



The history of the state forests helps us to understand the state forests today, and provides us a context for making decisions about the future. The writer Wallace Stegner once said, “If you don’t know where you are, you don’t know who you are.”

History can help us understand the development of the forest ecosystems, the patterns of natural resource use over time, the communities near the state forests, and the interests that people have in management of the state forests. It would take a long book to tell the complete story of northwestern Oregon. The next few pages tell the story very briefly. References cited provide more detail. The intent is to focus on events that shaped the state forests of northwestern Oregon.

Early History — Native Americans, Explorers, Traders, and Settlers

Many tribes and bands of Native Americans lived in northwestern Oregon. The Clatsops and Clatskanies lived around the Columbia estuary. The northern coastal river valleys were inhabited by a number of bands known collectively as the Tillamooks, and the central Oregon coast was inhabited by the Siletz, Yaquina, Alsea, and Siuslaw tribes. The Kalapuyans lived in the Willamette Valley, with several distinct bands. Along the west slopes of the Cascades lived the Molallas, who had many bands, including the Clackamas and Santiam bands. (Zucker et al. 1987, Minor et al. 1980)

Native Americans relied on the natural resources around them for their survival. They managed these resources to benefit their fishing, hunting, and gathering lifestyle, using the tools they had.

One of their most important tools was fire. The Native Americans burned large areas of the Willamette Valley in late summer or fall. The fires maintained grasslands and open savannahs of pine and oak. Fire was used to drive wild game into areas where hunters waited. The repeated fires favored grassland plants collected for food, such as wild wheat. They also kept underbrush down, making travel easier and making it more difficult for war parties to approach unseen. (Pyne 1982, Zybach 1993)

Forest fires outside the river valleys came from two sources: lightning and Indian fires. Fires set to burn grasslands sometimes spread into forests. Lightning strikes also started forest fires. In the Coast Range, forest fires were relatively infrequent, but could be very large. In the Cascades, more lightning led to moderate fire frequencies. Fire severity was often high. (USDA Forest Service et al., 1994a)

The Native Americans of northwestern Oregon traveled seasonally to use various food sources at their peak seasons. They gathered at the best fishing spots when the salmon runs were coming in, traveled to the mountains when berries were ripe, and returned to protected villages for the winter. In their permanent villages, they built large, plank houses that held several related families. Both men and women were involved in tribal decision-making.

The coastal Indians relied on fish and other seafood as their main food resource. Salmon were a major and dependable food source. They also caught smelt and collected shellfish. Food was plentiful and reliable, so they traveled less than inland tribes and developed many permanent villages along the river valleys and coast. (Zucker et al. 1987)

In the Cascades, the Molallas relied on a wider variety of foods, with no one food dominating. They collected many plant foods, including acorns, hazelnuts, camas bulbs, blackberries, and huckleberries. They caught salmon, and hunted deer, elk, and small game. Food was generally available, but not as plentiful as it was on the coast. The Molallas traveled more than the coastal Indians, and had a lower population density. (Zucker et al. 1987)

Early European-American exploration began in the 1700s. It consisted of Spanish ships sailing up the coast from their settlements in California, and British ships exploring the coastline. Russian exploration stayed mainly north of the Pacific Northwest, along the Alaskan coastline. The 1770s were a decade of increased interest and exploration along the Pacific Northwest coast, with fur trade beginning between Indians and European-American captains. By the end of the 1700s, Spanish, British, and American explorations had mapped a broad outline of the Pacific Northwest coast. Mariners had given new names to headlands, rivers, and bays. They had met the native peoples and “introduced to them smallpox, tuberculosis, and trade goods.” (Beckham et al. 1982)

The coast of Oregon was only vaguely known, because there were few good anchorages and sea otter, the most desired fur, was less abundant here than farther north. Although there were

some glowing descriptions of the wooded areas around Tillamook, most mariners gave the area that would be Oregon little attention. (Beckham et al. 1982)

Lewis and Clark were the first European-American explorers to reach Oregon by coming overland. They reached the lower estuary of the Columbia River in November, 1805. They built Fort Clatsop, spent the winter there, and left for St. Louis in the spring. Hudson's Bay Company trappers explored Oregon coastal areas further in the 1820s. During the 1830s and 1840s, the company built small forts and trading posts at key spots along coastal rivers. (Minor et al. 1980)

The Native Americans had little resistance to many illnesses carried by the European-American people. Diseases killed many Native Americans. From 1830 to 1833, an epidemic of an unidentified fever killed as many as 80 percent of the Indians of the Willamette Valley and Columbia River. A great deal of Indian culture was lost as a result of this epidemic. Surviving Indian children were often taken in by missionaries. With few tribal elders left, the Indians lost their tradition of sending young people on spirit quests to find their guardians. The remaining Indians were unable to resist the growing numbers of settlers on their lands. By the 1840s, Indians had adopted white dress, although they still depended on traditional food sources and continued to fish for salmon at Willamette Falls. (Minor et al. 1980)

During the 1830s and 1840s, the European-Americans shifted from exploration and trade to settlement. Their early settlements in northwestern Oregon were on the broad plains along the lower Columbia River and in the Willamette Valley. These areas were easily reached by water, had level land for farming, and had plenty of water and good soil (Minor et al. 1980). Events along the Columbia and Willamette corridors often affected the adjacent regions, where the state forest lands are located.

The rate of European-American settlement increased in the 1840s after the Oregon Trail was established. New settlers traveled overland all summer, and arrived in Oregon in a wave each fall. By the late 1840s, a few people began to settle in Clatsop Plains, Tillamook Bay, and other desirable areas along the northern Oregon coast. Settlers began moving into the mid-Willamette Valley in the 1840s, and in 1845 new settlements were started in the Corvallis and Kings Valley areas. (Zucker et al. 1987)

Oregon's first lumber mills were established in the 1830s and 1840s in the Willamette Valley. Although there were lots of trees, the industry developed slowly at first due to a lack of markets. The influx of settlers in the 1840s and the California gold rush in 1849 created demand for lumber. Eventually the timber industry emerged as a major industry. (Minor et al. 1980)

Settlers logged the most easily reached trees first. There were limited means for transporting the huge logs that came from northwestern Oregon forests. Settlers cut trees and let the logs slide or roll into rivers and coastal bays, then floated the logs to sawmills. Later horses and oxen were used to move logs, and sawmills were set up farther inland.

Settlement and Development: 1850s to the Turn of the Century

Fire was always part of the northwest Oregon landscape. However, the evidence indicates that the frequency of large fires increased in the 1840s, with the increasing number of European-American settlers (Pyne 1982). Between 1846 and 1853, a series of large fires burned over 800,000 acres in the central Oregon Coast Range. The largest fire, known as the Yaquina Burn, covered 480,000 acres, including the area that is now state forest land (West Oregon District). It is not known whether the fires were caused by lightning, Indians, or settlers. There were a number of large fires throughout the Pacific Northwest in 1868, with the largest fire in northwestern Oregon burning around Yaquina Bay.

Congress passed the Oregon Donation Land Act in 1850. The act allowed settlers in Oregon to receive up one square mile of land free. Under the act, 7,437 settlers filed on 2.5 million acres in western Oregon, including almost all of the Willamette Valley and the bottomlands of other rivers. Only after this, did Congress settle claims with Indians for these lands. The Palmer Treaty on January 4, 1855, ended most Indian land claims. Two Indian reservations were created in northwestern Oregon.

The Siletz Reservation was established in 1855. The original reservation was 1,382,400 acres, and included a large chunk of the northwest Oregon Coast Range. The reservation reached from Lookout Point in Tillamook County to a point south of the Siuslaw River, a distance of nearly 125 miles; and from the coast to the crest of the Coast Range. Tillamook, Siletz, Alsea, Yaquina, Siuslaw, and Lower Umpqua Indians were placed here. The federal government later moved in bands of southwest Oregon Indians. The Siletz Reservation was guarded by Fort Umpqua on the south, at the mouth of the Umpqua River, and on the east by Fort Hoskins in Kings Valley, northwest of Corvallis. (Beckham et al. 1982)

The Grand Ronde Reservation was established in 1857. It was east of the Siletz Reservation, at the northern end, and was much smaller, at 60,000 acres. The Indians brought to this reservation were from the Clackamas, Santiam, Tualatin, Luckiamute, Mary's River, Yamhill, and other tribes. (Beckham et al. 1982)

The town of Oysterville was established in 1863 as an outpost on Yaquina Bay for buying oysters from the Indians. Willamette Valley settlers wanted to gain a harbor and build a railroad from Corvallis to Newport. Under pressure from these settlers, in 1865 the federal government opened a wide section across the middle of the Siletz Reservation to non-Indian settlement. In 1866, Yaquina Bay was removed from the reservation. Later that year, a wagon road was built from Corvallis to Yaquina Bay. Elk City was established at the confluence of the Yaquina River and Elk Creek, and Newport was established at the mouth of Yaquina Bay. In 1875, the entire southern end of the reservation was opened for European-American settlement, as well as an area at the northern end. (Minor et al. 1980)

Oregon's agricultural base sustained rural and urban populations. The Oregon Donation Land Act of 1850 and the Homestead Act of 1862 encouraged more people to come to Oregon and begin farming. Portland, Oregon City, Salem, Albany, and Corvallis emerged as trade centers that could ship or process the commodities produced on farms.

As Oregon's population increased and the valleys filled up, people had to go deeper into the forested valleys and foothills to find sites for new homesteads. Not until the 1870s, and from then to roughly 1900, did people begin to settle the hill country, where they saw the dense forests as an obstacle to be cleared so farming could begin. Homesteaders worked hard to make a living from their "stump farms." It was difficult to preserve and ship products from these isolated farms. Farmers in the Tillamook area solved this problem by developing cheese factories, with the first one built in Cloverdale in 1894. Cheese factories gave farmers the chance to sell their milk in a form that could be preserved and shipped to markets. (Minor et al. 1980)

Several factors helped Oregon's timber industry grow in the last half of the nineteenth century. The population growth in the cities increased the demand for lumber, providing a market. By the 1870s, railroads were linking the Pacific Northwest and making it possible for lumber produced in valley mills to be sold on a regional or world market. By the late 1800s, the development of extensive logging railroad systems enabled loggers to reach timber in the mountains that was previously inaccessible. Now the logs could be moved easily "from hills to mills", and the finished products from mills to markets. (Minor et al. 1980)

Meanwhile, people in the Willamette Valley had survived the first generation of homesteading and settled into comfortable farms and cities. These people now had the leisure to seek recreation in the mountains on both sides of the Willamette Valley. The children and grandchildren of the first homesteaders enjoyed camping, fishing, hiking, and hunting as recreational activities, not as survival necessities. (Minor et al. 1980)

The Twentieth Century

Life was hard for the Native Americans on the Siletz and Grand Ronde Reservations. At both reservations, the death rate exceeded the birth rate throughout the 1800s. The population on the Siletz Reservation dropped from 2,026 people in 1856 to only 483 in 1900. The population at the Grand Ronde Reservation fell from 1,826 in 1857 to 298 in 1902. Not until the 1920s did the Indian populations stabilize. (Minor et al. 1980)

By then the reservations were gone. The Dawes Act of 1887 established a new federal policy called allotment. The idea was to allot land parcels to individual Indians, end the reservations, and assimilate Indians into the dominant white culture.

The federal government had removed land from the Siletz Reservation several times since 1855. By 1892, just before the lands were allotted, the Siletz Reservation had 225,280 acres left.

After allotment, the Indians had 46,000 acres. The rest of the land went to the federal government, who opened the land to homesteaders until 1916. Allotment was carried out on the Grand Ronde Reservation in 1904. At the Grand Ronde, 33,148 acres were allotted to Indians, and 26,111 acres ceded to the federal government. As part of assimilation, Indian children were taken from their parents and sent to boarding schools. (Zucker et al. 1987)

After 1917, the coastal tribes tried to get compensation for the land taken from them in the 1800s. Some claims were denied, and some claims resulted in modest settlements. In 1956, Congress terminated official federal recognition of 44 Indian tribes and bands in western Oregon. The Indians of northwestern Oregon were no longer recognized legally as Indians. (Zucker et al. 1987)

Between 1890 and 1910, the timber industry in the region changed. Lumbermen from midwestern and southern states came to Oregon, invested in timberlands of the Coast Range and lower slopes of Cascades, and began to market Oregon lumber on a vast scale. In these decades, the industry changed from small, locally-owned mills to large sawmills, with hundreds of loggers in the field. In 1910, the mills in Portland alone milled 700 million board feet. Logging was a seasonal occupation, but sawmills operated year-round.

The lower Columbia River, including Clatsop County, was the first major source of logs. Next, loggers turned to the Clackamas area, Tillamook County, and Columbia Gorge. The timber around Tillamook Bay was logged shortly after a railroad was built into the area in the early twentieth century. Logging began in the Cascade foothills in the 1880s and 1890s, and increased in the early twentieth century, especially in the Silverton and Sweet Home areas. As areas around the northern Willamette Valley were logged, the rate of logging increased in the southern Willamette Valley. In the 1940s and 1950s, logging trucks replaced logging railroads and chainsaws replaced crosscut saws.

After forest areas of gentle and moderate topography were logged, they were generally converted to farmland, grazing land, or towns. Even into the 1940s, many farmers burned off the “fir brush” to improve or maintain grazing conditions. Despite the forest fires and agricultural conversions, there were always enough forests for timber to be a major industry in northwestern Oregon. The timber supply seemed unlimited. Loggers burned the slash after harvest to reduce the fire hazard, but did not plant trees. Many acres of timberland were allowed to go tax-delinquent after timber harvest. This practice increased during the Great Depression, and was common in areas burned by forest fires, such as the Tillamook Burn (Fick and Martin 1992).

In the final decades of the twentieth century, northwestern Oregon continued to grow and change. The population grew slowly in coastal areas, and rapidly in cities throughout the Willamette Valley. High tech industries, such as computer chip factories, located in Portland, Salem, and Eugene, creating an important regional industry. Pacific Rim trade grew, and included agricultural products, wood products, and manufactured goods.

In 1977, the Siletz Restoration Act established the Siletz Indians as an officially recognized tribe again. Later, 3,000 acres of federal lands were restored to them as a new reservation. Other coastal tribes did not regain tribal status. There are Indians living throughout the Willamette Valley today, but they generally know little of their Indian heritage. (Zucker et al. 1987)

The landscape of the Coast Range and western Cascades today is different from the landscape that trappers explored in the early 1800s. Most Coast Range forests in northwestern Oregon are second growth or even third growth forests, due to logging and fires during the last 150 years. In the western Cascades, areas of old growth forest are generally found in patches. Many salmon, steelhead, and trout populations in the region have declined. The declining salmon and steelhead fisheries led to very restricted or even closed commercial fishing seasons in the early 1990s.

Mountains, forests, rivers, and natural resources are still important to the people of northwestern Oregon. The timber industry is still an important part of the region's economy. Forest management continues to evolve. The Oregon Forest Practices Act regulates logging on private and state forest lands, and requires that loggers use practices that protect soils, streams, and wildlife trees, and that they reforest an area after logging. Forest management on privately owned timberlands is focusing on managing second and third growth forests, and using smaller diameter trees. Concerns about endangered species, old growth forests, and fisheries have led to a reduction of logging on federal lands in northwestern Oregon. The state forests are discussed below.

People from all parts of northwestern Oregon continue to use a large variety of wood products in their daily lives, from lumber for construction, to paper for laser printers. Oregonians also use their forests for recreation, with the number of people hiking, camping, fishing, and hunting steadily growing. As the economy of northwestern Oregon continues to diversify, a smaller percentage of the population works in natural resource-related jobs. Many people also collect special forest products for extra income or personal use, collecting products such as firewood, cascara bark, ferns, and edible mushrooms.

The Origin and Development of the State Forests

The Oregon Department of Forestry was created in 1911. Its main purpose was to control forest fires, but it was also authorized to acquire forest land to manage. However, the department did not actually acquire any lands until legislative actions made it more feasible. The 1925 Legislature passed a law allowing the Board of Forestry to accept gifts or donations of forest land. The State Forests Acquisition Act of 1939 created procedures for the Board of Forestry to acquire tax-delinquent forest lands from the counties, manage the land, and return most net revenues from the land to the counties. In later years, amendments fine-tuned the distribution of revenues and legal direction for forest management on these lands (Fick and Martin 1992). Lands owned by the Board of Forestry are known as Board of Forestry Lands

(BOFL), and are actively managed in a sound environmental manner to provide sustainable timber harvest and revenues to the state, counties, and local taxing districts.

Some land in the state forests is owned by the State Land Board, which consists of the Governor, the Secretary of State, and the State Treasurer. When Oregon became a state in 1859, the federal government granted sections 16 and 36 of every township to the new state for the use of schools. Oregon's grant included 3.5 million acres of grazing and forest lands. Eventually, much of the land was either sold for the benefit of schools or lost through fraudulent land deals. The state also exchanged some lands in order to consolidate land in larger blocks. The remaining forest lands owned by the State Land Board are known as Common School Forest Lands (CSFL). Eventually, the State Land Board signed a contract with the Department of Forestry, authorizing the Department to manage the Common School Forest Lands, with the goal of generating income for the Common School Fund. For more information on legal and policy mandates for CSFL and BOFL, see Appendix D.

The specific events that led to the establishment of the state forests in northwestern Oregon are described below, organized by forest and district names.

Tillamook State Forest — Much of the area that is now Tillamook State Forest was burned in a series of wildfires in the years 1933, 1939, 1945, and 1951. See the sidebar “The Tillamook Burn” on the next two pages for more information on these fires and the rehabilitation program. The Board of Forestry began to acquire land in the Tillamook Burn in 1940. Land acquisition accelerated after the Legislature authorized bonds to rehabilitate the Burn. Eventually, the Board of Forestry acquired roughly 255,000 acres of the Tillamook Burn, mostly from counties who had foreclosed on tax-delinquent lands. (Oregon Department of Forestry 1993b)

The Department of Forestry carried out a massive reforestation and rehabilitation project in the Tillamook Burn between the years 1948 and 1973. During the 24 years of the rehabilitation project, the state invested \$12 million. In 1993, foresters estimated that timber alone will return about \$6 billion in the first cycle of growth and harvest. Many other benefits that can't be measured in dollars are expected from the forest, including watershed protection, fish habitat, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation.

(“The Origin and Development of the State Forests” continues on page H-11)

The Tillamook Burn

The summer of 1933 was hot and dry in Oregon. By August, the fire danger was extreme. August 14 was hot and dry, with low humidity and a hint of east wind. In those days foresters could only ask loggers to shut down their operations, not require it. A logger was still operating in Gales Creek Canyon, fifteen miles west of Forest Grove. The Tillamook Fire broke out on his operation, perhaps from the friction of one log being yarded over another log. Loggers attacked the fire immediately, but the fire spread to a snag. The snag became a torch, and the wind carried burning embers across the canyon. The Tillamook Fire burned out of control.

Over a thousand men fought the fire for ten days. At that point, the fire had burned 40,000 acres, and a slight rain gave the firefighters hope that the fire would soon be controlled. But on the eleventh day, humidity dropped and the east wind returned. The Tillamook Fire blew up. The fire burned another 200,000 acres in just 20 hours. Huge mushroom clouds of smoke rose to 40,000 feet. The fire uprooted entire trees in hurricane-force winds created by the fire itself. Ashes and burnt needles landed on ships 500 miles out to sea. The next day, fog rolled in and the fire stopped moving. Incredibly, only one firefighter died.

The forest that burned was mostly old growth — huge Douglas-firs, cedars, and hemlocks. Loggers had just started to log the edges of the mountainous area. Now, 240,000 acres were covered with black snags and hillsides of soft, black ash.

In what seemed to be a six-year jinx, new fires burned across the area in 1939, 1945, and 1951. Each fire reburned some of the previously burned area, and consumed new areas of green forest too. In each new fire, millions of snags from the old fires became torches, spreading embers over firelines and across canyons. The Saddle Mountain Fire in 1939 burned 190,000 acres, with 50,000 acres of that being new area previously unburned. In 1945, the Wilson River and Salmonberry Fires burned 180,000 acres, with 65,000 acres being newly burned area. The North Fork and Elkhorn Fires burned 33,000 acres in 1951, all in previously burned areas.

By the end of 1945, a total of 355,000 acres had been burned over and 13.1 billion board feet of timber killed. Some areas had reburned two or three times. Although some burned timber had been salvaged, much of the Tillamook Burn, as it was now known, was hillsides of snags, turned white over the years. In many places the soil had been so severely burned that nothing grew there for many years. Streams and fisheries were severely affected by the loss of forest cover and erosion after the fires.

The Tillamook Burn (continued)

After the 1945 fire, the public wanted something done to stop these fires and rehabilitate the Tillamook Burn. The state government took on the job. In 1948 Oregonians approved a bond issue to finance the project. Nobody had ever before attempted a rehabilitation project of this size. The Oregon Department of Forestry had to figure out what to do as they went along.

Before 1933, almost all of the land that became the Tillamook Burn was privately owned. After the fires, about 255,000 acres eventually came under state ownership. (See “The Origin and Development of the State Forests” for details on the transfer of lands to state ownership.) Most of the remaining 100,000 acres is owned by private timber companies and BLM (Bureau of Land Management). These owners have also carried out rehabilitation on their land. The statistics below are for state forest land only.

Salvage logging had started after the 1933 fire and accelerated to meet the lumber demands of World War II. By 1948, 4 billion board feet of fire-killed timber had been recovered from the burn. An additional 3.5 billion board feet of fire-killed timber were removed from 1949-1955.

The Department of Forestry carried out a massive rehabilitation project in the Tillamook Burn between the years 1948 and 1973. The first step was to protect the burn from new fires. There wasn't any point in planting trees unless the new forest could be protected from the repeated fires. Crews cut more than 220 miles of snag-free corridors as firebreaks, felling an estimated 1.5 million snags. Access roads were built near the main firebreaks. Lookouts were built and suppression crews hired in summers. The developing prevention system got its first test in 1951, when the last of the six-year interval fires broke out. These final large fires were held at 33,000 acres, all on previously burned ground.

Reforestation was the next task. Over the next 24 years, tree planting crews planted 72 million Douglas-fir seedlings. A total of 36 tons of Douglas-fir seeds were spread on the burn through aerial seeding, pioneering the first use of helicopters in aerial seeding. In 1973, the Tillamook State Forest was created. Approximately 255,000 acres of the old Tillamook Burn were included in the new 364,000 acre state forest.

The Department of Forestry's experience with the Tillamook Burn became a model for fire prevention and fire rehabilitation projects. The Department pioneered many techniques that have become standard practice in fire rehabilitation projects and forest management, such as cutting snag-free corridors as firebreaks and using helicopters for aerial seeding. The Department was also a leader in intensive forest management techniques, using various brush control and animal damage control techniques to help the young forests on the Burn become firmly established.

(“The Origin and Development of the State Forests” continued from page H-8)

In June 1973, the former Tillamook Burn was dedicated as the new Tillamook State Forest. The 364,000 acre forest includes 255,000 acres from the Tillamook Burn, and other unburned forest land. The first timber sale in the former Tillamook Burn, a commercial thinning, took place in 1983. From 1983 to 1992, commercial thinning has been done on 1,925 acres in the Burn. These small diameter logs are used to produce small-dimension lumber and pulp chips for paper and other wood fiber products. Department of Forestry staff are using modern silvicultural practices in the Tillamook State Forest, including precommercial thinning and fertilization. Pruning has been done experimentally on a few hundred acres. The forest is popular for recreation and environmental education also.

Clatsop State Forest — The Clatsop State Forest is 98 percent Board of Forestry Lands. These lands were privately owned, logged between 1910 and 1940, and then became tax-delinquent. Clatsop and Columbia counties foreclosed when landowners couldn't pay their taxes, and ownership reverted to the county. Many landowners went broke and lost their land during the Great Depression. Eventually, the counties deeded these cutover and unmanaged forest lands to the Board of Forestry to manage as a state forest. According to the trust agreement, the Department of Forestry would replant the lands, protect them from fire, and manage the new forest. Then, as timber was harvested, the counties would receive two-thirds of the net revenue. The remaining 2 percent of the Clatsop State Forest are Common School Fund Lands.

Today, Clatsop State Forest has mostly second growth Douglas-fir, from 30 to 70 years old. The forest has been progressively consolidated through a land exchange program that began in the mid-1940s. District staff are still actively pursuing land exchanges, working on a priority list of exchanges with several private landowners in the area. The purpose of the exchanges is to block up the state forest land.

Santiam State Forest — Much of the land now in the Santiam State Forest used to be owned by large timber companies, who typically owned railroad interests also. Some individuals and families also owned parcels of forest land. From about 1880 until 1930, most lands were logged by their owners. These lands were of little value to the owners once the timber was removed. Forest fires burned large areas. During the Great Depression, many landowners allowed their forest lands to be foreclosed by the county in place of back taxes. Marion, Clackamas, and Linn Counties suddenly owned thousands of acres of timberland.

The counties eventually deeded these lands to the Board of Forestry. Santiam State Forest land in Linn County was acquired by the Board of Forestry between 1939 and 1949. Marion County lands were acquired between 1940 and 1953, and Clackamas County lands between 1942 and 1950. Some land was also acquired from individuals through both charitable donations and purchases, between 1943 and 1952.

Natural regeneration successfully reforested most of the Santiam State Forest. However, a fire in 1951 burned nearly half the forest, and the Department of Forestry replanted the most damaged areas. In the early 1950s, the Department of Forestry's management activities were conducted by foresters working out of the Salem offices. In 1968 the current headquarters for management of the Santiam State Forest was built in Mehama.

West Oregon District — During the Great Depression, most isolated farms in the West Oregon District were abandoned to the counties in place of back taxes. Some more desirable parcels of land were bought by T. J. Starker, John Thompson, and others who saw the land's value for timber production. But by the late 1930s, Benton, Lincoln, and Polk Counties had many parcels of land that they couldn't sell or manage. Between 1938 and 1948, most of this land was deeded to the Board of Forestry. During that same decade, several small parcels were also purchased. Currently, the West Oregon District manages approximately 38,000 acres of land. Of that total, 75 percent is Board of Forestry Lands, and 25 percent is Common School Forest Lands.

Western Lane District — The Nelson Mountain Fire was one of the many large fires in 1910 that motivated people to start the Department of Forestry. The fire burned most areas that are now state forest lands in western Lane County. Large fires burned again in western Lane County in 1917 and 1922. Then in 1929, a number of large fires burned most of the central Coast Range of Lane County, covering a total of nearly 80,000 acres. The fires reburned some previously burned areas, as well as burning across new areas. With the timber gone, the Great Depression starting, and the land unsuitable for homesteading, many landowners allowed their land to revert to the county in place of back taxes. Lane County deeded its timberlands to the Board of Forestry in the mid-1940s.

The land base remained constant for the next 50 years except for 5 small land exchanges in the 1950s. In the early 1990s, two larger exchanges reshaped the state forest lands in the Western Lane District by exchanging one-quarter of the acres. These exchanges increased the land base by 10 percent and started to block up the state forest lands. Today, state forest lands in Western Lane District are mostly covered by a 50 to 60 year old forest.