

## Washington State's Family Forests

**Background:** Family forests represent an estimated 96,000 landowners managing approximately 4.2 million acres of forestland in Washington State. Due to historical settlement patterns, these forests are located primarily in low elevation watersheds, encompassing or adjacent to stream systems and often in the rural-urban interface. These forestlands make critical contributions to the public values enjoyed by the State's citizens including salmon and wildlife habitat, water quality and flood control, biodiversity, aesthetics and contributions to rural communities' economy and culture. Family forests are facing a multitude of challenges for those owners interested in long-term stewardship of their forests.

**Issue:** Exceedingly complex, one-size-fits-all regulatory approaches such as the current implementation of the Forest and Fish Report have proven to create a disproportionate impact on family forest managers. The complexity and technical requirements in the regulatory arena facing family forests presents a critical hurdle for the continued management of these productive lands. This burden, combined with a fear of additional regulatory losses, declining market infrastructure, and a distorted perception of family forestry by the general public, has led to a sense of uncertainty among many family forest owners.

**What Makes Family Forests Unique:** The small scale of family forest ownerships presents a series of challenges to both family forest owners and natural resource policy makers.

- Large numbers of landowners relative to forest acres managed
- Regulatory agencies ability to serve family forest owners are severely limited by the distinctive needs of these ownerships, the sheer number of owners and the lack of committed staffing within the regulatory agencies
- Generational ownership changes about every 30 years
- Profit margins are based on family values and needs, not maximizing return for shareholders
- A wide diversity of management objectives including love of the land, legacy and heritage
- Diverse management styles that result in a greater diversity of habitat and contributions to public resources
- Small scale ownership and lack of technical assistance subjects landowners with riparian holdings to disproportionate impacts under current Forest Practices rules
- Small scale ownership exponentially increases management costs across the board

**Washington State's Family Forest Needs:** The Family Forest Foundation is engaged in efforts to improve market access for family forest products and broadening the public perception of family forest issues. The Foundation has proposed a planning mechanism entitled the Family Forest Habitat Conservation Plan (FFHCP) that if fully supported by the Federal Services could provide regulatory certainty. If, market access, recognition of their public contribution and regulatory certainty can be achieved, family forest landowners will be able to remain a viable contributor to public values and local economies.