



Connie Best's Remarks – Forest Fete 2025

Thank you so very much for this kind—and overwhelming—acknowledgment of my contributions to the Pacific Forest Trust and to forest conservation.

When Laurie and I were still cooking up what would become PFT, I had lunch with a dear friend, Fred Moon, in 1992 – Fred's family were significant forest owners in the north state and he was an early impact investor, before that term was even in use. This was a time of ferocious controversy and confrontation over forest management that we remember as the timber wars and I wanted to share with him, to test market, our vision of creating a new organization that embraced the challenge of *collaboratively* conserving the vast public benefits of hard-working privately-owned forests. At the time, I told Fred that I considered this challenge a life work. He encouraged me to take the leap, and he even became a founding Board member of PFT.

Now, an astonishing 32+ years later I am still passionately motivated by our forests and all they do for us. And I am filled with gratitude for the growing strength of PFT's partnerships that are making such a difference for forests and all who depend on them for life, shelter and sustenance. . . Which means everyone; we are all forest creatures regardless of where we live.

It is these relationships with forests and their stewards that has enriched me and kept me going – and the fact that every day I get to learn from them both. I am a generalist, a New Yorker, a beverage entrepreneur, and without formal education beyond high school. *What did I know from forests?* Being in the woods with landowners like the Collins family, foresters like Chris Chase, scientists like Jerry Franklin, indigenous practitioners like Don Hankins, and loggers like Don Hammon—that has been my college. And I am a perennial student. I don't want to graduate!

With forests, the more you look, the more you see. They are an awesome natural network, the original green tech—encompassing complex reciprocal relationships among trees, shrubs, plants, creatures large and small, from high in the canopy to way below the ground. People have always been an integral part of that network of relationships that make a forest so rich and dynamic.

Rich, dynamic and ***resilient***. Forests persist and thrive—just as human communities do— ***because*** they are complex, diverse and interconnected, where change is a part of the natural system that has evolved in relation



to its place and its soil, water, nutrients and climate. These interconnections and relationships—at small scales and across large landscapes—are what we at PFT, and I in our conservation work, have sought to conserve and nourish, among people and nature, between public and private lands, and where ecological and economic productivity can cross-pollinate.

We are here tonight to celebrate resilience—the ability of a system to bounce back, to adapt, to renew itself. In a forest, certain elements foster resiliency—native species, complex assemblages, trees and plants of different ages—including the very young, the very old and even the dead—all in mixed up arrangements so there are clumps and gaps and scattered individuals. This complexity supports both resistance and resilience to fire, disease and other disturbances.

When change is sometimes abrupt, and at certain times and under certain conditions, extreme, that is the time we are especially grateful for the natural complexity and heterogeneity of a well-stewarded forest. And, one could say, of a society.

The compounding impacts of the climate crisis are written across the landscape now – and are expressing themselves in heat that kills, fast moving fires, and torrential floods at the same time as water becomes scarcer, to name just a few. People, our ancestors down to our children’s children, and all those we share the planet with, have never experienced such extensive and such rapid change in the natural fundamentals we have taken for granted.

Is it any surprise that our communities and social relationships are also sorely challenged, as we are part of the natural world and not somehow outside looking in?

Our collective resistance and resilience are being called upon. Do we have the essential elements to respond, adapt, and thrive, nonetheless?

I am confident that we and our forests do, especially if we continue to care for one another. Those elements of forest resilience—fostering interconnections, diversity at all scales—reflect the same elements key to social resilience. Let us cultivate our relationships and celebrate our connections – these will yield strength and surprises as we learn and evolve together with nature through a time of crisis.

We are making the future together now, each moment, through our choices—by what we do and what we don't do. People— each of you—can and must make the difference for forests and for each other in this crisis. With your help, forests will make all the difference for us, sustaining a livable planet.



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There are natural rhythms that we can draw on as we do. One is to work with change. For me and for Pacific Forest Trust, as part of making the future, we are embracing the dynamics of natural succession. Individual trees age and their contributions change, with these changes nourishing new cohorts, dynamics that allow the forest to adapt and keep flourishing.

I am proud of how PFT continues to evolve through changing times, of its growing talent and passion, and the network of relationships that sustain it, even as my role changes to being a mentor and resource. For my part, I know I will keep learning every day—welcoming new opportunities as they arise for me contribute to the resilience and the future of forests and people.

Thank you again!