

Multi-value forestry

Camp Namanu enhances its recreational appeal while earning timber income

By Dan Sadowsky
June 2, 2005

(CLACKAMAS COUNTY, OREGON) For more than 80 summers, generations of young campers have headed to Camp Namanu to frolic in the Sandy River, ride horseback through forests of Douglas fir and hike along trails used by Roosevelt elk and black-tailed deer. The camp's idyllic landscape, spread across 545 mostly wooded acres on the western slope of Mt. Hood, is its most valuable asset.

Recently, Camp Namanu adopted a plan that preserves its wilderness for generations to come – but not before wrestling with how to balance its need for a natural forest with its desire for income-generating timberland.

Most of the north Clackamas County camp has been logged in the past. In the 1990s, officials clear-cut swaths of forest when they needed cash to fund camp operations. In 2001, however, new camp chief Keith Thomajan, a believer in leave-no-trace environmentalism, ended what he calls the camp's "crisis-based" approach to forest management.

"It lacked a vision of sustainability," says Thomajan, executive director of the Camp Fire USA Portland Metro Council, which owns and operates Camp Namanu.

Thomajan imposed a moratorium on all logging within the camp, yet realized that some active management would be necessary, if only to maintain trails and satisfy the property's power-line easements.

Then in late 2003, a third option came to light. Thomajan attended a local Rotary Club meeting where Bettina von Hagen, vice president for forestry at Ecotrust, a Portland-based non-profit organization, lauded the social, environmental and economic benefits of forests managed according to standards set by the independent Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

Before long, Thomajan had set up a meeting with Barry Sims, a local FSC-certified forestland manager. Thomajan paid Sims \$2,500, half of which was reimbursed by the state's forestry division, for a 35-page plan outlining how Camp Namanu could maintain a healthy, diverse, aesthetically pleasing forest that protected fish and wildlife while logging 140,000 board feet of timber each year – enough to frame twenty 2,000-square-foot homes.

The 10-year plan demonstrated a way for Camp Namanu to break free from what Sims calls the "either-or" paradigm of traditional forestry: knock 'em all down or leave 'em all standing. "Instead," says Sims, "you can do a little logging, retain what's great about the forest, and still generate income."



Camp Namanu camp director Katie Johnson and forester Barry Sims display some newly cut logs. The Portland-area institution has recently received Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for its plan to apply restorative forestry on its 545 acres.

Maintaining an aesthetically pleasing forest is the plan's chief objective. Trees in heavily trafficked areas of the camp are left untouched; most tree harvesting takes place in the camp's outlying areas and those marred by previous clear-cuts. "It feels like a real win-win for us," says Thomajan. "It allows us to protect the wilderness and the aesthetic at Camp Namanu for the long term, and also be responsive to the council's budget and programmatic needs."

On a hot morning in late May, Sims is far from the heart of camp. Using a chainsaw and a small bulldozer, he's been thinning a 17-acre stand of mostly Douglas fir that he dates to around 1960.

"The conventional wisdom is that you manage a stand like this to eventually clear-cut it," explains Sims, a lithe outdoorsman in dirt-stained jeans and a t-shirt. "But the primary objective here is not maximizing timber dollars, it's aesthetics and recreation. I feel like those are all compatible objectives if you do it the right way."

Sims' task is to convert this area into an uneven-aged forest. Compared to same-age tree stands, Sims explains, uneven-aged forests provide greater visual appeal, beneficial shade for plants and animals and a wider range of harvesting options. To jump-start the cycle of regrowth, Sims has chopped down a cluster of trees so that sunlight bathes a patch of forest floor. Several fir seedlings have already started to sprout here, some only a few inches tall.

This process of natural regeneration – without herbicides or aerial sprayings of fertilizers – is encouraged through FSC standards. Here on the slopes of Mt. Hood, not far from the source of Portland's drinking water in the Bull Run Watershed, it is an approach that makes a lot of sense. The Camp Namanu forestry plan is also meeting FSC criteria by protecting old-growth trees; providing wide riparian buffers along the camp's two salmon-bearing waterways; promoting the growth of less-prevalent alders, maples and cedars in the name of species diversity; and leaving snags, woody debris and other potential wildlife niches untouched.

"What Barry is doing fits with what the camp is about and what we're trying to teach the kids about environmental awareness," says Katie Johnson, the camp's new director, who is a former camper herself. "I want campers to understand why we cut some trees and leave others standing, and the ideal of having a multigenerational forest," she says.

That timber is now ideal for two FSC-certified Oregon mills, Kaster's Kustom Cutting in Mulino and Warm Springs Forest Products Industries, who are two of the partners in Ecotrust's Market Connections initiative. Ecotrust is assisting in the certification of area mills, which represent key links in the chain that connects the growing demand for responsibly harvested wood products with FSC-certified land managers. As a result, Douglas fir logs recently shipped from Camp Namanu to Kaster's will be used to build a firehouse in Los Angeles, while other camp timber will stock FSC-certified Oregon lumberyards.

Today, timber sales generate less than one-tenth of Camp Namanu's revenue – a lower percentage than in years' past – but the real payoff is yet to come. Among the 150 campers enrolled this summer in Camp Namanu are some third- and even fourth-generation attendees, Johnson says. To her, the camp's forest management plan will be judged on whether its sylvan expanse, the backdrop for so many indelible childhood memories, remains for future generations to explore and cherish.

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