like find that common ground. Don't we all want the same thing? Don't we all want green forests? Don't we all want clean air and clean water and access to these incredible lands? I mean, don't we want to recover these species? Don't we want rural jobs and mills to be in operation, make wood products in America instead of shipping them in from, you know, like Brazil? Aren't those common values for Oregonians? Aren't those common values for Americans? And the answer, unfortunately, is maybe some of these groups say those things out loud, but their actions don't reflect it. And Grasshopper is a perfect example of that. There is no interest in collaboration. There's no interest in compromise. There's no interest in looking at the science, the data. I mean, something else that comes from the Grasshopper—I mean, talking about these layers of the onion—the Mount Hood National Forest received money in 2023 from Congress specifically for the Biden administration Wildfire Crisis Strategy. The Wildfire Crisis Strategy was about identifying the most at-risk landscapes in the United States of America. And then Congress funded activity and actions to try to address this wildfire crisis. So this is under the Biden administration. This is under a Democratic Congress. Congress is funding this work on the Mount Hood National Forest saying, "Hey, Mount Hood has some of the highest-risk lands in the United States of America, and we need to do something about it, and here's the money to go do it." And that's not enough for these groups to say like, "Hey, a Democratic administration, a Democratic Congress based on science, mapping these areas, making it clear for everybody, we need to do something about this," the collaborative working together to do it, and then one group that represents a tiny fraction of the public has veto power over everybody else. They have veto power over the scientists of the Forest Service, the biologists at Fish and Wildlife Service, they have veto power over the collaborative, over a school district member, over the county commissioners who appointed the collaborative members. Like, this is wild. And this is the system that we operate under on federal lands. And this is why it won't change unless the system changes. And maybe we can talk about what some of those solutions are.

Chris Edwards: Well, that's right. And before we jump into that, I do want to note that there just—see, as you were speaking there, I was thinking about the religiosity of the environmental movement today and how there's a worldview that is enforced by—you know, you're a part of a community, you're fighting the good fight as your community has defined it. There's a culture around it, there are norms around it, gives people a moral code if you will and meaning to their life. I mean, there are a lot of reinforcing mechanisms that are part of today's environmental movement. And not only do they define the terms of what it means to be an environmentalist, they're excluding you if you don't subscribe to all of their beliefs. I would consider myself an environmentalist, but for how they have defined environmentalism in today's American culture.

Travis Joseph: If Oregon Wild is an environmentalist group, I don't want to be an environmentalist.

Chris Edwards: That's right.

Travis Joseph: I think that's part of this disconnect. And I really appreciate you bringing this idea of religiosity, and I'm really curious to have you expand on that a little bit. As you mentioned, you're a democratically elected member of the legislature. You served. I worked for Democratic members in Congress, and I try to make this connection of like, how does the Democratic Party make these connections around environmentalism and what these groups are doing? This is not conservation. Frankly, it's bad behavior and it undermines the systems that are really well-intended, you know. NEPA public disclosure law, that's a great idea. It was signed into law by Nixon. I think there's bipartisan agreement that these are smart laws, at least in terms of what they were intended to do. They've been weaponized to drive an ideology, a political agenda. And the party that we either have been a part of or work for have attached themselves to some of these views. Why? This is also the party that says they care about working people.

Chris Edwards: Well, it's as you know, it's about coalitions. I mean, politics is a team sport. As much as I wish sometimes it weren't a team sport, it is a team sport. And so, you need a team. The Republicans have their team, their coalition. The Democrats have their team, their coalition. And some coalitions, as you know, coalition members, you know, come into the coalition for a while. Maybe they're all the way in or they're partway in. And then certain members, and I'm thinking in particular, labor, organized labor, some of the trades and private sector industrial unions and whatnot have found themselves at odds with the Democratic Party and the party platform and those in control and those casting votes, and have veered more over to the Republican side either nationwide or in certain parts of the country. Here in the Pacific Northwest, the Democratic Party base is deep blue. The party is not purple at all. The state is purplish.

Travis Joseph: Correct.

Chris Edwards: Tending blue. But when you look at the primary elections and you know how our districts are drawn, we don't have that many competitive districts, and so right now today in Oregon in all but a handful of state legislative districts, it's all about the primary. And so they know that they're not going to have a competitive general election. So it's all about counting where they stand with those base voters, those constituencies. One of them are environmentalists. There's organized labor, civil liberties. I mean, on and on and on. There's a lot of members of that coalition. And if you participate in a party coalition, then you get the strength of the coalition. And there's an unwritten rule that you will not undermine one another. And so, inside of this big cultural blind spot that's created by this religiosity runs this environmental movement that then finds safe harbor inside a Democratic Party coalition and there they stand and they just kind of do whatever they want because within the party that is because there's nobody else to stand up and say, "Hold on a second, what the hell is going on here?" Because a lot of what we're doing actually isn't going to lead to a more sustainable future. At the end of the day, everything we need to sustain our world community, to sustain civilization comes from the air, the water, the dirt, or a hole in the ground. Everything comes from

natural resources. So, we better figure out how to sustainably manage those and steward those natural resources. There's no sector that does it better than our sector. And not only are there benefits, carbon benefits, quality of living benefits from using sustainably managed forest products and timber—not only are there all those benefits, but there's a great carbon story. I mean, what you just described is the leader that I would follow. You know, who's going to stand up and say, "This is not environmentalism. This is not conservation. And for our party, for our state, for the future of our lands, for the future of our businesses, we have to do something different. This isn't working."

Travis Joseph: Where is that person? Who is that person who's willing to call this out and say, "This is not okay. This is not okay for our forest and our communities. It's not working and we need to think differently if we really want to consider ourselves and call ourselves and tout ourselves as environmentalists," which Oregon does, right? I mean, you talk about Oregon, people talk about being sustainable. We're the environmentalists. Yeah, look at our lands. Does that look like environmentalism to you on federal lands after these fires and what we're allowing to happen? Here is a state that is the most significant producer of lumber in the United States of America. We make lumber better than anybody else on planet Earth in the Pacific Northwest. And we do it with some of the cleanest power available and possible. We do it in many cases on lands that are the most regulated lands on planet Earth. And for some reason, our politics don't embrace that, don't celebrate that, we actually make it as difficult as possible to continue and maintain that infrastructure. Our forest infrastructure, their infrastructure for environmental benefits, their infrastructure producing cleaner air and cleaner water and climate benefits for wood products we all need. We have a housing crisis, but we don't want that wood to come from Oregon. It's going to come from somewhere. So, I just—there's an, like you said, there's this incredible narrative, an incredible opportunity, and instead of our state leaning into this industry and embracing it—I'm not saying there haven't been issues and questions and mistakes and learning and there is a complex history to this. I don't deny that. Can we be forward-looking? Can we look to the future about where we want to go? This is not the timber industry of the '70s and '80s and '90s or even the early 2000s. This is an industry that is a 21st century environmental industry. And it feels like to me, and I know it feels like to some of my members, our politics reject that. That when I go to Washington DC and I meet with other offices out of the Pacific Northwest, they're embraced. Our members are embraced as heroes. Like truly, like, "We are so grateful for what you do. Thank you for taking care of our forests. Thank you for making wood products. Thank you for creating jobs and wealth in these communities. How do we work together? How do we help you?" Do you think that those are the conversations that I have in Washington DC with the Pacific Northwest? It's very different and it's sad, it's frustrating, and I'm hopeful as well. I know it can change. I think that there is going to be a reckoning. I really do. And what we've been talking about today, whether it's fire, disease, and insects, the way that we're losing our forest due to these climate stressors and the system that we're imposing on these lands, this is going to come to a head. I think this is the beginning of it right now where there is truly going to be a reconsideration and a restructuring of what forest policy in the Northwest looks like, and you and me are part of it.

Chris Edwards: I agree. I agree, Travis. And I think the reckoning is coming and it's going to be forced by the disconnect between the Democratic Party, not just the environmental movement, but the Democratic Party largely, and the Oregon voter. I would say the American voter, but I'm really thinking just about Oregonians. Oregonians are increasingly identifying themselves as independent. Many of those independents have moved to independent from the Democratic Party.

Travis Joseph: Correct.

Chris Edwards: There's every opportunity when they check that box to say that they are going to be a non-affiliated voter, they could also fill in the bubble for Democratic Party or Republican Party or one of the other minor parties. They are not choosing to do that. So, there's a reason that we have this growing wave of independent-minded thinkers and politically independent Oregonians, which, let's be honest, I mean, Oregonians have always had this strain of independence, even as Republicans or Democrats. There's always been a strong libertarian strain in our politics that always puts certain Democrats at odds with the party. Don't you feel that?

Travis Joseph: Absolutely. I do. I feel independent. I am independent.

Chris Edwards: Right. But you and I don't have power in our party. And that's why there's going to be this reckoning because our party is not popular. Oregonians like to talk about how, and you know, the left likes to talk about how unpopular Trump is, and Trump is really unpopular. The Democratic Party is more unpopular and there's a reason and it's because of these type of things that we're talking about here today. It's losing a sense of just what makes sense. It's not grounded in just common sense. Oregonians, Americans largely understand that it's not always about the "or"—we can do this or that. It's more about the "and"—we can do this and that. We can have environmental sustainability and we can have thriving communities and we can have economic growth and we can have sustained prosperity, but not if you're always saying "no, no, no" driven by this ideology that—again, I speak I tend to speak disparagingly about the activist groups because of how they're organized. I have a number of personal friends that would consider themselves a part of, you know, or ideologically aligned, and they're good humans. I love them. You know, there are people that I feel true love for in my life that would identify themselves with this part of the political spectrum. It doesn't mean they're bad humans, but we just have some very profound disagreements and I think that we are starting to see more of the outcomes, particularly on this topic that we're talking about here today, of what I would call a misguided philosophy that undergirds all the policy.

Travis Joseph: Yeah. I think you're really putting your finger on something that is framing this issue for these groups, which is forest policy is a zero-sum game. You talked about it. It's an "or" instead of an "and". Here's some issues where I think that we probably agree with some of these groups. I don't use the word conservation environmental groups anymore because that's not what I believe they are. But I do think

that there are shared values or shared goals on some of the things that they talk about. For example, on wildfire, they talk about home hardening. Yeah, that makes sense. I mean, yeah, there should be defensible space. Yep, that makes sense. We should really focus on the WUI, the wildland-urban interface. Like that's where we can have an impact. Yep, that makes sense. That's a good investment. That's where it seems like the conversation stops, right? It's like, "but you can't do any of this other stuff." Like we shouldn't be out quote-unquote in the backcountry or the wilderness doing anything about it. To me, fire and smoke have become a kitchen table topic for families because it's impacting their day-to-day. It's impacting their kids. It's impacting their family members, their friends. They're not able to do the things that they grew up doing, that they want to do, whether that's recreation, hiking in the wilderness areas in Three Sisters. I mean, it sounds like maybe you and me were both in Three Sisters Wilderness the last couple weeks. I mean, these are some of our favorite places. They're incredible. And now we're not able to do those things. Local businesses are being impacted. You know, these are becoming day-to-day issues, especially during the summer. We tend to forget that, but now it's right front and center here. We're breathing it, you know, we're smelling it. It's part of our lives. This is becoming an issue that Oregonians are having to deal with. And what is the response from leadership, political leadership in Oregon from these groups? There really is no articulated solution other than, "Well, this is the new norm and we're going to have to live with it." That is an unacceptable answer to almost every Oregonian that I can think of and have talked to, regardless of political persuasion. Like, other than maybe a handful of people who buy into this narrative, like literally there's nothing that we can do about it. That is not where Oregonians are. That's not where Americans are. We do have agency.

Chris Edwards: We do have agency. And what frustrates me is—I'm going to add one thing that they say, too, about it. They say there's nothing we can do about it, but yet we could take action here locally to really have a measurable impact on climate change. And they'll point just to climate change. They will not talk about forest management. They will only talk about climate change when it comes to these wildfire issues. We're not denying climate change. There's no climate denialism happening here. Yes, the fire season is demonstrably longer now. Yes, we just had a drought this year. We're in the middle of a drought and that does not improve wildfire conditions. And yes, our national forests are overstocked and diseased and we need to manage them proactively in the face of climate change. Climate change is the clarion call for active forest management.

Travis Joseph: You nailed it. Exactly. And it goes back to this idea of our forests are not a climate solution; they're climate infrastructure. I mean, if you really care about climate, then you really, really should care about the trajectory of our forests, and specifically around our federal forests. You know, the federal government manages more than half of our forests in the state of Oregon, and in the West it's even a higher number generally. So our national forests and our public lands are the greatest opportunity to move the needle on climate change globally. Yes, we can do things locally, but if you look at that big picture, it really is federal public lands where that opportunity exists. And if you look at the outcomes of our federal lands and public lands right now, and in many

cases in the West, our national forests are carbon emitters. They're no longer capturing carbon. They're dead. They're dying. They're on the wrong trajectory. So, if you look at the trajectory of emissions from our national forests over the last couple of decades, we're losing our forests and they're becoming emitters of carbon rather than when we have these catastrophic events to immediately go in and restore these lands to replant our national forests so that they really are contributing at a global scale to climate change mitigation. The U.S. Forest Service manages 193 million acres across this country. There's a huge opportunity right now, but they're being degraded. And again, this is not being degraded through proactive science-based management that are going through the strongest regulatory system in the world. It's because we're not doing anything about it. That's where the agency is. That's where the opportunity is. I think Oregonians can't wait for the opportunity to showcase to the country and the world: this is how we can steward our lands. Let us show you how. And on federal lands, we literally are handcuffed by rules and regulations that prevent us from taking those common-sense actions. Nobody out there in my industry is talking about "let's go out there and clear-cut old growth." But that's the narrative of these groups, like they want to take us backwards into the '80s and '90s and re-litigate these issues from 30 years ago. We've moved on in every way, including with our milling infrastructure and how they're sourced and how they're equipped and what their input is. We want to move forward in stewardship and proactive management. But that's not consistent with the worldview and philosophy of these groups that want to continue to perpetuate conflict and misinformation and division. And I think they're a minority. And that's what I also think is part of the solution here, is having that political leadership in our state, in our part of the world, saying, "This is unacceptable. Thank you for your opinion. Thanks for your input. This is a democracy, but this is where we're at. This is where our country's at. This is where the science is. This is what the data is telling us. We're moving on without that of just the bomb-throwing at collaboration, about coming together to find a right way forward." And I continue to be hopeful that that is exactly where we're going. It's not as fast as I want it to be. I've been in this job for 11 years. I was hoping it'd been a lot faster to see some of these changes, but I think you're going to have some of these key moments, unfortunately, crises that drive change. And I think that we're in the middle of a crisis, not just specifically what we talked about today, but just big picture what's going on on federal lands in the United States of America. Why do we think that Congress is doing all of these things? Specifically, Republicans talking about like, "Let me make changes to NEPA and let's make changes to the Endangered Species Act," and there's been talk about, "Hey, maybe there are parts of federal property that don't make sense for us to manage anymore." Where do we think that that's coming from? It's coming from the fact that the system is broken. And so, they want to change the system. And you got people who are just freaking out around like, "Well, we can't do that." Why? Why can't we make changes to these laws? We got to stick with 50-year-old laws that have been added to for decades by courts and judges? We can only operate in this old-school way of thinking from the 1900s? Like that's environmentalism? No thank you. It's time for a 21st-century approach. And I want you and me, and I know that we're working on this, to deliver that better future for Oregonians and for people who live in the West.

Chris Edwards: Well, when you announce that you're running for governor, Travis Joseph, I will volunteer to chair your campaign committee. So keep me in the loop. I've been thinking about this issue since it must have been around 1989 or 1990. I think it was probably about 1989. I was a high schooler at South Eugene High School in the international high school program there. Some of our listeners may know that South Eugene culturally is a hotbed of progressive environmental activism. I mean, it's a hotbed and it's ground zero for timber activism, and there was a lot of timber activism back in those days. And I remember one of our teachers—I don't remember what class it was, but maybe it was our values and beliefs class, I'm not sure—but we had somebody come in from a local activist group and we were having a discussion about federal forest issues and old growth. And coming from a forest products family, I piped up and I said something about wildfire. And I was told by this gentleman that was speaking to our class that wildfire happens and we should not be building communities around forests that can burn. Either inside of forests that can burn or near forests that can burn. We need to let nature be what nature is because nature knows the way. And I've thought about that for how many years? 30-some years now. I'm 52. I was probably, I don't know, 15 at the time. And I've been thinking about that ever since. And it just—it was really instructive to me at that early point in my life about the worldview. Later on, when I ran for office for the first time, I sat with the Oregon League of Conservation Voters, which is an amalgamation of various conservation groups, and I wanted their endorsement. And I was pretty straight up with them that on the little questionnaire that you fill out, we're not going to agree on forest management issues, so let me talk about other things. I mean, I'll talk about whatever you want, but we don't agree on timber issues. And they were actually astonishingly refreshed that I had been so forthright with them about my disagreement and we just don't see things the same way. And during that interview, I talked about growing up in Bandon on the south coast and how my dad owned a veneer plant there and how we had had to move to the valley because we had to close the veneer plant there and the whole area around Coos Bay had just been devastated. The community had been devastated by the shutdown of the federal forests and the decline of the sector there. And I'll never forget an environmental attorney who sat on that interview panel. She said, "Well, I mean, Coos Bay isn't really a suitable ecosystem for that many people to live in anyway. You know, really there's just not that many natural resources. It's not appropriate." And I believe the word "appropriate" was used. "There's not really an appropriate land there for that much settlement in that sort of an ecosystem." And there it was again. You know, just like those two incidents in my life have been sort of an unveiling. They pulled back the curtain for a moment to really show me what that worldview is that is informing how they fight the fight.

Travis Joseph: They're saying the quiet thing out loud.

Chris Edwards: That's right.

Travis Joseph: And if you listen carefully, they're still saying it. If you really think about and listen to what they're saying about what they're trying to drive, it's these types of concepts that are to me offensive. They're inappropriate. Those types of comments,

and so disconnected from—well, history is another piece of this. I mean, we could probably have a whole other podcast around something that I think is actually going to be part of this change. This game change, this breakthrough is a reconciliation for the so-called environmental community with its policies and its priorities with what we know about Indigenous people, about human beings being part of these landscapes. I mean, wilderness policy is a really good example of that, of this idea that no one was here, this is pristine and untouched, it's a place where man shall not be permanently, kind of thing. Like that's wild if you really think about that critically or where that comes from and what worldview and ideology is driving that kind of policy of control and division and exclusion. These are the things that Democrats are going to have to reconcile with as we move forward on how we think about public land management and forest management. There are some major disconnects that are being exposed on just what you said of this concept that here's where we should live and here's where we should be and here's how we should control it and let nature do its thing. That is a fundamental worldview disconnect that I don't buy into, and I think this is going to help shift this narrative and the laws and policies that govern natural resource management in our state.

Chris Edwards: So where do you see this going, Travis? I mean, what do you see? There's a lot happening in Congress right now. If I'm honest, I wish it was happening jointly, you know, both Democrats and Republicans driving this. Right now it seems to be driven by the Republican Party, which I think is probably going to have some blowback in blue states. You know, blue state Democrats are going to freak out about whatever is happening because it's being driven by congressional Republicans in the Trump administration. I think that there are probably some changes in the works. Maybe you could talk a little bit about, regardless of what is happening—and again, I don't follow those federal issues so much as we follow state issues here at OFIC that impact private landowners—but what needs to happen to fix this process so that a group like Oregon Wild can't just sit on the sideline when they were invited to the process, they could have participated, but they elected not to, and then after the fact file a lawsuit, settle, and then get reimbursed?

Travis Joseph: You're not going to love the answer to this. On the one hand, there are like technical immediate fixes, for example, being paid by the taxpayer to file a lawsuit. That's the EAJA law. You know, Congress can fix that and they can do it in a very specific way that targets natural resource issues like this and forestry issues. In fact, there's a bill in Congress that does that, that was introduced by a lawyer who's dealt with EAJA issues from Wyoming, Representative Hageman, who's introduced a bill to say we should eliminate this. You know, you can file a lawsuit, but the taxpayer is not going to pay for your attorney fees. That seems pretty common sense to me. There's not one Democrat on that bill. And why? Well, Democrats say, "Well, we can't close the courtroom doors to anybody." It's like, that's not what's happening. That's a copout. You can file a lawsuit. I don't think we have a lawsuit problem in this country, you know, like, "Oh man, there's not enough lawsuits going on, we really are shutting the courtroom doors here." That's ridiculous. That's wild. So, there are those technical fixes. That's not going to solve all the problems because you still have these very rich and powerful

environmental groups that are going to continue to file these lawsuits. They don't need necessarily that EAJA award. I think that'd be a good fix, but they're still going to be able to do this. So, Congress could step in and say, "Okay, we're going to raise the bar here in terms of what litigation you can bring, and we're going to provide direction to judges about what considerations they need to make in terms of a preliminary injunction, awarding a preliminary injunction on a timber sale." We've tried to work with Congress to do that. You know, how do you balance harms and how do you balance public interest to raise the legal bar for when a judge would issue a preliminary injunction? That's good. That makes sense. Also, preliminary injunctions can be incredibly disruptive, but that doesn't stop lawsuits like this Grasshopper case, right? Like it's not about necessarily just stopping it; it's about delaying it until it doesn't get implemented. Like you're just waiting it out. And in this case, it burned. Now we've lost all that work and investment and taxpayer money on these projects. So, there are targeted fixes to kind of deal with these issues that we talked about. But why I said you're not going to like my answer is because I really think the change—it's obvious, but it's the long ball game. Public opinion has to change.

Chris Edwards: That's right.

Travis Joseph: Public opinion has to change.

Chris Edwards: And I'm glad you said that. A lot of voters want to blame politicians. I, being a former politician, am here to say politicians respond to incentives in the system.

Travis Joseph: Bingo.

Chris Edwards: If a politician falls out of step with their voters, then they're voted out of office. They know that. So, they justify their votes by falling in line with what the quote "voters" want. The broad public opinion has to change enough that it pulls, whether it's the Democratic base or the Republican base, a little bit more toward the center so that there's space for those elected officials, those politicians who are responsive to the incentives that are built into the system.

Travis Joseph: And that's what I think that you and me are doing. I mean, that's what I think this podcast is about. That's what I think that every material that comes out from AFRC is trying to keep in mind, about sure, we are razor focused on the laws, the policies, the direct impacts, you know, looking out for the impact to our members that way, weighing in, engaging in the process, but it's also about engaging the public at large. It's about educating the public about these issues. You relayed some personal stories. You know, my own personal network is a pretty liberal political network. And when I talk to those people and I explain these things and I get more than a sound bite and we have a conversation about it, they're outraged. Like, they want to change the system. It's like, that can't be allowed. No way that we are paying for an EAJA award for an attorney for Oregon Wild. There's no way that that's allowed. Wait, they did what after this collaborative went through this process? So I mean, as you really educate people and you get people engaged in this issue, I think that they come to a pretty common-

sense conclusion that the system right now is not working. Might be well-intended, it's not working, and it needs to change. And you nailed it about—I think if Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and the Governor and the Oregon House delegation were getting signals from Democrats, their voters, saying, "I reject this. This is not reflective of my values. I don't think a group should be able to come in and blow up a collaborative process. That undermines my values. That's not what this should be about. Well, I don't think we should be spending our money that way. I'm actually good with rural jobs and wood products coming from Oregon. I think that's smart. That makes sense to me." So getting—you nailed it. In our part of the world, what that looks like is Democrats communicating to their Democratic elected officials, "This is not okay. This is extremism. We don't accept that and we want to work for solutions," because they are going to be responsive to what they're hearing from their voters. And right now they're not hearing that. They're not hearing from their voters that—for example, this Roadless Rule issue, you know, they're hearing of like, "This is the end of the world. The Trump administration is going to rescind this Roadless Rule." Actually, if you're a critical thinker and you look at what's going on, it actually might be a pretty smart approach to look at a 25-year-old policy that ties our hands from doing science-based proactive management and say, "Hey, maybe we should do something different. There are places that maybe need protection. Let me work on that. Maybe there are some places that need restoration active management. Let's work on that." But we're missing that. Our publics are not necessarily fully informed, fully engaged as this becomes a bigger and bigger issue. This is where I see the pressure. I don't see it coming from the right. I see it coming from actually the Democratic Party itself is going to have to reconcile this and actually feel they have the permission from their voters to take different votes and make different policies. That's what needs to happen.

Chris Edwards: That is what needs to happen. With regard to the Roadless Rule, I was up in the woods one day. It was a few years ago and I had heard about the Roadless Rule, but let's be honest, most of us don't travel on those type of roads. We are traveling on major highways, you know, I-5, 126 going over the pass. Okay, that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about forest roads. And I was driving on some forest roads and I made a turn and I was winding around and it was on federal ground, and I got to this one curve and I looked ahead and everything was just grown in. Like you could see that there was sort of a roadbed there, but it was 100% grown in. And that has major implications for fire suppression. When there's a fire on the landscape and we need to get boots on the ground and you don't have a road to get to it, the Forest Service steps back and says, "Well, you know, we can either take the time and the equipment to open up a road or we can drop back to some other road in the network and draw a big box around it and implement box and burn." Now, there's a lot happening in the Forest Service around initial attack and fire suppression strategy and so I don't want to throw them under the bus for a lot of good work and they're working really well with the Oregon Department of Forestry that has a different approach and their neighboring landowners. There's some critical agreements that are in place, a lot more cooperation. So, I'm not going to throw them under the bus right now for how they attack a fire, but they don't have the infrastructure to get to the fire safely because there are no roads.

Travis Joseph: And it goes back to even what we're talking about with the Grasshopper. This is about modernizing our approach. Like we continue to trap ourselves thinking that these policies and laws that are 50 years old continue to serve our purposes in 2026 and beyond. They do not. If you believe in climate change and you think that our climate is changing rapidly, wouldn't you want to adapt? Don't we want to mitigate that? And so using the tools that we had 50 years ago don't reflect the tools that we need in the 21st century. And so I know it's challenging for people. They have some of these sacred cows and policies of like, "I can't let go of that because drawing a line on a map, I have certainty and I have control and this area is protected." I can show you picture after picture of a roadless area that has been absolutely nuked by wildfire and it will never come back in our lifetime if it's a forest, ever again for the next 500 years. I mean, the soils change, the chemistry changes, I mean, these landscapes are being devastated by these disturbances. Why aren't we looking at different, better, more modern ways to address this? And anytime someone proposes something, it's "You're undermining bedrock environmental laws." Maybe these environmental laws don't apply the same way that we need them to apply looking into the future. If we're going to adapt to climate change, if we're going to make changes for our federal lands, the system in place, the way we fund it, the way we go through these processes, the length of time that it takes to go through this, you know, like we talked about Grasshopper, four years. Four years to do 5,800 acres on a 1 million-acre forest. That's not going to work. That's not sustainable. That's not big picture. That's not a paradigm shift. We need a paradigm shift. So, we really got to look at these underlying laws and regulations. Look, it probably makes folks feel uncomfortable. It makes me feel uncomfortable. But I also know that we need change. And you can't have change unless you do some of these hard looks, hard conversations, and make the change that's necessary.

Chris Edwards: That's a hopeful note. And I think on that note, we can wrap this conversation up. I've really enjoyed this, Travis. You and I over the years have had a few conversations like this, but we've never done it with mics.

Travis Joseph: It's been great and fun.

Chris Edwards: And we've never done it for public consumption. And I think that a couple of folks like you and me with similar backgrounds, similar politics, having a very frank conversation with one another, it feels refreshing to me. I feel hopeful, and I hope that the general public will take something from it. And we hope that elected officials will hear this and hear this kind of conversation, not only because it pertains to our future, but we're trying to shine a light on what's happening. Damn it, the Grasshopper fire is happening. Now it's smoking in Portland now. This is why...

Travis Joseph: This is going to change. This is going to change. It's inevitable and we're going to be part of it.

Chris Edwards: Yeah. Yeah. Well, thanks so much, Travis. This has been a lot of fun.

Travis Joseph: Same. Appreciate you.

Chris Edwards: I hope you enjoyed this episode. 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. And who knows, maybe in a future episode we will address your question or whatever beef you may have with what we have presented.