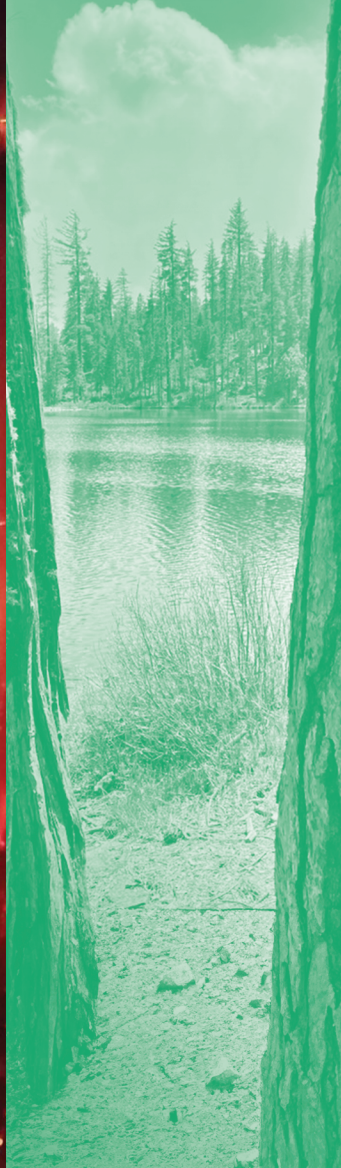




PACIFIC
FOREST
TRUST



FOREST LIFE

WINTER 2025

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Pacific Forest Trust's mission is to sustain America's forests for all their public benefits of wood, water, wildlife, and people's well being, in cooperation with private landowners and communities.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The Beauty and Blessings of Old Forests

Being in an old forest is always inspiring, calming, and rejuvenating. You walk into one overwhelmed by our current press of events and emerge more settled, with a sense of our place in the world and in the broad passage of time.

Standing amongst these old giants releases our sense of importance and gives us a peace of being. They have been through and survived so much for so many years. And we know well, that from fire resilience to water services to carbon sequestration to extraordinary biodiversity, these forests far outperform the very young forests we typically manage for.

We have very little old or even "mature" forest in this country. Why?

Some would say, it's simple: money. Those big old trees have a lot of board feet in them, and it takes too long to grow them back. The time value of money is just too great.

Others might say it's the way we've always done it. Our mills are all adjusted to small, young, uniform trees. Our subsidies are all geared to reforestation and using various wood residues. The common sense wisdom is that it just makes financial sense to manage for young plantations.

Young, homogenous, vulnerable tree plantations dominate our landscapes. But, given the enormous, irreplaceable values of older and old forests, especially for climate, the great challenge facing us is how to manage for old forests.

Michael Taylor's work documenting the remaining great old giants shows us the extraordinary value of even a single big, old tree on the landscape. They provide a road map of what to manage towards.

The next step is aligning our policies to encourage and engage forest managers in managing to restore and maintain these old forest functions. Given the amazing capacity of older forests to mitigate the climate crisis, our future depends on it.

POLICY

Supporting Fire and Habitat Resilience through Accelerating Fuels Management



The Pacific Forest Trust has launched an exciting new project focused on how fuels and fire management practices can benefit both human and animal/plant forest communities, especially vulnerable, threatened and endangered species in California.

Fuels reduction management and prescribed burns are widely acknowledged as effective means to reduce fire intensity and protect communities. But, such management actions often overlook how these actions impact vulnerable wildlife, plants, and other species and their habitats. These habitats are fire-adapted, as are the species who live there, though they are adapted to low and moderate intensity fire impacts and disturbances.

The way disturbances – such as fire or harvesting activities for fuels reduction – occur on the landscape can have very different impacts on habitats. Supported by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, this project aims to identify areas where fuels reduction and habitat restoration efforts can create the highest synergies, enabling landscapes to safely accommodate regular fire. We also intend to identify key priority areas to focus fuels reduction for both human and other natural communities.

California's plants and animals have adapted to specific fire regimes which have shaped critical habitat features like hollow trees for nesting, insect and invertebrate diversity, and understory plants that provide food and cover from predators. Changes in fire frequency and intensity over the past century have significantly altered these habitats, contributing to other management actions such as development, fragmentation and ecosystem simplification that have put many species at risk of extinction.

Focusing initially on Siskiyou County – which has diverse habitats, over 100 species of concern, and vulnerable human communities – PFT is developing a Best Practices Manual for landowners and managers to use in planning and implementing fuel management activities. This manual is designed to complement regulatory requirements and existing fuels management guidance by incorporating habitat restoration needs for vulnerable species, identifying practices that both reduce fire risk and enhance critical habitats.



PFT's conserved forests are home to over 800 species, many of which are at risk.

CONSERVATION

Securing California's Water and Wildlife: The Trinity Headwaters Conservation Project

In a unique partnership, PFT completed the acquisition and protection of almost 11,000 acres at the headwaters of the Trinity River, conserving some of the most biodiverse conifer forest systems globally and expanding the connectivity of protected lands across the Klamath-Cascade region.

Azaleas at water's edge on the Trinity Headwaters property.

50+

miles of streams protected across the Trinity Headwaters Conservation Project.

This \$15.5 million project has permanently protected nearly 11,000 acres, representing almost 10% of the Upper Trinity watershed. The project is a partnership with the Watershed Research and Training Center, based in Trinity County, to whom the land has now been transferred, while PFT holds a Working Forest Conservation Easement on it to ensure its sustained long-term ecological management and conservation. "We are looking forward to implementing innovative forestry, fuels reduction and fire-management strategies that demonstrate the potential for balancing profits with landscape ecological resilience and broad social benefits," said Watershed Resource and Training Center's Co-Executive Director Nick Goulette.

Located where the Klamath Mountains meet the Southern Cascades, the newly conserved land is both water rich and enormously diverse in its habitats and species of plants and animals. It comprises vast mixed-conifer forests, a significant network of wet meadows, springs, natural lakes, 4.5 miles of the Trinity River and over 50 miles of spring-fed tributaries!

“This acquisition will protect and improve the health and resilience of forests in one of the state’s most biodiverse regions.”

— Jennifer Norris, Executive Director of the Wildlife Conservation Board

The Trinity Headwaters project is a major contribution to California’s goal of conserving 30% of its land by 2030 (30x30), providing refuge for nearly 250 species of wildlife and plants, many of which are found nowhere else in the world.

With this amazing water and species richness, the project enhances the health and resilience of one of California’s most water-rich and biodiverse regions, providing essential habitat connectivity for endangered species such as the northern spotted owl, Sierra Nevada red fox, and Cascades frog.

Linking multiple federally protected areas but maintaining the lands in private ownership and as a community-focused resource, the project enhances critical wildlife corridors that allow species to migrate in response to climate change. This milestone builds upon Pacific Forest Trust’s goal of creating an integrated network of conserved headwaters forests in the Klamath Cascade to sustain both wildlife and water resources for generations to come.

The project was made possible by the collaboration of multiple funders: the California Wildlife Conservation Board, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and an historic investment from the U.S. Department of Housing

and Urban Development (HUD) for community development. “The Trinity Headwaters project is a novel initiative that has both ecological and community benefits, also bolstering the local economy,” noted Congressman Jared Huffman who led the effort to secure federal funding for this initiative.

“This acquisition will protect and improve the health and resilience of forests in one of the state’s most biodiverse regions,” said Jennifer Norris, Executive Director of the Wildlife Conservation Board. “Protecting this watershed will benefit native fish and water resources, sequester carbon, and provide critical habitat and connectivity for threatened and endangered species.”

The project originated with the Michigan-California Timber Company (MTCT) and was completed with New Forests, a timber investment management organization which purchased MTCT’s holdings in 2022. Such major projects take time, partnerships, dedication, and investment to complete, illustrating how critical public support for innovative conservation is.

The easement ensures that the land remains in sustainable, ecological management, supporting jobs and economic development in an economically disadvantaged area, while also protecting public trust resources including water, wildlife, and climate resilience. This balanced approach is exemplified by the innovative working forest conservation easement model, which permits private ownership and economic use of the land while safeguarding its ecological values.

The Trinity Headwaters Conservation Project stands as a model of landscape-scale conservation, improving the resilience of both natural ecosystems and human communities.



A Pacific fisher, a key species in the region's ecosystem, relies on healthy, conserved forests for survival.

STEWARDSHIP

Pioneering Large-Scale Prescribed Fire for Healthy Private Working Forests

McCloud Soda Springs burn at night.

PFT is a “think and do” organization. Our work in restoring good fire to the landscape is a powerful example of that.

PFT’s pioneering work to develop incentives and policies to restoring natural fire regimes to Western forests has been in place for decades. Over the past several years, we have been matching that with reinstating the practice of restoring fire. This year we embarked on an ambitious project reintroducing “good fire” at a large scale in commercially managed forests, enhancing forest resilience and ecological health while improving community safety.

Our policy work spans building coalitions, supporting science-based advocacy, and developing successful policy initiatives. Now we are “walking the talk” by putting beneficial fire back on the landscapes we manage – demonstrating the practicality and feasibility of this paradigm shift in forest management.

This year, we burned almost 900 acres of commercially managed forest at **McCloud Soda Springs**, also advancing the art, science, and practice of beneficial fire. This is the largest prescribed burns on private commercial forest in over two decades.



1,350

acres of ponderosa
pine-mixed conifer forest.

McCloud Soda Springs: A Landmark Burn

PFT has conserved the McCloud Soda Springs Working Forest and also manages it on behalf of its owner, Schroll Timberlands. Bordering the town of McCloud in Northern California, this 1,350-acre ponderosa pine-mixed conifer forest has multiple wet meadows and springs. It had been significantly altered by years of industrial management and fire suppression, simplifying its rich, diverse ecosystem and reducing its fire and climate resilience. Our goal in returning fire to this forest, which would naturally have had a low-intensity burn for at least once a decade, is to reduce the risks of high intensity fire by restoring tree spacing and meadow extent, as well as enrich the soil and promote more natural species composition, including for key native oak species.



The prescribed burn was meticulously planned to enhance the property's fire resilience, habitat values, and community safety.

With a \$1.8 million grant from California's Wildlife Conservation Board, we undertook a massive prescribed burn covering approximately 900 acres. The burn was meticulously planned to enhance the property's fire resilience and habitat values. It has been planned for since the initial harvest was undertaken in 2018, and subsequent further non-commercial and biomass thinnings. These steps reduced the risk of fire spreading out of control lines.

We are particularly proud of the community engagement in this project. Many McCloud residents observed the burn, interacted with our fire crews, and participated in discussions about the positive effects of prescribed fire. This community involvement underscores the importance of public education and engagement in advancing prescribed fire initiatives, as well as how indispensable a tool "good fire" can be in keeping our towns safe from catastrophic wildfire.

The success of the McCloud Soda Springs burn extends beyond its ecological benefits. We produced educational videos documenting the preparation, execution, and early results of the burn. These videos are serving as a valuable resource for other forest owners, managers, and foresters, inspiring them to safely incorporate prescribed burns into their management practices. The burn also attracted national attention with coverage on CBS.



Our burn mitigates the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

Shaping California's Fire Policy

Pacific Forest Trust plays a pivotal role in shaping and driving key fire legislation that promotes the use of beneficial fire as a tool for reducing wildfire risk and restoring ecosystem health.

This year, PFT was the lead sponsor for **SB 1101** authored by Senator Monique Limon, and was pivotal in the passage of **AB 2276**, authored by Assemblymember Jim Wood. With remarkable bi-partisan support, both bills were signed into law by Governor Newsom this fall. They make for significant improvements in state regulatory processes governing fuels management and prescribed burning as well as advances in on-the-ground management in California's fire-adapted forests and large landscapes.

A critical focus is expediting significantly larger scale prescribed burns to lower the risk of high intensity, catastrophic burns. SB 1101 does just that by streamlines CAL FIRE's contracting and procurement processes for implementing prescribed burns, making it easier for public and private landowners to implement the large prescribed burns at the scales needed. By fostering greater collaboration between state, federal, tribal, and local entities, SB 1101 also promotes a more coordinated approach to fire management. The bill, with unanimous bipartisan support, underscored the state's commitment to increasing the amount of "good fire" on the ground, thereby improving both public safety and ecosystem

resilience. We are extremely grateful to Senator Limon for her leadership on this issue.

AB 2276 makes it easier for private landowners to expand the scope and scale of their fuels reduction and expands the positive ecological impact of these activities. It builds upon the prior Forest Fire Prevention Exemption, renaming it as the Forest Resilience Exemption and expands the scope of forest management projects and consolidates several prior exemptions. Overall, this simplifies implementation of fuels reduction projects. Under this new approach, landowners can also create larger fuel breaks and reduce forest density over wider areas, essential practices for reducing wildfire risk. The bill also supports the restoration of naturally oak dominated areas which have been reduced by the encroachment of small conifer trees due to decades of fire suppression. This is especially valuable for two key species, the California Black Oak (*Quercus kelloggii*) and Oregon White Oak (*Quercus garryana*). These species were specifically managed for by indigenous peoples, and these oaks provide essential food for many California wildlife species. We were very pleased to partner with the California Forestry Association, a key advocate for California forests, on this bill.

PFT's continued advocacy for beneficial fire and forest resilience policies is helping to create a future where California's forests can thrive in the face of climate change, all while reducing the danger that massive conflagrations have placed upon our communities.



AB2276

facilitates restoration of
historic oak dominated areas.



Documenting the Tallest Trees: **A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL TAYLOR**

Pacific Forest Trust supports Michael Taylor's work documenting the tallest, biggest trees in California and beyond. Here, he shares some of his findings and motivations.

1. What compels you to find these tallest trees, and why are they important?

These ancient giants are awe-inspiring – towering, stalwart, and wind-firm, they've endured fires, storms, and the axe. Discovering "extreme trees" – the biggest/tallest trees – is a new frontier. We learn from them because these trees define a "Boundary Condition" – that is, the limit of what that species can do when left alone. Changes in the environment will be seen first in the tallest trees. The biggest, tallest and oldest trees of a given species likely have good genetics that allowed them to become exceptional.

2. How does your research contribute to forest management?

The oldest, tallest trees are often the only survivors of ultra-hot wildfires, thanks to their thick bark and branchless lower trunks. In fires like the Rim, Caldor, Ranch, and Dixie, mostly the largest and tallest trees survived while younger ones did not. These old trees are crucial seed sources for regrowth after fires. Giant trees also provide wind protection and homes for countless animals and unique plants. This shows us what we need to manage for to reduce fire impacts and promote more fully functioning forests.

3. Why is protecting big, old trees important for people?

Giant trees inspire people – most have no idea how immense trees like redwoods, giant sequoias, sugar pines, and ponderosa pines can be. Big, old trees sequester far more atmospheric carbon, stabilize more topsoil, keep surface temperatures lower, and hold more surface water than smaller trees.

4. How do you locate and measure champion trees?

I use LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging – a remote sensing system), both ground- and aerial-based, to locate them. We also climb these trees using ropes, not spurs, to get accurate volume estimates of their crown, branches, and foliage for total mass.

5. What are the biggest threats facing the tallest, oldest trees today?

These trees are largely in protected areas, but climate changes and extremes, diseases and exotic pests pose the greatest threats, weakening and destabilizing forests in the Pacific Northwest, Eastern U.S., and globally.

6. Does old growth need to be managed?

The big old trees should be left alone to support wildlife and forest regeneration for future generations. Mature trees should be cultivated and selectively cut on long rotations, allowing many to mature into old growth. The largest dead trees should be left for wildlife habitats.

7. How can people help protect and manage for these old giants?

Landowners can conserve their forested lands to save their oldest trees, prevent overharvesting and development, and manage for mature forests, in the future, really old trees. As part of that, selective harvest and controlled burns help reduce fuel loads and return nutrients to the topsoil. These actions are key steps to protect these old giants.

STEWARDSHIP



Engaging the Next Generation on Mount Ashland Demonstration Forest

PFT's Stewardship Forester, Jack Singer, at MADF with high school students.

PFT is continuing its mission to advance climate-resilient restoration through our Mt. Ashland Demonstration Forest (MADF), a vital outdoor classroom for local students.

This 1,130-acre forest, just minutes away from the Ashland and Medford metropolitan area, is home to globally unique forests and rich biodiversity, providing an amazing venue to demonstrate climate-resilient management. In partnership with local schools, PFT is providing unique field experiences to inspire and educate the next generation of natural resource managers.

In May and November this year, students from Phoenix High School took part in the first of many field days planned at the demonstration forest. PFT designed hands-on experiences that complement what students were learning in the classroom regarding ecology, forest dynamics, and conservation. Activities included wildlife tracking, tree identification and aging, as well as learning about general forest health and resilience – and how restoring beneficial fire regimes can help achieve these goals. "This was such a great experience," shared one pupil, "and I learned that fire can be a good thing."

continued >

In November, PFT's Stewardship and Outreach Associate Lyndia Hammer and Stewardship Forester Jack Singer hosted an environmental science class from Armadillo Community Charter School in Phoenix, Oregon. The students assisted with a wildlife habitat survey and learned basic forest measurements. Their fieldwork reinforced classroom lessons on food webs and community ecology. They observed plant and animal interactions firsthand in the field.

The students spent the day traversing both wet and dry meadow habitats, inventorying large, downed wood and snags, and documenting signs of wildlife use, such as burrows. The group also explored forest edge habitats, identifying tree species, measuring growth, and investigating tracks and scat to understand forest processes and wildlife activity. The data gathered adds to PFT's pre-treatment habitat mapping, a critical part of its ecological monitoring program.

The Mt. Ashland Demonstration Forest is a perfect place to create immersive experiences that educate and inspire the next generation of environmental leaders as they meet the challenges and opportunities of managing forests in the face of climate change.

DONOR HIGHLIGHT: ERIK WOHLGEMUTH

Erik Wohlgemuth is COO of Future 500, and Secretary for PFT's Board of Directors. Erik's expertise spans environmental strategy, as well as the private and NGO sectors. We asked him about his love of forests and his dedicated support of PFT's work.



Why are forests important to you?

I grew up in the urban forest of Brooklyn, NY, where experiencing the great outdoors was a jaunt in Prospect Park or a run across the Brooklyn Bridge. It wasn't until a fateful father-son raft trip, taken shortly after I graduated college, that I was captivated by the complex beauty and mystery of Western U.S. forests. I took a solo trail run through a side canyon to a natural hot spring; in that journey, I felt closer to God than I ever had in a place of worship. It was in that moment that I resolved to devote my life to protecting the environment. Since then, no other habitat moves me quite as much as a healthy forest.

What makes PFT's work important?

Their history as pioneering innovators in both stewarding forests and in influencing the policies that reward landowners for stewarding their land has influenced the work of countless other conservation groups, foresters, and the rural economies that depend on healthy forests. And their focus on the Pacific NW is critical as the forests from Northern California up through British Columbia are the greatest forest carbon sinks on the planet and home to critical ecosystem services and biodiversity essential for human prosperity.

What worries you about forests in this time of climate change?

I live in Portland, Oregon, and am blessed to live next to Forest Park, an intact forest system that is over 2,000 hectares. It is a beautiful resource, yet over the past dozen years, I have seen how the effects of more extreme weather diminish the flora as well as animal species.

What gives you hope?

I see people every day who are starting to get it about climate change and forests. I see my neighbors staying vigilant about managing fire risk and knowing the value of the Forest Park to our quality of life. I see state and national policies highlighting biodiversity – an issue that transcends politics and helps protect forests and other natural systems that sustain us. I see it in PFT's leadership, staff, and board, all of whom cultivate a "radical middle" that allows us to unite across aisles to make a difference.

PFT is THE cultivator of this radical middle space, building bridges across the Pacific NW enabling us to tackle the climate and biodiversity challenge that threatens to undermine humanity's prosperity. Our collective work gives me hope, and it will continue beyond my short time on this earth. Let's get to it!



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