

Creative Partnership Protects a Family Forest in Oregon

By **CONNIE BEST**

Douglas-fir draped ridges framing two miles of the Alsea River create essential habitats for fish, wildlife, fertile floodplains, and biodiverse forests. More than 1,100 acres of highly productive and biodiverse forestland near Oregon’s coast have been protected with a conservation easement gifted to the Pacific Forest Trust by the Haglund family’s Digger Mountain Forestry, LLC at the end of 2022. With management guided by the easement terms, the Haglunds hope their property will be a model for multi-generational family forest owners seeking both ecological and economic returns.

The son of a forester and avid student of forestry, Mike Haglund is a Portland native and noted attorney.



Alsea River Bend property is now a bulwark against creeping development, assured to remain a working forest.

Mike and Melissa Haglund establish a working forest conservation easement to protect their property’s abundant forest.



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Together with his wife Melissa, an educator, they have been buying parcels of land in this coastal Oregon watershed for more than thirty years. Their *Alsea River Bend* property near Corvallis is now a bulwark against creeping development. It will remain a working forest situated between small residential parcels along the river, older forests on Siuslaw National Forest, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, and large tracts of industrial timberland.

After several years of careful succession planning, the Haglunds decided to establish a working forest conservation easement to protect their property’s abundant forest, riparian, and aquatic ecosystems while allowing their family to reside on the property. The easement terms also provide for the on-site processing of forest products and sustainable, small-scale agriculture that the family is committed to continuing. In the future, this scenic spot may become

a resource for public education and outdoor recreation.

The easement was designed to limit non-forest uses and guide management for timber, healthy ecosystems, and biodiversity. The Haglund family's goal is to restore the Coast Range Forest diversity that was prevalent before conversion to commercial Douglas-fir plantations by previous owners. Over time they plan to recreate a more mature and complex stand structure, including large trees with important habitat value, as well as a lush native understory. Consistent with Forest Stewardship Council certification and current forest science, the Haglunds use variable retention forestry and uneven-aged silviculture to restore their forest, keep it healthy, increase carbon stores, and improve resilience to changing climate conditions. Their conservation easement provides added protections for the abundant clean water that supports both threatened salmon species that spawn along the river and the water supply for nearby towns.

Alsea River Bend is in the heart of the Oregon Conservation Strategy's Coast Range Ecoregion, within the traditional territories of the Alsea, Siletz, and other indigenous people. It connects critical habitats on neighboring public lands to create a more integrated landscape of public and private forests. It is particularly valuable for wildlife migration, including the elk that traverse the property and the northern spotted owls that nest nearby.

For the Haglunds, a partnership with Pacific Forest Trust represents a resounding commitment to *Alsea River Bend's* future. As Melissa Haglund explained recently, "My family and I love the Alsea River and its amazing forests. Over the last 30 years, we have been fortunate to put together this beautiful property that we manage for high standards of ecological forestry and sustainable agriculture—all while restoring habitats for threatened salmon and wildlife. Great forestry takes time to succeed. We are delighted to partner with Pacific Forest Trust (PFT) to permanently conserve this special place

and guide its management for future generations. PFT understands how

ecological and economic productivity

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go hand in hand. We believe our partnership can be a model for other family forest owners in Oregon.”

PFT president Laurie Wayburn noted, “We are so honored to partner with the Haglunds and other Oregon woodland owners who have entrusted Pacific Forest Trust to help protect their legacy with a conservation easement. There is no greater commitment to sustaining forests—which is even more critical today.”

FAQ’S on working forest conservation easements

What is a Working Forest Conservation Easement?

Conservation easements embody a landowner’s vision for the lasting stewardship of a property. A working forest conservation easement is an effective and cooperative legal agreement that permanently protects the important natural values of a forest property, (fisheries, water supplies, wildlife habitat, carbon capture, and open space) while limiting development or break-up and ensuring good forest management and sustainable flows of the wood products we need.

This deduced agreement is voluntarily placed on a property to help realize a forest owner’s goals while providing lasting public benefits as these restrictions stay with the property even if it changes hands. A land trust like the Pacific Forest Trust, selected by the landowner, becomes responsible for monitoring compliance with the easement and ensuring that its provisions are being honored through time.

Why place a conservation easement on your property?

The reasons a landowner may grant a conservation easement are varied—but the decision is always rooted in a person’s relationship to their land. The goals for a property may be focused on commercial timber production, nurturing habitat for wildlife, or providing a family retreat. Often landowners have multiple objectives. A conservation easement can help achieve all these goals by stripping off unwanted uses and guiding future management to achieve desired results. For fami-

About Pacific Forest Trust

Founded 30 years ago, PFT works in partnership with forest owners, agencies, and communities to conserve working forests for public benefit. PFT creates and advances high-leverage strategies and resources to make it easier and more rewarding to do good things for the forest and forest landowners, which we all depend on. The only conservation organization focused on private forests in California, Oregon, and Washington, we’ve conserved more than 275,000 acres of vital forestland regionally, including conservation easements on more than 115,000 acres. A nationally accredited land trust, PFT’s work has been recognized for its excellence by government agencies, philanthropies, and non-profit organizations.

ly forest owners who have invested deeply in the stewardship of their land over decades, a conservation easement brings greater assurance that future owners will sustain the value of those investments rather than liquidate them.

Is there compensation for restricting a property using a conservation easement?

When a landowner makes this enduring commitment to conservation, they can be compensated for protecting the many public benefits forests provide. The value of the conservation easement is readily appraised, taking into consideration foregone revenue from restrictions on development, timber harvest, or other uses. Based on this valuation, a landowner can garner potentially significant income and estate tax benefits by donating the easement to a land trust like the Pacific Forest Trust. Or, an owner may be paid for the conservation easement, usually from funds available through local, state, or federal conservation programs. A landowner may also make a partial donation or “bargain sale,” receiving some value in cash and gifting the remainder; an approach that is seeing increasing use. This provides immediate cash flow combined with long-term tax savings. Perhaps most importantly, a conservation easement can be essential for passing land on

to the next generation. By removing the land’s development potential, the easement lowers its market value, which in turn can lower an estate tax bill. Whether the easement is donated during life, by will, or during the process of settling an estate, it can make a critical difference in the heirs’ ability to keep the land intact. At the same time, the public gains immensely valuable, lasting conservation of forests, and good forestry, at a fraction of the cost of public ownership. This makes conservation easements an efficient use of tax dollars to sustain wood, water, wildlife, and our quality of life. ■

CONSTANCE BEST is a conservationist, successful entrepreneur, and forest owner. Ms. Best is a recognized leader in advancing strategies that harness the power of commerce to accomplish conservation objectives. At Pacific Forest Trust she has led the conservation of over 100,000 acres of managed forestland in partnership with families, tribes, major timberland owners, and communities to secure lasting climate, watershed, and biodiversity benefits. For her work in developing rigorous accounting methodologies for forest-based carbon credits, she won the EPA Climate Protection Award. Ms. Best is the principal author of America’s Private Forests: Status and Stewardship and “Capital Markets and Sustainable Forestry: Opportunities for Investment.” She is a past board member of the American Forest Foundation, the Land Trust Alliance, and Ecotrust, among others.



Connie Best, author.

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