



(/donate-to-american-forest-foundation)

Blog (/american-forest-foundation-blog) | News (/newsroom) | Contact AFF (/contact-american-f)

- About AFF (/about-american-forest-foundation)
- What We Do (/what-we-do)
- News (/newsroom)
- Resources (/tools-resources-for-woodland-owners)
- Our Advocacy (/government-policy-advocacy-for-forest-owners)
- AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION BLOG
- Landowners (/forest-owners-rural-america)
- Woodland Magazine (/woodland-magazine-publication-for-forest-owners)
- Ways to Give (/ways-to-give)
- Home (/) ::

The Challenges of Burnt-Out Markets ()

Share (http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&pubid=xx4dde6a840a326f66)

March 28, 2018 at 4:00 pm by affoundation (/contentmgr/showdetails.php?id/3/view_type/950050/findby/10006)

The Defrees family of eastern Oregon are no strangers to the challenges that come along with forest ownership, having owned a 2,000-acre ranch for more than 100 years.

In 1986, the Defrees were hit hard when lightning sparked the Huckleberry Forest Fire — a wildfire that would go on to burn 9,600 acres in their area. The wildfire took with it virtually every ponderosa pine, Western larch, Douglas fir, white fir and black pine tree on the 500 acres of their land it swept through.

It was a hard lesson for Dean and Sharon Defrees, two of the family members who oversee the ranch. While the family cared for the land regularly, the area that had burned was a bit overgrown with trees growing close together. The fire could have been managed better had they thinned those stands of trees.



Afterwards, as they tried to restore, they were met with a series of other challenges.

With the widespread destruction of the wildfire, seedlings were in high demand with federal agencies given priority, making it hard for family forest owners to purchase them. On top of this, the burned forest was inundated with several species of bark beetle and the infestation spread to the healthy, unburned trees growing in adjacent areas.

But the Defrees persevered. They were eventually able to replant, planting 5,600 seedlings of Douglas fir, ponderosa pine and white pine helping their land regenerate.

After all was said and done, the family took on a more aggressive management style, placing more importance on the need for wildfire prevention. They rewrote their management plan, and as a family agreed to thin each section of their trees moving forward each year. This would ensure if a wildfire struck again, their larger trees would be spaced farther apart, so they could control the fire and help the land better survive.



For years, they stuck to this plan, yet outside their property factors began to change. Starting in the mid-1990s, the nearby mills began to struggle. Federal lands management and thinning normally fueled the bulk of these mills' volume. But litigation and lawsuits surrounding Forest Service lands halted operations. Without the business, one by one the mills closed. Mill closures meant loggers and truck drivers for hauling were no longer needed, so the contractor and forester community dwindled as well.

For the Defrees's community, 17 mills dwindled down to two. Both are 70 miles away, and only one takes pulpwood, or small diameter material. The next closest mill to take pulpwood is 175 miles away.

Without assistance, and an outlet for wood material, many landowners in the area began to pull back their management activities. Timber stands were left alone, becoming more and more overgrown with each passing year.

The Defrees family began to take on more of the workload themselves. Sharon took a master forester course through the Oregon State University Extension Program — not just because of the program's passion for conservation and to make more informed decisions — but also due to the lack of foresters available in eastern Oregon to assist landowners. They purchased logging equipment, tractors and other gear to help take on the hard labor themselves.

Just this winter, the Defrees family took on the task of fire-proofing 24 acres along their western property line that borders federal land by thinning out the ponderosa pine stands. They did the hard labor themselves, taking down the trees that were 9 inches or less in diameter, or were diseased. But they will need to pay a truck driver to help haul the material to the

BLOG SEARCH

RECENT POSTS

[Even Wildland Firefighters Need Help to Handle Wildland Fire Risk \(/golden-crown-initiative-wildland-firefighting\)Inspector Highlight: The 2018 National Inspector of the Year, Mississippi's Michael Hughey \(/michael-hughey-inspector-mississippi\)Leader Highlight: The 2018 National Leadership Award of the Year Honoree, SC's George Kessler \(/george-kessler-leadership-award-south-carolina\)Helping Audubon Vermont Spread Their Wings to Reach More Family Woodland Owners \(/helping-audubon-vermont-reach-woodland-owners\)The Challenges of Burnt-Out Markets \(/lacking-markets-eastern-oregon\)](#)

CATEGORIES

[Place-based Projects \(/american-forest-foundation-blog?view_type=950070&findby=15831\)American Tree Farm System \(/american-forest-foundation-blog?view_type=950070&findby=15829\)News \(/american-forest-foundation-blog?view_type=950070&findby=11639\)News for Forest Landowners \(/american-forest-foundation-blog?view_type=950070&findby=11641\)Policy \(/american-forest-foundation-blog?view_type=950070&findby=11643\)Profile \(/american-forest-foundation-blog?view_type=950070&findby=11644\)](#)

pulpwood mill. The mill offered them \$26 a ton, which in total will not cover their costs. Out of pocket, the Defrees will end up spending \$8,000 to \$10,000 to complete the job.

Other neighbors have said they too need to conduct similar thinning projects, but cannot afford it due to the lack of reasonable markets.

The Defrees know their efforts this fall are helping the health of their woods. But, they worry most about the roughly 400 more acres that need the same treatment to keep a wildfire that will inevitably strike from getting out of control and destroying the land. They will have to wait until they are able to afford to make that investment, unless more market opportunities become available.

The couple often reflect on the decades before, when markets existed and management was affordable, and hope for a day when this balance is back to normal and the community is safer from wildfire.



PRINT

EMAIL

`()(javascript:window.print());` (</blog/email.php?id=16405>)

RSS

COMMENTS: ([https://www.forestfoundation.org/rssmgr/feed.php?co=blog_makeblogrssfeed&of\[blog_id\]=3&en=9d16d](https://www.forestfoundation.org/rssmgr/feed.php?co=blog_makeblogrssfeed&of[blog_id]=3&en=9d16d))

Jack Fetterman

Black pine? Do they mean "black bark pine" which is slang for 2nd growth ponderosa pine? This is a clear case of the Forest Service's failure to manage their resource. The mill closures were predictable when they stopped harvesting (yes, some harvesting still went on but at a greatly reduced rate). It's sad that so many lawmakers sided with the no harvest management style.

Dave Raugust

The DeFrees's are to be complemented for there good stewardship of their tree farm but thinning small diameter trees can be done with without removing them, I can certainly understand why it is not economical to truck them to a mill for pulp but there is no reason not to just fall the trees and leave them lay or sell them for firewood. This would leave the larger trees to mature for lumber uses later and solve the problem of an otherwise fire prone forest. It would still require much sweat equity but not much in the way of financial costs.

Bill Byers

Cutting felling and leaving log length Ponderosa thinning increases fire fuel on the forest floor. A good practice is to cut in short segments and making small piles dispersed about the forest. They can make small critter habitats while the pikes rot in place. These piles reduce wild fire events.

Brian Rabe

Our Tree Farm is just a few miles from the Defrees's and we were hit by the Cornet-Windy Ridge fire in 2015. The conditions cited in the article definitely had an impact on our salvage operations. Thankfully, there are a few consulting foresters, loggers, and truckers in the area but the distance to markets makes positive cash flow difficult, especially for small diameter material. Although firewood is an option, distance to markets is still an obstacle and any revenue is taxed at your nominal rate. Leaving or piling that much material (anything over 3" diameter) not only leaves the fuel in the forest, but is also prime habitat for beetles that can then infest your leave trees.

Carroll Bond

While my circumstances are vastly different from the Defrees, here in Maine we have somewhat the same circumstances with mills closing all through the state making marketing quality timber for 'some' profit difficult. I've owned or worked on my Tree Farm for over 60 years doing sustainable forestry practices for the entire time. My timber is of high quality but nobody will give a decent price for top quality fiber/lumber. Other than my own satisfaction the work performed over the years has meant nothing. Its disheartening.

0.

Name
Email
Comment

SUBMIT

WHY FAMILY FORESTS MATTER

Do you know the important resources and products you use every day that come from family forests?

[LEARN MORE \(/HEALTHYWOODS\)](#)

TOOLS & RESOURCES

AFF provides tools, resources, and information for woodland owners about the role of forests and the global environment.

[LEARN MORE \(/RESOURCES? ICN=RESOURCES&IAD=HP_FOOTER\)](#)

TAKE ACTION

It's important for all of us to ensure the right policies are in place to conserve our nation's forests and woodlands. Join us today!

[ACT NOW \(/GOVERNMENT-POLICY-ADVOCACY-FOR-FOREST-OWNERS\)](#)

SUBSCRIBE TO AFF'S E-NEWSLETTER

Find out how AFF grows stewardship every day by working with family forest owners from around the country.

[SIGN UP NOW \(/SIGN-UP-EMAILS\)](#)

[Log In \(/extranet/\)](#) | [Woodlands Conservation \(/woodland-owner-impact\)](#) | [Policy & Advocacy \(/government-policy-advocacy-for-forest-owners\)](#) | [News & Media \(/newsroom\)](#) | [About Us \(/about-american-forest-foundation\)](#) | [Resources \(/tools-resources-for-woodland-owners\)](#) |

[Facebook \(http://www.facebook.com/pages/American-Forest-Foundation-AFF/131830830855\)](http://www.facebook.com/pages/American-Forest-Foundation-AFF/131830830855) | [Twitter \(http://twitter.com/AmForestFndn\)](http://twitter.com/AmForestFndn) | [Contact Us \(/contact-american-forest-foundation\)](#) | [Site Map \(/site/sitemap.php\)](#) | [Privacy Statement \(/privacy-statement\)](#)

2000 M Street, NW, Suite 550 | Washington, D.C. 20036 | © 2018 American Forest Foundation
202-765-3660