



Oregon

Theodore R. Kulongoski, Governor

November 21, 2008

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Dear Mr. Howe:

I am writing to clarify the Oregon Department of Forestry's responsibilities related to specific elements of Oregon Administrative Rule 660-006-0005 (2) and (3). This letter is intended to address recent Lane County public inquiries regarding this administrative rule and was developed following consultations with the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development and the Oregon Department of Justice.

Please note that previous Department of Forestry policy position statements or technical findings contained in the May 23, 2008, letter from former Department of Forestry Private Forests Chief Ted Lorensen to Goal One Coalition Executive Director Jim Just that are in conflict with this letter are hereby rescinded and replaced with the policy statements and technical findings articulated here. All other statements in that correspondence remain valid.

Applicable Administrative Rule Language:

OAR 660-006-0005 (2) and (3) state:

2) "Cubic Foot Per Acre" means the average annual increase in cubic foot volume of wood fiber per acre for fully stocked stands at the culmination of mean annual increment as reported by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) soil survey information, USDA Forest Service plant association guides, Oregon Department of Revenue western Oregon site class maps, or other information determined by the State Forester to be of comparable quality. Where such data are not available or are shown to be inaccurate, an alternative method for determining productivity may be used. An alternative method must provide equivalent data as explained in the Oregon Department of Forestry's Technical Bulletin entitled "Land Use Planning Notes Number 3 dated April 1998" and be approved by the Oregon Department of Forestry."

(3) "Cubic Foot Per Tract Per Year" means the average annual increase in cubic foot volume of wood fiber per tract for fully stocked stands at the culmination of mean annual increment as reported by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) soil survey information, USDA Forest Service plant association guides, Oregon Department of Revenue western Oregon site class maps, or other information determined by the State Forester to be of comparable quality. Where such data are not available or are shown to be inaccurate, an alternative method for determining productivity may be used. An alternative method must provide equivalent data as explained in the Oregon Department of Forestry's Technical Bulletin entitled "Land Use Planning Notes Number 3 dated April 1998" and be approved by the Oregon Department of Forestry." (Emphasis added)

Using the Best Possible Forest Site Productivity Information:

The administrative rule, in combination with *Land Use Planning Technical Note Number 3*, establishes a hierarchy of forest site productivity information that should be considered in land use decisions subject to the rule. Listed in order of preference, the information sources are:

1. Data sources cited specifically in the administrative rule;
2. Other existing data sources determined by the State Forester to be of comparable quality to the data sources cited specifically in the administrative rule;
3. Alternate methods to develop site productivity data based on direct tree measurements and calculations using applicable Douglas-fir, western hemlock, or ponderosa pine site tables, with priority given to the species among these three that dominates the area being evaluated;
4. Alternate methods based on direct tree measurements and calculations using other native forest tree species site tables; or
5. Site-specific soil surveys.

Applicable existing data from USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) soil survey information, USDA Forest Service plant association guides, Oregon Department of Revenue western Oregon site class maps should always be consulted and used first (Tier 1). If these three data sources are determined by the county and/or NRCS to be inaccurate or do not exist, only then should other applicable, existing data sources determined to be of comparable quality by the State Forester be consulted (Tier 2). Alternate methods for collecting new site productivity data are only needed when data from these first two tiers are determined by the county and/or NRCS to be inaccurate or do not exist. To be approved by the Department of Forestry such alternate methodologies must be consistent with the methodologies described or contemplated in the technical note. Alternate methods based on direct tree measurements and calculations using applicable Douglas-fir, western hemlock, or ponderosa pine site tables (Tier 3) should be considered before using site tables for other tree species (Tier 4) or site-specific soil surveys without direct tree measurements (Tier 5).

Consistent and credible site productivity determinations should be an important facet of the land use planning process. To meet that objective, this hierarchy should be adhered to. Attempts to consider a variety of methods simultaneously in hope of finding a "preferred" site productivity determination should be avoided.

Lane County Data Sources of Comparable Quality

The State Forester has determined the following existing site productivity data sources to be of comparable quality to the data sources cited specifically in the administrative rule when applied on appropriate locations in Lane County:

1. February 8, 1990, *Forest Lands Soils Ratings – Revisions* produced by the Oregon Department of Forestry
2. Undated *Lane County Forest Soils Ratings* based on published Soil Conservation Service data and the February 9, 1990, Oregon Department of Forestry report
3. August 1997 *Lane County Soil Ratings for Forestry and Agriculture* produced by the Lane County Council of Governments

No further Department of Forestry review or approval of site productivity determinations are needed when these data sources are used.

Ponderosa Pine in the Willamette Valley

In most western Oregon locations where both Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine are present, Douglas-fir will be the dominant species and, therefore, whenever possible that species should be used for selecting site trees. In infrequent cases where ponderosa pine is the dominant species in western Oregon, *Land Use Planning Technical Note Number 3* states that Meyer's ponderosa pine site table may be used in calculations of site productivity. However, the technical note also states Meyer's site table must not be used for ponderosa pine in the Willamette Valley. For the purpose of implementing this section of the technical note, the Department of Forestry will rely on the definition provided in OAR 660-033-0020 (12) in which "Willamette Valley" means "Clackamas, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Washington and Yamhill Counties and that portion of Benton and Lane Counties lying east of the summit of the Coast Range."

The Department of Forestry has not been able to locate credible site index or yield tables for ponderosa pine applicable in the Willamette Valley. In a May 23, 2008, letter, Ted Lorensen noted that the department had used tables for ponderosa pine from Douglas County for the Forest Resource Trust, and that in the current absence of standard tables, ODF "would likely approve of methodology using the pine tables for Douglas County and appropriate interpolation." However, the Department of Forestry has since determined that interpolation of either Douglas County or Eastern Oregon ponderosa pine yield tables for the more highly productive Willamette Valley would not be technically sound.

Instead, energy should be focused on obtaining or developing, if possible, technically credible Willamette Valley-specific ponderosa pine site index tables. The Department of Forestry is willing to work cooperatively with county governments, Oregon State University Forestry Extension, forest landowners, and other parties to develop such information. Until a credible Willamette Valley ponderosa pine site table becomes available and is acknowledged in a revised ODF Technical Note, the Department of Forestry's position is that it is inappropriate to use ponderosa pine to determine site productivity for under OAR 660-006-0005

(2) and (3) in the Willamette Valley and use of such methodologies cannot be approved by the agency.

Outside the Willamette Valley, Meyer's ponderosa pine site table may continue to be used on sites where ponderosa pine is the dominate species and the Tier 1 and Tier 2 site productivity data sources cited above are determined by the county and/or NRCS to be inaccurate or do not exist.

Stockable Area

Cubic foot site productivity determinations assume fully stocked stands. In this context, "stockable area" means the proportion of an area that can be physically stocked with trees. Rock outcrops, impervious soils, or high water tables are examples of factors that may result in less than 100 percent of the site being stockable. The technical note anticipates this issue by referencing the USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station *Field instructions for forest surveys in Washington, Oregon, and Northern California* where consideration of stockable area factors are addressed. Upon request by a county government, the Department of Forestry will evaluate and consider approval of reductions in site productivity from fully stocked stand levels based on such factors.

Limits on Department of Forestry Approvals

As stated in the technical note, the Department of Forestry does not measure site productivity for landowners. The Department of Forestry's involvement in site productivity determinations applicable to Oregon Administrative Rule 660-006-0005 (2) and (3) is in evaluating the quality of existing data sources other than those cited in the rule and evaluating alternative methodologies with respect to the technical note. The Department of Forestry will not issue findings on whether these data sources or alternate methodologies have been employed correctly or if the resulting site productivity determination are accurate. The Department of Forestry is not responsible for verifying field measurements.

Oregon Forest Practices Act Minimum Site Productivity Requirements for Reforestation

While not directly applicable to land use planning decisions, Department of Forestry believes it is important to note the Oregon Board of Forestry has established that all forestlands with a site productivity of at least 20 cubic feet per acre per year shall be subject to the reforestation requirements of the Oregon Forest Practices Act. Other technical references use 20 cubic feet per acre per year as the minimum threshold for defining commercial forestland. Local governments are encouraged to consider this information when establishing site productivity standards for land use planning processes.

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In summary, the content of this letter is intended to further explain, and not alter, the requirements of Oregon Administrative Rule 660-006-0005 (2) and (3) and *Land Use Planning Technical Note Number 3*. Please contact me if you have any questions. If unresolved issues continue to arise, clarifying changes to the administrative rule and/or the Technical Note may eventually be necessary and the Department of Forestry will work together with county governments, the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, and other interested parties on such changes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Morman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Morman, Director
Forest Resources Planning Program

cc: Katherine Daniels, DLCD
Carmel Bender, DLCD
Michele Logan, DOJ