

Dave Wells' Path to Forestry and OSAF

I grew up in a neighborhood without fences that I explored with friends and periodically by myself. Growing older I began to explore beyond walking distance, into bike riding distance, and eventually car distance. A lot of that exploring was in the area now known as the Issaquah Alps. At the time, there were no official trails and one gravel road leading to the microwave tower on Squak Mountain. There was, however, long abandoned access roads and other routes to discover, which my friends and I did. It was a fun time, including being along on some of the first meetings with Harvey Manning, Bill Longwell, Weyerhaeuser, and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as to trail development and what would eventually include land trades. This was my first insight into the different demands on forestlands, and it was a golden opportunity to see while still in high school.

From early on I knew a life of supported leisure was not in my future. My dad made it pretty clear when he asked me what I would like to do. I said, "Play." His response: "We are going to have to talk about that," and "You are going to need to earn or learn, and it is better if you do both." So I learned as long as I could. In 1974, I enrolled at the University of Washington (UW) and chose to major in forestry in their College of Forest Resources. A combination of the first Earth Day four years earlier and the recent end of the Vietnam War meant there were plenty of forestry students. Forestry was about as close to play and exploring as I could imagine. There was a lot of studying but also field trips and cool professors. I do know that there was not another College of Forest Resources class like the one of 1978.

Yet I had to earn. In 1976, I had my first forestry job with a DNR office in Forks, Washington. I mostly weighed dump trucks but did work on a slash burn for a day. Upon returning to the UW, a friend said they were hiring student help for Pack Forest. During my interview with Steve Archie, he asked what I did last summer. "Weighed dump trucks and burned slash," I said. "And I really liked burning slash."

As only Steve could say it, I was hired and worked at Charles Lathrop Pack and other University forests on weekends and breaks until December 1977. During that same time, I worked another summer for the DNR, this time in North Bend as a teacher's assistant in surveying. I also worked a good part of 1977 during the winter and spring on a weekend tree planting crew with the DNR. By the time I graduated I had built up a pretty good work resume.

On June 12, 1978, two days after graduation, I was hired by the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) in a "permanent" as opposed to "seasonal" forest technician position and started work in Tillamook. Seven new forestry employees started that same day in Tillamook, three of whom ended up retiring after 30 to 40+ years with ODF.

We did not know it at the time, but our young crew had been handed the responsibility of the Tillamook State Forest. It was fun and sometimes hard to separate college life from work life. We were forest generalists: burning slash all summer, stocking surveys in the fall and setting up timber sales in the winter and spring. We joined at the end of the "Tillamook Burn" salvage, with cedar bolts from long fallen trees being removed by helicopter from remote locations. A forest management plan that nobody liked was being developed using a structure-based management approach. I was so lucky to have great coworkers that the 40 years of work at ODF is a bit of a blur.

That idea of earning and learning never left and that is where my membership with the Society of American Foresters started. For many years, I attended one chapter meeting a year when there was a

program of interest to me, but it was not until 1994 that I joined. Bob Teagle and Tom Park made a personal appeal to our work group to join SAF. They told about the benefits of leadership and education, and that the Tillamook-Clatsop Chapter really needed help in putting on the OSAF annual meeting. That was enough for me, and I've been involved with SAF ever since.

SAF has been a place to learn from the invited speakers and those I've had dinner with. It was a place to meet the landowner next door to ODF's ownership, find out what they are doing, and share what ODF is doing. SAF was the first place where I led a business meeting. SAF was where I got to try new things without jeopardizing my primary employment. The plus to my employer were the skills I had practiced and then brought back to work. There are just so many opportunities—educational, leadership, and friendships—that I would have missed had I not joined SAF. What started as filling my need for continued education has turned into so much more.

There is a little about my career and SAF paths that have been entwined now for more than 25 years. It took me awhile to join but joining SAF has been one of my best career decisions.