

Understanding the Private Forest Accord

Forest Road Construction and Management

Importance: Forest roads have the potential to severely impact water quality and aquatic species by blocking access to habitat and by allowing sediment and other road pollutants to enter streams. Forest roads increase surface runoff and alter stream flow. These impacts can vary depending on how the road was constructed, where it is located on the hillslope, and how it is used and maintained.

Current Law/System: Oregon has very weak regulations on forest road management practices compared to Washington and California. Enforcement is uncertain at best. Too few of the regulations are included in code, and far more are a part of guidance documents known as “Technical Notes.” Some of the outcomes of Oregon’s outdated and inadequate forest road rules include: undersized culverts, fish passage barriers, poor regulation of drainage, and a lack of protection for critical locations and water resources.

Proposed Change: The Private Forest Accord roads agreement establishes new goals and a suite of specific rules for forest roads. These include: 1) limiting sediment to waters of the State through hydrologic disconnection of the road system, 2) ensuring adequate passage for aquatic organisms at stream crossings, and 3) preventing (or minimizing) mass wasting, hydrologic alterations, and impacts to streams and wetlands.

Importantly, the PFA establishes the Forest Roads Inventory and Assessment (FRIA) 20-year program that requires forest owners update their roads to new standards, and prioritizes the removal of fish passage barriers and the hydrological disconnection of the road system from the stream network. It also creates a study to identify abandoned “orphan” roads that are on the landscape and a process for repair. For stream crossings, it upgrades to a 100-year flood level in determining culvert size and uses “stream simulation” with larger crossings to ensure adequate passage on fish streams. Small forestland owners, who own nearly half of the important salmon habitat on Oregon private lands, have a responsibility to also update their roads. But the agreement establishes the Family Forestland Fish Passage Program (OFFPP) to ensure state funding to help small landowners upgrade fish passage.

Discussion: Updating Oregon’s forest roads rules is long overdue, and this agreement would be a huge benefit to salmon where roads threaten water quality and prevent fish passage. The rules will establish more modern standards, while the FRIA program would immediately begin the process of upgrading forest roads to these standards, and the OFFPP will ensure that small forest landowners also have the capacity to upgrade their forest roads.