



Stephen "Fitz" Fitzgerald

New Director of College Forests balances recreation, revenue, teaching, research, and public engagement

by Bryan Bernart

As of January 2014, the OSU College Forests, which comprise thousands of acres across eight separate locations state-wide, are supervised by new director Stephen Fitzgerald. "Fitz" arrived in Corvallis with 30 years of Extension forestry experience. We asked him to answer a few questions about the role of the College Forests Director, the challenges of managing forests for a diversity of uses, and his plans for the future.

What do you see as the director's primary responsibilities?

I oversee all the College Forests operations and provide overall management direction. The day-to-day, on-the-ground operations decisions are made by the staff who work on the Forests. We are fortunate to have very competent, dedicated professionals working there. Because I am a silviculturist and conduct silvicultural research, I do provide decision-making guidance regarding silvicultural methods and treatments. My goal is create a biologically diverse forest that provides a diversity of teaching, research, and recreational experiences, while also providing revenue to the College of Forestry to support our teaching, research, and public engagement endeavors.

How do you feel that your career as an Extension forester has prepared you for your new position?

During my time in Extension I worked in both the coast range and in the eastern Cascades, with a number of stakeholders and user-groups, private landowners, state and federal agencies, and city and county governments, on a whole host of forest and natural resource issues. I've had to facilitate dialogues between many different groups over a number of contentious issues. With my background in science and management, I feel at ease discussing and translating what the appropriate science says, and engaging the various interest groups on how to integrate science with ecological, social, and economic values. My career in Extension prepared me to manage the College Forests, in that doing so requires a commitment to collaboration in order to balance the different ways in which we use the College Forests.

How challenging is it to balance the different uses of the Forests among different groups? How do you ensure that recreation activities, timber harvest, and researchers from the College and elsewhere "coexist"?

It's a huge challenge because everyone views the Forests differently and wants to see or emphasize different things. In the past 10 years, it's become even more complicated because the Corvallis populace has discovered that this gem, the Forests, is available for their use and is right outside their own back doors. We have over 100,000 visitor days every year; these visitors each have their own views of how they would like to see the Forests managed. My charge is to help maintain a general awareness that these are "working forests," and that teaching, research, enhancing forest diversity, engaging the public (including recreation activities), and generating income are, all together, our primary objectives. To do so, we communicate with the public using our website, in order to inform them about when and where timber harvests, road building, and other activities take place, in order to avoid conflicts.

What kinds of opportunities for the public to visit and learn about the Forests do you have planned through the end of 2014?

We have a number of events happening this year. In May, we hosted the National Get Outdoors (GO) Day in the Forests, which was co-sponsored by the OSU Benton County Extension Service. This was an all-day event for families to come out and learn about camping, geocaching, fire, how trees grow, fishing, and many other topics. This year, 570 adults and children attended the event, which also

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So, who listens to ID? “Our target audience is undergraduate students, who might catch our show while driving around Corvallis. We hope that they overhear some of the conversation and come away from listening feeling inspired,” says Hulbert. “But we believe the majority of our listeners are actually other graduate students—they’re interested in the human element of the program, meaning the common experiences that grad students go through, as much as the research.” He explains that to build listenership, the program archives many of its shows on its website, where they’re available for download (<http://oregonstate.edu/inspiration/Episodes>). “We’re fortunate to have an undergrad helper who creates podcasts from our material. It’s interesting to look through the statistics generated; one of our programs has over 2,000 listens.”

In the scant two and a half years since its inception, ID has not only garnered national recognition, having been recently honored by the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System and winning its award for “most innovative program,” but, perhaps even more notably, actually helped its listeners win recognition and additional funding of their own. Jeremy Hoffman, a CEOAS PhD student in Geology, was a guest on the show in 2013 and discussed a major grant he received for his research. Following his appearance on ID, he posted his grant application on the program’s website so that other students could see what he had written. Hulbert says that some time later, he was approached by two undergraduate students who told him that they had followed Hoffman’s advice and won grants of their own.

Speaking about opportunities afforded to graduate students via their participation with ID, Hulbert says that the program allows them to practice communicating to a broad audience—an important and often overlooked facet of graduate-level academia. “Every episode we have, we see how difficult it is to explain the

research very basically,” he says. “I think the most fulfilling part of the show, for me, is seeing students struggle to communicate their research in a way the audience can comprehend. For a lot of our guests, this is their first introduction to media. When they come in, we say ‘give me your elevator pitch,’ and many find it difficult. We hope, though, that every student who comes away from our program has a better idea of how to do that in the future.”

In his own upcoming plans, Hulbert intends to continue working in science communication. “Personally, creating and co-hosting ID has affected me to the point where, even if I’m not doing science podcasting, specifically, I’d like to be doing something similar.” He motions to Kamvar, who has continued prepping the show, which is now about to begin. “We love it. We enjoy doing it, and we think that, wherever we each end up after grad school, we’ll continue in one form or another, provided there’s a radio station that will have us.”

The program begins. This week’s guest takes a seat in front of the microphone, and Hulbert and Kamvar introduce him, their voices carried across the airwaves to unknown listeners near and far. “Inspiration Dissemination” is live.

Foresters in Action

“Inspiration Dissemination” continues the legacy of forestry students taking to the airwaves to talk about science and student life. In the 1930s, a group of students led by Arthur Harold Sasser (’40) created a weekly radio program called “Foresters In Action,” which combined amusing anecdotes, scientific discussion, humor, and even live music, to both educate and entertain the student body. You can read a collection of their original radio scripts online here:

<http://hdl.handle.net/1957/50349>.

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reached a lot of underserved groups within our community. We also host a STEM Academy (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) for high school students where they can learn about new field-oriented subjects. There are also mountain-biking and trail-running events that occur in our Forests, which, combined with a number of guided hikes, allow for plenty to do over the summer. In the fall, we allow some deer and elk hunting for those hunters who draw a tag for the Dunn Forest.

Of course, even if people are not interested in these larger events, they can always come out and visit the Forests on their own. We have a number of trails that have interpretive signs and allow you to learn at your own pace. There’s something for everyone—come outside and see!

For more about the College Forests, visit:
cf.forestry.oregonstate.edu