

## Environmental Justice in Oregon's Forest Conservation

By: Helen Bouchard

Oregon is a state in America very well known for its beautiful and unique environment.



This includes the variety of forests, the coast, and so much more that the land offers. As someone who has moved all over the country, I truly love Oregon and the environment I am grateful to live in. These forests provide numerous ecological benefits, including carbon

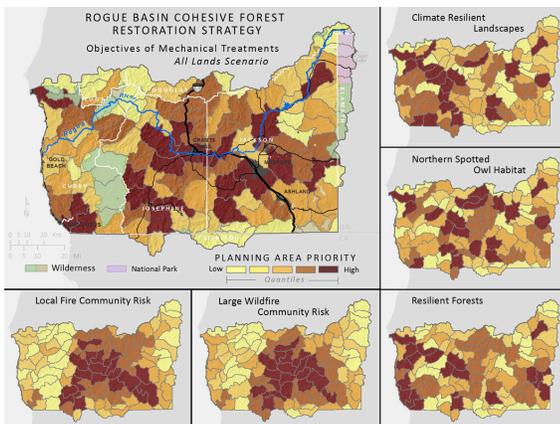
sequestration, habitat for wildlife, and clean air and water. However, in recent years, there have been growing concerns about the long-term health of these vital ecosystems. There are environmental factors that need to be kept in mind to be able to keep this environment safe and healthy, and environmental issues that need to be solved. Not only this, but vulnerable groups and indigenous groups that need to be thought of when areas in our environment are destroyed, or are used. Oregon's forests are at risk due to poor management, climate change, and environmental injustice. To protect these forests, we must incorporate Indigenous knowledge, advocate for policy changes, and support local organizations working toward sustainable conservation.

A rising issue that has come about within Oregon is the management of our forests. Over the past few years, we have seen impacts including catastrophic wildfires due to the poor management of our forests and overgrowth, losing over 1.5 million acres of land. For instance, The Washington post stated "Since 2001, the state has over prioritized recreation and environmental concerns such as ecotourism. As a result, Oregon's forests were allowed to become overgrown, creating fire hazards" (Parrish, 2020). I have seen first hand how wildfires can take away homes, as my grandparents lost theirs a few years ago. The Alameda fire in 2020,

took out thousands of homes and structures in Oregon, including my family member's. It is devastating and has negative impacts on the environment. Not only this, but my family almost had to evacuate our area due to a fire as well in Clackamas. These wildfires have traumatized my family as we have lost many valuables and artifacts due to forests and areas being unkempt. Not only this, but the neighborhoods that the Alameda fire hit was a low-income community and communities that were vulnerable. They were not in a place to take those impacts and destruction and this is also why I care for the justice that needs to be made for these people, so they don't lose everything over something that they truly had no control over. As a person who lives in Oregon, I care and truly want to preserve its beauty to its full extent. While poor forest management has allowed dangerous overgrowth, climate change has intensified the conditions that make wildfires more frequent and severe. Addressing both issues is necessary to prevent future disasters. With this being said, poor management of the forests is not the only probable cause for these fires that are burning Oregon. Climate change is an issue that needs to be solved as well.



Within Oregon, there are many organizations that are trying to solve this issue. One example is the Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative (SOFRC). They work hard to stop destructive wildfires, harmful smoke impacts, disrupted lives and damaged habitats. They

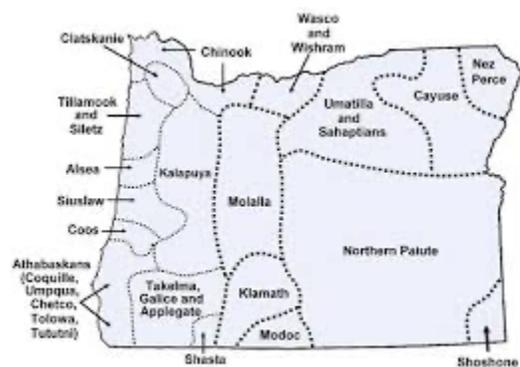


say their role is “supplying the latest scientific data, public engagement, cross-boundary learning opportunities, coordination and administrative support that forest restoration groups need to

succeed”. One of the main strategies that they are enforcing is known as the Rogue Basin Strategy. This is a 20-year plan that involves addressing wildfire issues over 1.1 million acres, within Jackson, Josephine, and Curry counties. It will work on scale forest thinning, fuel reduction, and controlled burning to help prevent destructive wildfires in Oregon. They do not only use their team, but also involve the local communities in their work, this including Indigenous groups, local groups in the area, and vulnerable groups that could be greatly impacted. The SOFRC is working hard to bring environmental justice to this work.

Although I believe the SOFRC are doing a good job at this plan of action, I would like to expand on how important it is specifically to get indigenous communities involved. Oregon is home to many Indigenous tribes, such as the

Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the Klamath Tribes, and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, who have long-standing spiritual and cultural connections to the land. These communities have practiced sustainable land stewardship for



generations, using methods like controlled burns to prevent catastrophic wildfires and maintain ecological balance. When policies go through, and groups start to expand on the idea of logging, deforesting, and thinning these areas, there should always be a voice of the people that either are affiliated or are a part of a tribe within these given lands. In the past, Indigenous people have been excluded from these policies and acts “several legislative acts passed that had a significant impact on the tribes in Oregon and the land they occupied. These acts slowly took away land from the tribes and eventually forced them from their homelands to the Reservation”

(Oregon.gov, 2025) We need to protect their voices and homes.

Lastly, I would like to explain how I would get involved to help with forest overgrowth and make sure all communities are heard. I will get involved in groups such as The Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Club, and Indigenous Environmental Network, which focus on sustainable land management and environmental justice. I will volunteer for clean-up efforts, donating to wildfire relief funds, and advocate for better land policies. Not only physically will I help, but also virtually, sharing information on social media, or engaging in local politics to push for policies that prioritize vulnerable communities. I will support wildfire prevention and recovery efforts through forest restoration projects, creating fire-safe spaces, and help with reforestation. Lastly, I will continue to educate myself about traditional land management practices, particularly Indigenous fire management, and advocating for their integration into modern practices can help address the root causes of overgrowth. Through all of this, I am putting an effort into projects that I care about and will prevent tragedies, such as losses of homes, people, and our beautiful environment.

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