

The Forest Steward's Journal

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Journal of the Forest Stewardship Foundation

The MISSION of the Forest Stewardship Foundation is to “educate and inform landowners, natural resource professionals and the general public about the science and ecology of forest lands, the many values derived from forested lands and the principles of sustainable forest land development.”

DISCLAIMER: As in the past, we again advise that this information is submitted for your interest only. The Foundation's mission, as indicated above, is to “educate and inform”, not to advocate or persuade. The Foundation takes no position, either endorsing or opposing, approving or disapproving, any of the assertions or arguments in the contributed information.



From the Chair

I am very pleased to announce that our membership has reached an all time high of 118 members and we have continued to be fully engaged in trying to fulfill our mission of educating forest landowners, resource professionals and the general public.

On April 27 we had another very successful Helena Landowner Conference. In 2019 we look forward to sponsoring our 10th annual landowner conference, but this time it will be in Butte and held jointly with the Society of American Foresters. Butte is a great city and the Copper King Convention Center is a terrific facility. We expect this conference will be bigger and better than ever.

Once again we were fortunate in bringing Kirk and Madeline David over for the Ties To The Land workshop in Helena on April 28th and one in Kalispell on April 31st. The Kalispell workshop was unexpected, but the Flathead Lakers group took the initiative in requesting our assistance and doing all of the advertising. Word of these workshops is spreading and another workshop is being planned in November in Thompson Falls thanks to the Kaniksu Land Trust in Sandpoint Idaho. We are offering our assistance, but they are the ones making this workshop happen. This was our original goal, not to do it all ourselves, but to help spread the word about succession planning so that more landowners can make informed decisions on the future of their property.

With the coming of summer comes another fire season. We hope it isn't as impactful as the 2017 fire season, but you never know. In Lincoln County we have seen a real surge of interest in participating in the fuel reduction grant program. So much so that we are almost out of grant funds. I hope you all are well prepared for what the summer may bring. Have a great summer.

Ed Levert, Chair

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**2018 Montana Forest Landowner Conference
Applauded by Attendees**

By Clyde Robbe, Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation Board Member

The 9th annual Montana Forest Landowner Conference held in Helena, Montana April 27th was a big hit once again with participants. With approximately 100 people in attendance, the “Becoming the Best Forest Steward Possible” themed conference offered something for all folks with an appetite for expanding their own forest stewardship knowledge and efforts. The Forest Stewardship Foundation, in cooperation with Northwest Management, Inc. was pleased to sponsor the informative conference once again.

Staying true to form, the conference offered morning and afternoon breakout sessions following a very interesting opening presentation by Chris Bryant of the Montana Nature Conservancy. A snapshot of some of the broad session topics included Forest Wildlife, Forest Management, and Forest Insects & Diseases. As attendees pointed out, the conference format presented the usual challenge of deciding which presentations to attend due to the very interesting and timely subject matter of the session topics as well as the quality and experience level of the presenters.

To enhance the mid-day lunch break, Rich Aarstad with the Montana Historical Society gave a captivating presentation on “The Wild Days of Montana’s Early Christmas Tree Industry 1937-1968.” What an interesting, but somewhat sad reminder of what was once a thriving value-added business opportunity for small, family-owned, mainly Douglas fir forestlands in western Montana.

It is important to note, with sincere appreciation, the excellent speakers we had participate again this year at the conference. Speakers represented The Nature Conservancy; University of Montana; MT Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks; Northwest Management, Inc.; MT Historical Society; and MT DNRC. Without the continued support of people and groups like these, it would not be possible to provide the high caliber subject matter for the attendee interest that the landowner conference relies on each year.

The refreshment breaks offered time to make new acquaintances and reconnect with old friends. A valuable aspect of the landowner conference was the sharing of experiences and stories from other forest landowners in their own stewardship ventures, and visiting with the vendors who were available to describe opportunities they provide to forest landowners and the equipment or services they offer. During breaks and the lunch period, attendees had the opportunity to browse and bid on the quality silent auction items rounded up by Tom Jones and his Forest Stewardship Foundation team.

Each year the conference relies on the support of many sponsors to ensure a successful event and the Forest Stewardship Foundation is grateful for their interest and generosity. The sponsors this year included Northwest Management, Inc.; MT DNRC; Sun Mountain Lumber Co.; MT Women in Timber; MT Wood Products Association; MT Forest Owners Association; MT SAF; Roseburg Forest

Products; Idaho Forest Group; Stimson Lumber Co.; Weyerhaeuser Co.; Lincoln Conservation District; MT Logging Association; F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber Co.; The Nature Conservancy; FireSafe Montana; Marks-Miller Post & Pole; USFS.

Please consider putting the Montana Forest Landowner Conference on your calendar for next year as the date and location have already been set. Next year we will be hosting a joint conference with the Society of American Foresters (SAF) in Butte at the Copper King Inn, April 12, 2019. This will be our 10th annual Landowner Conference and hope to see you there!



Photo by Glenn Marx
L-R) Peter Nolin, Luke Fehlig, Gary Ellingson of Northwest Management



Photo by Glenn Marx
Linda Leimbach and Andy Darling



Photo taken by Clyde Robbe
Ed Levert giving his opening comments



Taken by Clyde Robbe
Sam Gilbert and friends



Taken by Clyde Robbe
Rich Aarstad and Gary Ellingson of Northwest Management



Montana's New State Forester Sonya Germann

By: Glenn Marx, Montana Association of Land Trusts

Sonya Germann is the new Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Forestry Division Administrator, taking on the role of State Forester in April of this year. She's a Madison Valley native and the first woman to lead the forestry division. DNRC and its forestry division have significant involvement with private forest landowners, and the Journal recently caught up with Sonya to visit about her new job, the forestry division, and DNRC programs for private landowners. The Forest Stewardship Foundation extends a sincere thank you to Sonya for taking time from her incredibly busy schedule and respond to our questions.

Q: You're a Montana native who grew up on a ranch in the Madison Valley. How will that background help you in your new job as Administrator of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's Forestry Division?

A: I understand and care about rural Montana. Having been raised on my family's cattle ranch in McAllister, I grew up in a family heavily dependent on goods produced from the land, and from that experience, I have a deep appreciation of what it takes to make a go of that type of life. I was working on the ranch steadily from the age of 10 into my mid-twenties and came to understand the amount of human effort it takes to support a family and what is left to markets, chance, weather, and land management policy and practices. Forestry issues are similar, yet wood products industry families are so much more dependent on the availability of goods from land other than their own and assume other risks that are unique to their industry. Where forestry issues really crystalize for me is in places like Libby, Thompson Falls, St. Regis, and many other small rural communities that are dependent on a local forest products economy, but also towns like Ashland and Roundup that are surrounded by forests in need of restoration but far away from major infrastructure and have few markets for wood products available.

I also understand and believe in the possibility and potential for land management agencies to be of service to local communities and individual landowners. One of my early mentors was a range management specialist who worked for the local Forest Service ranger district. Rather than approach us as a hardline compliance manager, she showed up at brandings, shipping, calving, to fix fence and stock tanks, and in any type of weather. She modeled to me that land management agencies can and should be of tremendous service to communities and should be strong partners in accomplishing mutual goals. And that is my drive in this position. I see my responsibility first and foremost as a servant to the citizens of Montana regarding forestry and fire protection issues.

I want people to understand that this is not just a job to me – this is my life's work. I am driven by my love of this state, the tremendous potential of our natural resources and all the benefits they bring, the unprecedented need to do more forest management and restoration, and the opportunities to work together to do right by your communities.

Q: You're the first woman hired to lead the DNRC Forestry Division. What does that statement mean to you?

A: I grew up being one of the only girls within our ranching community. I became accustomed to being told that I couldn't do things as well or at all. I don't think my experience is unique to that of other women; especially those who work in natural resources. I have adapted by developing resiliency, a sense of humor, sheer grit, and an uncanny ability to turn down the volume on the naysayers and to turn up the volume on those who are ready and willing to be positive partners.

I don't think that I have broken any major glass ceilings; I'm coasting on the waves of the strong and courageous women who have blazed the trail for people like me. But I do think my hire is redefining this position. I'm the first one to say that I am not a forester – I came to forestry by way of wildlife biology, natural

resource policy, and people management. I was not put in this position because I can administer a timber sale or put a fire out; I was put in this position because I can bring people together to work on big issues and to get big things accomplished. And that's what we need to do together and that's what I think your membership expects of us as an agency representing their interests.

Lastly, I'll say that I wish my mother was alive to see me in this position. She was a school teacher who said to me that the only opportunities available to her were nursing, being a secretary, and being a school teacher. I think she would be proud to know her youngest daughter was the first woman to be in the position, and got there because of hard work and dedication to a mission she believes in.

Q: One of the concepts highlighted in your first interviews after being named State Forester is the concept of "being inclusive" and "working hard for everybody." How do you see yourself and the Forestry Division working with private forestland owners?

A: During my ramp up period in this position, I've been approaching my staff and impressing upon them that this time is about what we do together. We are faced with a time of larger and more intense fires, longer fire seasons, higher fuel loading, and major forest health issues across all ownerships. These issues know no boundaries so in a sense, we are all facing a common problem and opportunity, so why not face it together and in partnership when and where it makes sense.

The Forestry Division will continue to offer excellent services to private landowners including: protecting their lands, property, and communities from wildfire; forest pest management consultation; forest stewardship plan development; education on forest practices laws and rules; cost-share assistance to accomplish stewardship objectives; timber management assistance; fuels reduction funding; and conservation seedling products. We will also continue to work closely with our partners at MSU Extension Forestry to deliver forest stewardship planning workshops and to connect landowners with partners and services offered by other organizations.

What we are interested in exploring more is how to better connect various partners within our respective communities to take a comprehensive approach to landscape scale management and fuels reduction and look for more innovative ways to fund and support those projects.

Q: What do you see as the major challenges you and the Forestry Division are facing right now?

A: The fire year is getting longer, fires are getting larger and more severe, and we are seeing more fires statewide. We pride ourselves in doing an outstanding job in fire suppression, keeping fires short in duration and small in size. We average, an initial attack success rate of 96%; meaning out of all the fires we, and our local government partners respond to, we contain 96% of them within 24 hours with local resources. This is a very high success rate, and a tremendous accomplishment for a small agency responsible for protecting lives, property and natural resources across 50 million acres across Montana. As fire seasons become longer and more intense, we are asking our people to do much more with no additional resources which ultimately taxes those people on a year-round basis. We are finding that during our 'off-season' the demands on our staff are significantly increasing when it comes to training local government firefighters, our own personnel, and interagency cooperators; working with communities on fire awareness and prevention; and maintaining the interagency relationships that make fire protection work so well in Montana. In the last year, we trained more than 4,000 fire personnel, more than any other year, while also assisting hundreds of landowners in preparing their homes and properties to be more resilient to fire. And we don't see the demands decreasing. In fact, we see the opposite. We want to be able to continue responding to the needs of our constituents, while not extending our workforce beyond their capacity. And what's incredible about the people within the Fire Protection Program is that even amid increasing demands, they have foresight, and have dedicated energy to position us for success in the future by crafting a strategic plan that will guide our program for the next seven to 10 years. Our Fire Protection Program strategy team involved our program personnel from engine bosses to Area Managers, and charts a path forward to face the oncoming challenges. It will be one of my main charges to support the good work and thinking that our people have invested in and to convince others to do so as well.

Q: What is the status of Governor Bullock's Forests in Focus Initiative and what do see happening next within that effort?

A: DNRC has most recently been ramping up its capacity under Good Neighbor Authority which was authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. To date, DNRC is engaged with all seven of Montana's national forests to outline a 3 to 5-year program of work focused on fuels reduction, commercial timber harvest, and a multitude of restoration projects. We will be rolling out statewide announcements on that over the coming weeks.

Q: Are you nervous about entering the 2018 wildfire season with only \$4 million in the reserved wildfire fighting account?

A: No, the DNRC will continue to carry out its mandated responsibilities throughout the 2018 fire year regardless of the balance in the Fire Suppression Fund and both Director Tubbs and Governor Bullock have given clear direction that we will continue to fight fire as normal regardless of the fund balance. The account currently carries a balance of funds that are technically obligated to pay for expenditures from the 2017 season. However, since actual payment of those obligations may not occur for months or even years, we can borrow against those obligated funds. In addition, we can borrow against other current year program budgets within the DNRC. In that case, should we over-spend our appropriated budget, the DNRC will go to the Legislature with a supplemental budget request to backfill behind spending on the 2018 fire season. The Fire Suppression Fund has only existed since 2012, and the supplemental budget process described above was standard operating procedure before that time.

Q: How can the DNRC Forestry Division and private forestland owners work more closely on private land management and stewardship objectives?

A: We encourage private forestland owners to take advantage of the many forestry assistance programs that we offer now. Our educational, financial, and technical assistance services include:

- Conservation Seedling Nursery: Produces and distributes seedlings for conservation plantings to private, state, federal, and tribal landowners.
- Forest Pest Management: Provides assistance to family forest landowners and others in the identification and management of forest insects and diseases.
- Forest Practices: Provides landowners with the resources to comply with Montana's forest practices laws, rules and forest water quality best management practices.
- Forest Products and Biomass: Provides information and financial assistance that promotes forest product and biomass market and business development.
- Forest Stewardship: Assists family forest owners in acquiring personal knowledge about their forest resources, developing a stewardship plan for their property, and implementing their objectives with financial and technical assistance.
- Urban and Community Forestry: Provides Montana's urban communities with assistance in establishing and maintaining urban forestry programs through grant support, technical advice, and formation of community tree boards and Tree City USA recognition.

Q: Any final advice or insights for Montana's forest owners?

A: Each year, wildland fires consume hundreds of homes in the Wildland-Urban Interface. Studies show that as many as 80% of the homes lost to wildland fire could have been saved if their owners had only followed a few simple fire-safe practices. There is no better time than now to prepare and educate your family. Know how to protect your home and make sure that your family knows what to do in case of a wildland fire by consulting the many quick links, resources, and publications we make available at <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/fire-and-aviation/fire-prevention-and-preparedness>

Heading into the core of the 2018 fire year we also remind all Montanans that more than 60% of our State's wildfires are started by people. Help us meet our goals of raising awareness and educating adults and children on ways to reduce their chances of starting a wildland fire by paying particular attention to fire causes associated with forestry operations including slash and debris burning, harvesting equipment, and exhaust systems on passenger vehicles.

New Jersey Academics Surprise Us At The Helena Forest Landowner Conference

By: Nancy Jackson, Professor of Chemistry & Environmental Science—New Jersey Institute of Technology



Nancy Jackson, Professor in the Department of Chemistry & Environmental Science at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, found our event by Googling “forest landowner conferences.” She and her two student assistants, Alec Ratyosyan and Chrystoff Camacho, registered online and checked in bright and early. It was indeed a pleasant surprise to meet them and learn about their research.

First, we would like to thank the Montana Landowners Conference participants for taking time to speak to us during our visit. The information, expertise and feedback we gathered was invaluable to us. We are working on a project, funded by the National Science Foundation, focused on identifying challenges that landowners face in the forestry sector. Our team is developing an aerial reforestation platform and decision support tool using drones and customized software. Our goal is to better understand the forestry sector and to use what we learn to refine our technology to better meet landowner needs.

Over the past six months, the team travelled across the country speaking to private landowners, foresters, loggers, and land managers. Landowner conferences are the ideal place to learn about current programs, changes in policies, and emerging issues in each state and speak directly to landowners. We learned that forest landowners and managers across the country have shared concerns including: control of invasive species, cost of reforestation versus natural regeneration, sustaining forest ecosystems, developing and securing markets for timber, and compliance with regulatory requirements. Montana made our shortlist of landowner conferences because we were interested in learning more about wildfires and post-fire mitigation. Many conference participants we spoke to provided valuable insight, based on their direct knowledge and experience, to forest fire hazards, fuel load, current policies, and the time and labor involved to regenerate forests after a fire.

At the end of the last day of the conference the team hiked Mount Helena. Mount Helena provided a scenic view that overlooked the city, and offered the team some time to connect with the beautiful outdoors.

LANDOWNERS – Expect a Change in Your Fire Assessment Fee

By Mike Christianson, President of the Montana Forest Owners Association

Beware if you own a parcel of Montana land outside of a municipality (and not federal, tribal, or state trust land). You will likely see a change in the amount you will be assessed for fire preparedness costs. This change could be detrimental or beneficial, depending upon where your parcel is located in Montana and other factors described below.

The most recent data available show the following sources of funding for fire preparedness:

| Fire Preparedness Funding Source | Amount in Current Allocation |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. Montana’s General Fund (funded through non-earmarked taxes and fees) | \$8.2 million |
| 2. Federal grants (when available) | 1.9 million |
| 3. Fees assessed to property owners in “wildland fire protection districts” under MCA 76-13-204 | 3.8 million |
| Total | \$13.9 million |

It appears likely that a bill will be introduced in Montana’s 2019 Legislative Session to require the entire \$13.9 million be funded by assessing every land parcel in Montana except federal, tribal, state trust, and municipal parcels.

Members of the Montana DNRC have testified before that Environmental Quality Council (EQC) with the recommendation that three changes be made to the assessment. First, assess all the above-described parcels in order to be more equitable by assessing all parcels (including those in the eastern part of the State which are not currently assessed). Secondly, assess parcels at different rates with the higher rates for parcels which contain timber or dwellings. Thirdly, assess each parcel rather than assessing by ownership/acreage under the current system. Assessing each parcel will save the DNRC money because it may utilize the Department of Revenue’s current system for assessing real estate taxes.

Any change in the assessment system will benefit certain parcel owners and will be a detriment to others. For example, each parcel in the east part of Montana will be assessed for the very first time. Those who own several parcels might pay more as a result of switching the assessment from ownership/acreage to parcels only.

One result of the assessment change has gone unmentioned. The General Fund will be enriched by \$8.2 million if the entire fire preparedness fee is funded by some 512,000 parcel owners. This has all the markings of a tax increase in disguise, even though the DNRC says each assessment is a fee and not a tax.

If you wish to give your input on the proposed assessment, you may attend the July 25-26, 2018, meeting of the Environmental Quality Council in Helena. [See https://leg.mt.gov/css/Committees/interim/2017-2018/EQC/Meetings/meetings-and-materials-2.html](https://leg.mt.gov/css/Committees/interim/2017-2018/EQC/Meetings/meetings-and-materials-2.html).

- i. Fire preparedness (previously called “fire protection”) covers the activity to prepare for fire suppression, including securing and maintaining equipment, training, education, fire detection, and salaries for those in fire preparedness. Fire suppression, on the other hand, commences upon ignition of the fire, and includes all activity for control and extinguishing the fire, as well as rehabilitation efforts to damage caused by the fire-fighting. Suppression is funded from a source different than the fire preparedness source.
- ii. The DNRC can create a “wildland fire protection district” upon a vote of not less than 51% of the owners representing at least 51% of the acreage to be involved in the affected wildland fire protection district MCA 76-13-201; MCA 76-13-207; MCA 76-13-208; MVA 76-13-213. (Note that the \$3.8 million contribution is primarily made by owners in the west because that is where the districts are located.)

Successful Fuel Mitigation through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

By Diane Fitzgerald, NRCS

We recently passed the landmark of one million acres burned in 2017. So far. We have been choking on smoke for months now, and are unable to see our beautiful mountains. The loss of firefighters, homes, livestock, wildlife, historic structures and damage to grazing lands, forests, streams, and national parks is beyond disturbing.

A recent epidemic of forest pests resulted in high mortality in both the pine and Douglas-fir forests. With some of the dead trees still standing, some on the ground and in various stages of rotting and falling, many of our forests on both private and public land are a dry, tangled mess and combined with drought, a severe fire hazard. With many houses built in the forest now, some forest management practices like prescribed fire and timber harvest are unusable in these inhabited areas.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) can help private landowners plan a strategy to protect their property and homes, improve forage for livestock, or accomplish wildlife goals. The practices used to help landowners develop these plans can create defensible or survivable space around structures, create fuel breaks in the forest, thin and prune precommercial sized trees, dispose of slash and control weeds. These plans, based on landowner goals and developed through our technical services can go through a competitive ranking process for financial assistance through the EQIP program. EQIP is not a "grant", but rather it is a program where NRCS shares in the cost of installing these fuel-reducing practices at a flat rate per acre.

Fuel reduction measures will not stop a fire, but are intended to keep a fire on the ground, giving firefighters a chance to control it, instead of in the crowns of the trees where it cannot be fought. Precommercial thinning is intended to improve the health of the trees remaining on the site through reduced competition for light, moisture, nutrients, and space. Maintenance is needed for all practices, to continue the crown or stem spacing achieved with the work. Scouting for and controlling noxious weeds must be done for several years after fuel reduction treatment. Grass seeding is also needed sometimes in disturbed areas.

Successful forestry work has been Figure 3 Fuel Break-After accomplished through the EQIP program in all private forested areas of the county, from Wolf Creek and Craig to Rimini to York. Two homes in the Scratch gravel Hills survived the Corral Fire, and the owners had recently completed fuel breaks through EQIP.

The Helena NRCS field office welcomes the chance to come out and look at your property with you, discuss your goals, and help you lay out a plan to achieve them. If you are interested in funding for your plan, we can help you with the application and eligibility for that process. We can also show you completed practices on the ground to give you an idea of what the property could look like, post-treatment. If you are interested, please contact the Helena NRCS office at 406-449-5000 extension 3.

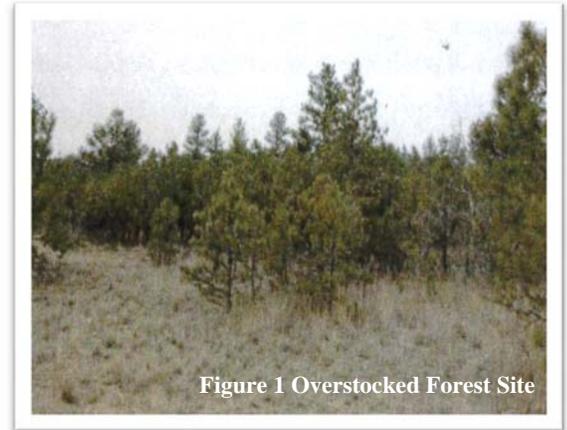


Figure 1 Overstocked Forest Site



Figure 2 Fuel Break-Before



Figure 3 Fuel Break-After

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The Forest Steward's Journal is a publication of the Forest Stewardship Foundation. Comments, articles, and letters to the editor are welcome.

Should you join the Forest Stewardship Foundation?



By joining us you become a part of a small but energetic organization that gets things done. We are all volunteers, but since 2011 we have been able to co-sponsor the Helena Landowner Conference and several "Ties to the Land" workshops. We have also contributed, as funding is available, to MSU Extension Forestry to help fund stewardship workshops. Plus, twice a year we publish and distribute over 1,300 Forest Steward's Journals.

We know money is tight, but our dues are still only \$25. We currently have 100+ members so you can do the math and see that we don't have much

of an operating budget once we publish and mail the Journal. Your membership means a great deal to our continuing success. Please consider joining the foundation by completing the membership application form/envelope found in each winter's edition of the Journal.

We invite you to visit our website and welcome your comments and suggestions.

<https://www.ForestStewardshipFoundation.org>

Thank you sincerely for your help.

Ed Levert, Chair