

Conservation SHOWCASE



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NRCS

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Eugene Forest Benefits From Conservation Practices

Curt McKinney is a consulting forester who manages thousands of acres of private forestland around the Eugene, Oregon area. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is just one of the many tools in his toolbox that has helped him improve forest health, increase production, improve wildlife habitat, and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire both on and off the land he manages.

“EQIP has enabled us to implement conservation practices that would not have been financially viable for us to do on our own,” said McKinney during a February 2012 tour of forestland he manages outside of Eugene. “The financial assistance provided through the program didn’t completely pay for the work, but it certainly provided enough incentive by increasing the health and production of our stands. Bottom line, it’s a win-win from both the production and environmental perspective.”

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program providing funding and technical assistance for measures to improve a variety of natural resources on private lands. Forestry related EQIP funds are specifically designated for non-industrial private forestland owners. Resulting projects are designed to create pest and disease resistant stands, as well as develop a more natural stand structure and environment.

ABOVE: Curt McKinney, consulting forester, picks up a recently cut tree

“With the continued growth of wild land-urban interface areas across Oregon, and especially in Lane County, forest stand health and fire hazard protection is a high priority that needs to be addressed,” said Tom Burnham, NRCS District Conservationist for Lane County. “EQIP can really help forestland owners do just that through a number of different conservation practices that can fit a wide variety of individual landowner needs.”

Over the past two years, NRCS in Oregon has treated approximately 4,400 acres of forestland through EQIP contracts across the state. This includes funding for landowners to develop forest management plans, complete slash treatment, tree pruning, pre-commercial thinning of dense forest stands, as well as brush management. Other approved practices include developing fire breaks, building access roads, tree and grass planting, and tree and shrub site preparation.



Yellow tint is a sign of dusky-footed woodrat damage

“Helping Oregon forestland owners assess their property and develop a specific management plan to address any issues they may have is the first step,” said Misty Seiboldt, NRCS Oregon State Forester. “We can then also provide financial assistance to implement that action plan. The end result is a healthier forest stand that should eventually produce improved profits for the

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) forestry health project area five miles outside of Eugene, OR.





Uncovering a dusky footed woodrat nest

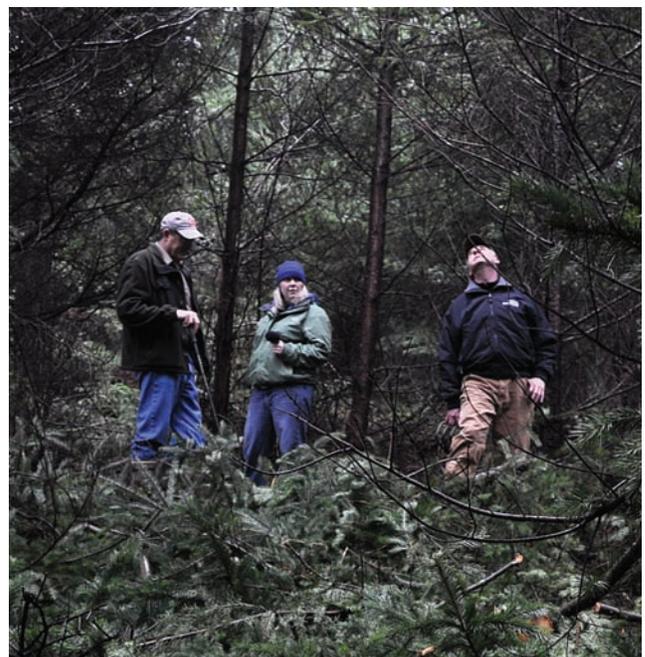
landowners. However, the benefits for soil health, reduced erosion, improved watershed function and water quality, better wildlife habitat, and breaking the chain of high fuel loads that can feed raging wildfires share the benefits with the whole community.”

Unforeseen benefits can also arise like Curt McKinney discovered. He found highly-populated pockets of dusky-footed woodrats that were threatening to decimate production in some of the forestland areas he manages.

“These rats were girdling up to 70 trees per acre in places,” said McKinney. “This would either kill the trees or top them so the trees would never grow to be harvestable. From a production standpoint, this had to be brought under control or it would have had a very negative financial impact on future harvesting.”

From McKinney’s observations, the EQIP-funded pre-commercial thinning helped reduce

the forest stand density making it difficult for woodrats to travel easily from tree to tree. The thinning practice mimicked a more natural stand structure, appeared to reduce the spread of rat



NRCS District Conservation Tom Burnham (left), NRCS Oregon State Forester Misty Seiboldt (center) and Curt McKinney (right) examine a pre-commercially thinned area.

nests in the trees, and forced the rats to travel on the ground allowing natural predators such as foxes and owls thin the populations to more tolerable levels.

To find out more information about these and other NRCS conservation program opportunities, contact your local NRCS representative.

“Though we are still monitoring the woodrat issue, so far we are extremely encouraged by the results,” said McKinney. “I’m certain the forest thinning was nearly as important in controlling these rat populations as other methods we implemented. When you put the benefits of the improved forest stand health with the reduction of the woodrat population, it’s hard to put a value on that. But I’m sure glad we did it.”

Currently (2012), 13 counties in Oregon have adopted forest health as a priority conservation strategy for NRCS. An additional six counties have designated some forest-related emphasis for their conservation funding plans. These locally developed strategies vary from dealing with fuels reduction to overall forest management.

Branch laden road created for pre-commercial thinning operation

