

Where I Have Worked

Alan "Al" Tocchini

After more than 50 years in forestry, I believe that I am finally retired. Here is an overview of places I've worked, highlighting experiences that shaped me and people that inspired me.

My interest in forestry was inspired by my father. He was an auto body mechanic by trade - not a forester. He was born and raised in an urban setting – not the forest. But he showed his interest and knowledge about the trees and forest we saw on our family vacations. He had worked several years in the mid-1930's building forest roads with the Civilian Conservation Corps. He wanted to return to work in the woods after WWII, but his bride wanted to stay close to family in the Oakland, California area. Sadly, he died of Cancer in early 1956 at age 40 – never getting to realize his dream. I vowed then – at age 9 – that the part of me that is *him* would live to fulfill his occupational dream.

There were several attempts by teachers, friends and family to divert my career elsewhere to fields such as: commercial art, drafting, machinist, electrical, iron worker, etc. In my senior year at high school, I worked weekends as a janitor for a machine shop in Oakland. In summers of 1965 and 1966 I worked as a draftsman for a large electrical construction contractor at building sites of telephone cable factories. But people whom I met in my trips to the forest during these formative years kept me on a path to forestry.

In fall 1964 through spring 1966, I attended Diablo Valley Junior College in Pleasant Hill, California, and took as many transferrable courses as possible and a lot of natural sciences. Then, I transferred to the School of Forestry at Humboldt State College.

I didn't start forestry work until summer 1967 after my first year at Humboldt. I worked on a USFS road survey crew in Hayfork, CA, and there again in summer 1968 as the crew chief. I "interned" doing fieldwork and chores in the Forestry School's greenhouse for a valued mentor (and advocate) Professor Dale Thornburgh. I also worked scrubbing pots and pans at the Student Union cafeteria to help make ends meet. I received my Bachelor of Science degree in Forest Management in 1969.

My first job after college began that summer with Crown Zellerbach (CZ) Corporation in Tillamook, Oregon. In preparation for forester positions, most new hires worked with the scalers. In the woods, I marked incoming logs for the market sort as they were unhooked at the landing or off-loaded at reload yards near Grand Ronde and at Lewis and Clark. I helped with scaling logs at the Lewis and Clark yard and river log boom, and at mills that bought CZ logs at Willamina, Sheridan and Oregon City. Most of the logging sides were on Cape Mears and in the mountains southwest of Grand Ronde, and on a tract south of Vernonia along Dairy Creek. It was very educational, because CZ had its own logging and trucking operations.

In my very-short stint at CZ, I met some very-fine people—some of whom I remain acquainted with to this day. Despite my degree and ambitions, the fine man who hired me, CZ Chief Forester George Schroeder, had the dubious honor of informing me that I "didn't make the cut." This "stumble" seemed at the time to be *very unfortunate*, perhaps putting an end to my quest to be a forester. Instead, it turned out to be the *most fortunate* turn for me on my career path!

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In November 1969, I went to work for Oregon Department of Forestry at Tillamook. I was not looking for a State job; ODF then did not recognize degrees from schools such as Humboldt that had not been accredited by SAF as qualifying for their professional forester positions. Still, *that* was when and where my *good fortune* began!

The agency oversaw all aspects of forest land management, as well as forest law and rule enforcement and fire prevention and protection on other public and private lands. At the time, Tillamook District was still heavily engaged in reforesting the Tillamook Burn. By this time, salvage logging (except for cedar) was complete in the burn, and the district was about ten years into managing the surrounding unburned state timber lands in the county.

During my time at Tillamook, I did a variety of jobs beginning with minor forest products sales and permits. I soon progressed to timber sale and road layout and cruising, land surveying, and forest inventory which included establishing a grid of "CFI" plot clusters and mapping out cover types and land use potentials across the district. I enjoyed and appreciate the supervision, counseling and co-work from folks there such as Ray Miller, Willard "Will" Berry, George McKibben, Bill Dryden, Donald LaFrance, and of course District Forester Millard Trout. Though I was not a member, they graciously took me along to monthly Astoria-Tillamook Chapter SAF meetings.

(I also worked on land exchanges including a proposal for one in the northwest corner of the district that involved Oswald West State Park. Fate would bring me back to this location in the not-too-distant future.)

Late in 1975, I went to the Astoria District, as assistant to the District Forester. The Astoria was not near the acreage as was the Tillamook district, but it had a lot more timber volume on it. It was divided into a North and a South unit. The road system was either under-developed or seriously in need of rehabilitation. In addition to timber management Astoria District was protecting about 500,000 acres of public and private forest lands; and administering Forest Practices Act regulations on 400 operations per year.

In late 1976 there were about 80 active sale contacts with 2 to 4 year terms that would gross about \$14 million upon completion. Receipts for FY 1975-'76 were about \$7.67 million – about \$3.65 million going to Clatsop County taxing districts. About 2,600 acres of harvest and rehabilitation units would be reforested. Some 60 miles of land line and 15 miles of new road right-of-way would be surveyed; more than 45 miles of roadway would be improved – including 120,000 cubic yards of crushed rock produced, used and stockpiled. All of these numbers were projected to increase with an expected increase in the allowable cut.

To help serve that challenge, a third Central unit was created from the two, which included about 60,000 acres of forest in the east part of the county, and I was given the job to manage it. In these capacities, I enjoyed the advice and assistance I received from co-workers such as Tom Scoggins, Bill

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Lecture and Mike Barnes – and the tutelage of Astoria District Forester Chester "Chet" Reed, Forest Grove D.F. Bob Madsen and Northwest Oregon Area Director Marvin "Marv" Helland.

Early in 1979, I left ODF to become the first full-time forester for then "Parks and Recreation Branch" of the Highway Division of Oregon Department of Transportation. The agency was in charge of more than 210 properties across the state at the time – about 60,000 acres of which were forested. In addition to the frequently visited State Parks and Recreation areas, this included many forested waysides and odd remote tracts acquired during development of the Highway system.

My charge was to establish a forest management program for State Parks. Up to that time, Park forestry concerns were handled by foresters and right-of-way agents for the Highways. This included a lot of folks I admired, such as Lawrence C. Merriam, Marvin Rosette, John B. Woods Jr. and Douglas Watson (some of you older readers may recognize these names.) Technical advice and assistance was occasionally provided by ODF.

The job was based in Salem Headquarters in a section of the building that included park designers, architects, engineers, surveyors and planners. The purpose of putting the forester there and not in Maintenance (where it was with Highways) was to help incorporate and coordinate forest management planning and actions with master plans and development plans. It also would provide technical assistance to other programs such as Recreation Trails and Scenic Waterways, as well as the individual park regions and districts.

At the time, State Parks and Recreation was being "kicked-out" of the Highway Fund which provided a significant part of its funding. Drastic cuts were being made in its programs – HQ staff shrank from about 50 to barely 40 positions during my first few months there. Consequently, support for the new forestry program was greatly limited. Basic field equipment was scraped together for the new forester – including a 1972 Chevy Blazer with nearly 200K miles on it. There was a backlog of tree and forest related problems across the system, and there were some opportunities for those to be addressed with costs offset by sale of the marketable timber involved.

I had to do all of the tasks - plan, mark, cruise, appraise, write prospectus, advertise or negotiate and administer the contracts for cutting and associated roadwork, rehab and reforestation. There was no money for other staff. There were numerous active projects - relying a lot on contractors' honesty and integrity, some local park managers' observance, lots of travel and unannounced inspection visits. I represented the agency on several advisory and cooperative program panels and projects related to natural resources.

While this was going on, I was helping property agents with the timber aspects of two high-profile proposed land acquisitions to create forest preserves at Crabtree Valley in Linn County, and one in Clatsop County, which added the Elmer Feldenheimer F.P. to Ecola State Park. These entailed exchanges of forest land and timber to harvest to balance the trade with the other parties in the trades.

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I often felt like a juggler act – on a unicycle, trying to keep all the plates spinning while juggling the balls. Consequently, a blunder occurred in which I learned that value limits for such contracts for ODOT were different from those I observed at ODF. My “penance” was to draft a proposal for a legislative bill and the subordinate administrative rules with the same negotiation limits as ODF.

Parks properties were being impacted by all the forest maladies at the time: Mountain Pine Beetle, Tussock Moth, Spruce Budworm, Spruce Aphid, root and bole pathogens – all degrading aesthetics, increasing fire hazard and posing safety hazards to the public. The timber sale contracts through which problem trees were removed, and overly-dense growth was thinned made it possible for the revenue-strapped agency to effectively address the problems at hand.

Progress was being made until November 1981 when the north coast was slammed by a major windstorm which leveled most of the trees on more than 200 acres of Oswald West State Park – destroying its surface water system, about a mile of the Oregon Coast Trail and ruining much of the camping and picnic areas in the park. There was no money available to fix the damage, and there was no FEMA in those days.

After an extensive reconnaissance, I determined the area could be rehabilitated with the sale of the downed and damaged timber, while leaving alone much of the natural structure of mature spruce and hemlock forest. A proposal was presented in a parks master plan presentation at Manzanita, and with no objections, the forester set to work laying out the project, cruising the blowdown, and laying out about two miles of road and tower settings to access and harvest the marketable damaged timber.

In 1981, the economic recession severely impacted the domestic log market. The proposed sale contract would be based on log scale and weight recovery, and include projects to be amortized by reduction of the rate per MBF for a first portion of the scaled volume of the bid species. The initial auction did not attract bids. The contract was re-appraised, and the second auction received only one bid for the minimum rates. Time was of the essence as work would need to begin in spring of '82 or risk a year's delay that would cause volume and value loss to decay of the hemlock and spruce.

After staff review of the bid and the bidder's qualifications, the contract was awarded, and work got underway. There were no laws yet in effect prohibiting export of unprocessed logs from State lands. So, the buyer was able to market most of the logs for export. Another windstorm in winter 1982 leveled another 25 acres; and it was decided to add that salvage to the contract to expedite the rehab.

With the infrastructure repairs done under this timber sale contract, the park was reopened to visitors in summer 1983, with exception of the Coast Trail, which was in the operation area and being rehabbed by the sale buyer. A park visitor happened-upon the active operation, and complained to the Governor's office. The operation immediately fell under the close scrutiny of Sierra Club, several legislators and other officials who questioned such activity in a state park – especially in this relatively-pristine example of Spruce-Hemlock forest.

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For the next year, forestry activities across the system were put-on-hold while the agency worked to regain public confidence in its natural resource management. A "blue ribbon" panel of respected experts reviewed the project and the program, identified shortcomings and recommended solutions – which included adding forestry staff. This was not possible due to the funding crisis at-hand. Consequently, ground was lost in addressing serious forest health issues and implementing measures to restore resilience (e.g. judicious thinning) throughout the State Parks system.

Relief for the program came when State Parks Advisory Committee member L. L. "Stub" Stewart created an endowment from which earnings would pay for seasonal hires and interns to assist the forester. This raised capacity, confidence in and eventually more funding for Parks Forestry. *Note: I've dwelled on this, because it was pivotal in the establishment of additional natural resource planning and monitoring as well as forest management that remains in effect today – was integral to my growth as a professional public servant, and enabled the agency to attract and recruit excellent foresters (Amie Gillette – followed by Craig Leech) to replace me upon my retirement from State service in December 1999.*

After retirement, I continued my involvement in organizations I had served on in behalf of OPRD, including Oregon Community Trees and Oregon Heritage Tree Committee. I also volunteered as an office assistant and tree farm inspector for Oregon Tree Farm System. I established a Forestry Consulting practice that concentrated on serving the small woodland owners. Much of my client load and work would be in Northwest Oregon. But I did a few jobs in other parts of the state and even in Montana. Interspersed in this work was contract forestry work for my old employer OPRD, and temporary employment to assist the ODOT forester.

I was able to "close the loop" with the ODF – the agency that started my good fortune, by working for eight biennial seasons helping them track legislation during the regular legislative sessions, and by doing some artwork for that agency's Forest History Center and Civilian Conservation Corps Museum on the Headquarters campus in Salem. In the latter activities, I was blessed to have been able to work with retiree Ray W. Miller – my very-first boss when I went to work for ODF in 1969.

For those of you that have hung-in-there with me: I can't close without acknowledging SAF – particularly OSAF – for what it did for me and my career – even before I finally joined in 1984. If you have known and/or worked with me over the years, it is YOU that is among the people that have inspired me and so-enriched both my professional and personal life. If you are new to the profession and to SAF, I hope this has convinced that you *will* realize your forestry dream despite the seemingly unsurmountable obstacles and setbacks you will encounter in your career path. Associate with and follow the examples of older professionals and your peers – and forge ahead! You will reap your rewards, and so will the people you serve.

Finally, I must thank the immortal spirit of my father, *Waldo P. Tocchini* who - so many years ago - inspired me to become a forester in the first place. *"This one's for you, Dad."*