



# OREGON EAST FACE OF THE ELKHORN MOUNTAINS PARTNERSHIP

2014 - 2016

PROJECT

SUMMARY

## Project Vision — “All Hands, All Lands”

RESTORE LANDS ACROSS LARGE LANDSCAPES REGARDLESS OF OWNERSHIP, REDUCE WILDFIRE THREATS TO COMMUNITIES AND LANDOWNERS, PROTECT WATER QUALITY AND SUPPLY, AND IMPROVE HABITAT FOR AT-RISK SPECIES SEAMLESSLY ACROSS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LANDS.

### Funding

Two Chief’s Joint Landscape Restoration Partnership, a collaboration between the chiefs of two USDA agencies, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Forest Service, to improve the health and resiliency of forest ecosystems where public and private lands meet.

### Location

Baker and Union Counties, Oregon. The project targets fuels reduction treatments on more than 46,000 acres in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest; 1,224 acres of BLM land; 4,000 acres of ODFW land; as well as adjacent private lands.

### Project Goals

Accomplish goals of USDA’s Cohesive Wildfire Strategy by reducing the risk of loss to catastrophic wildfire through forest fuels reduction, restoring and maintaining landscapes, and improving fire response. The long-term goal is to minimize potential impacts from wildfire on private residences, natural resources, and public infrastructure, while also improving overall forest health. Specifically, this project aims to reduce impacts of wildfire to drinking water and fish habitat in the Baker and La Grande watersheds. This includes improving habitat for federally-threatened bull trout, steelhead, and Chinook salmon.

### Partners

- NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)
- FOREST SERVICE (USFS)
- OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY (ODF)
- OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE (ODFW)
- BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)



Natural Resources Conservation Service

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

USDA is an equal opportunity provider,  
employer and lender

## Success on Private Land

Thanks to a solid partnership between NRCS and ODF, these two agencies provided financial and technical assistance to help private forest owners reduce catastrophic wildfire risk on 5,491 acres of private lands in Baker and Union counties.

2014

- ▶ **33 contracts on 3,083 acres**
  - ▶ **Union County: 16 contracts on 1,511 acres**
  - ▶ **Baker County: 17 contracts on 1,573 acres**

2015

- ▶ **18 contracts on 1,751 acres**
  - ▶ **Union County: 12 contracts on 1,248 acres**
  - ▶ **Baker County: 6 contracts on 503 acres**

2016

- ▶ **10 contracts on 658 acres**
  - ▶ **Union County: 6 contracts on 354 acres**
  - ▶ **Baker County: 4 contracts on 304 acres**

## Progress on Public Lands

During the three year timeline, staff with the Wallowa Whitman National Forest completed a rigorous planning process to develop an Environmental Assessment, with input from the public and stakeholders, to address forest treatments on the public lands within the East Face project area. Restoration work continues on public lands to complement the work that private landowners have achieved. Read more at:

[www.fs.usda.gov/goto/EastFace](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/EastFace)

## Progress on State Lands

Forest management activities are also occurring on the Elkhorn Wildlife Area, an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife owned property. During 2016, the 219 acre Bear Tree Timber Sale was completed. The sale area was directly adjacent to treatment areas on the federal forest, improving the overall protection to both ownerships. The objectives of this sale were to improve forest health, minimize the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and improve elk forage and habitat conditions for a variety of other wildlife species. Approximately 1 mmbf (million board feet) were removed from the treatment area. Recent planning efforts have been focused on identifying priority areas for further wildlife habitat work through non-commercial thinning and slash treatment areas, as well as continuing to plan and layout additional timber sale areas.

## Outcomes on Public and Private Lands

▶ **3,757** acres of precommercial thinning

▶ **5,491** acres of fuel reduction on private lands

▶ **1,067** acres of piling on federal lands

▶ **213** acres of commercial thinning on state lands

▶ **Enhanced forest resiliency to wildfire along 20+ miles of shared boundary with public and private forests and rangelands.**





# TESTIMONIALS



**Shelly Gray**  
Landowner

**Union County ranchers Shelly and Jerry Gray participated in the East Face project to achieve their forest health goals and reduce wildfire risk.**

"In the summer, we get a lot of dry lightning, and that's what causes most of the fires up here," Gray says. "You can't control nature. If you didn't clean up some of the fuels, the fire would just spread and everything would be gone."

The Gray's hired a private forest consultant, Lane Parry, to help them in the process. They thinned the property using hand cutting and hand piling, which helped them maintain the natural aesthetics and reduce ground disturbance.

The Gray's feel confident that their forestland can withstand a wildfire. Plus, the work provided excellent grazing areas for their cattle and recreation opportunities for the family.

"With it thinned, it's easier to see the cows," Gray says. "They really do well up here. They eat the grasses they prefer first, then they come back through and eat some other grasses. It's spread out enough and we don't put too many cows in here. They like being up here in the shade in the trees when it's hot."



**Tim Fisher**  
Landowner

**Tim Fisher was one of the first landowners in Baker County to do pre-commercial thinning through the East Face project. Tim has worked with NRCS in the past and sees the value in voluntary conservation.**

"Just by opening the canopy of the trees, you bring tremendous benefits to the land," Tim says. "It reduces the risk for wildfire, it helps with soil erosion, the wildlife habitat stays intact, the trees grow taller and stronger, and the wood can become marketable timber."

The thinning work was completed with a slashbuster— an excavator mounted, high-speed rotary mulching head that grinds the material on the stump. This machine eliminates the need for small, non-merchantable trees to be hand cut and piled into slash piles. In addition, the material left behind acts as a slow release fertilizer on the forest floor. In addition to reducing wildfire risk, Tim has noticed a significant difference in tree vigor and wildlife habitat.

"The elk and deer love this area now that it's open," Tim says. "It's fun to sit up here and watch them. They can see through, but they also have cover."

**Gray Ranch: Before**



**Gray Ranch: After**



**Fisher: Before**

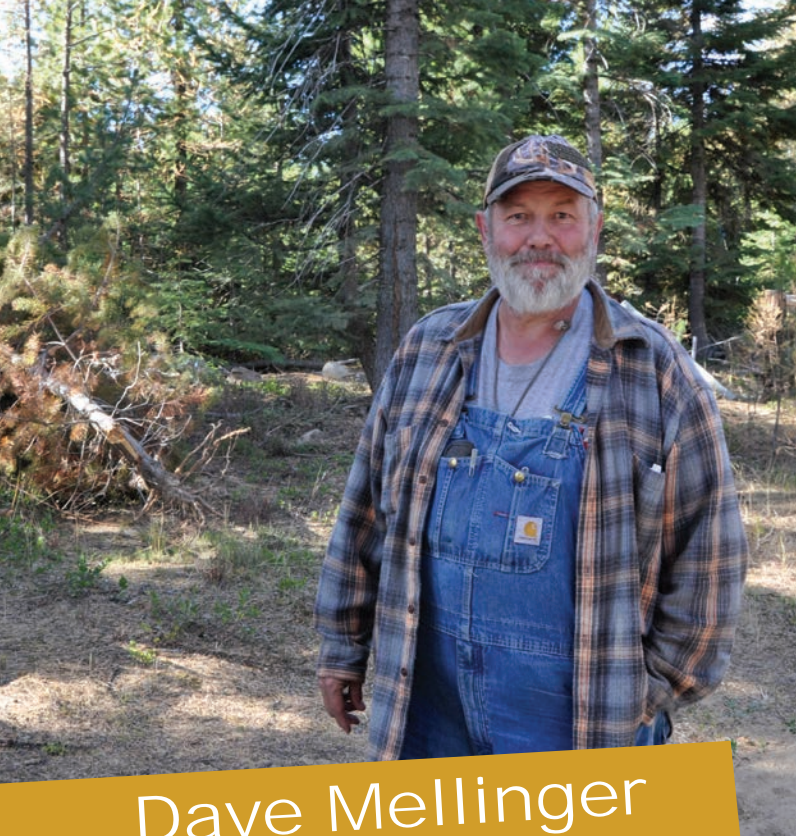


**Fisher: After**





# Partner Testimonials



**Dave Mellinger**  
Landowner

**Thanks to the East Face project, Dave Mellinger has completely transformed sections of his forest in Union County.**

"You couldn't walk through here before because the trees were too close," Mellinger says. "It was full of tall, waxy-leaf brush, which is highly flammable. If we ever had a fire come through, we would have lost everything."

After thinning his woods with a slashbuster, Mellinger's woods are much better poised to withstand a catastrophic wildfire. The thinning project also will help his trees grow taller and healthier.

"If the trees are too close together, they won't get any size to them," Mellinger says. "Now that we have thinned the forest, the trees that are left will get bigger and healthier. In 25 years or so my family will probably be able to log again. It can stay right here in the family and continue the cycle."

Mellinger: Before



Mellinger: After



**Agency:** Oregon  
Department  
of Forestry

**Name:** Jana Peterson

**Position:** Field Forester



"The main purpose of thinning is to reduce wildfire risk. Thinning the trees makes space between the crowns and stems, so the fire has less fuel to carry it. So if there is a fire, responders can get in there and put it out easier because they wouldn't be battling 20-foot high flames. Instead, they would be dealing with 1 or 2 foot high flames."

"There's also a forest health benefit to thinning. Dense, over-crowded trees don't get enough sunlight, water and nutrients for each tree. So you have trees that die, or stressed trees that make them more susceptible to disease and insects. For example, mistletoe is a parasitic plant that is a big issue here in Northeast Oregon. We implement a top-to-bottom treatment to target the problem trees with mistletoe. So overall, you are left with a healthier stand that's more resilient and resistant to insects, disease and fire."

**Agency:** Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

**Name:** Mike Burton

**Position:** District  
Conservationist,  
Union County



"Resource problems like wildfire don't observe political boundaries. That's why it's so important for private and public landowners to work together through the East Face project to address the wildfire threat on a watershed scale. No single agency can tackle this problem by itself."

