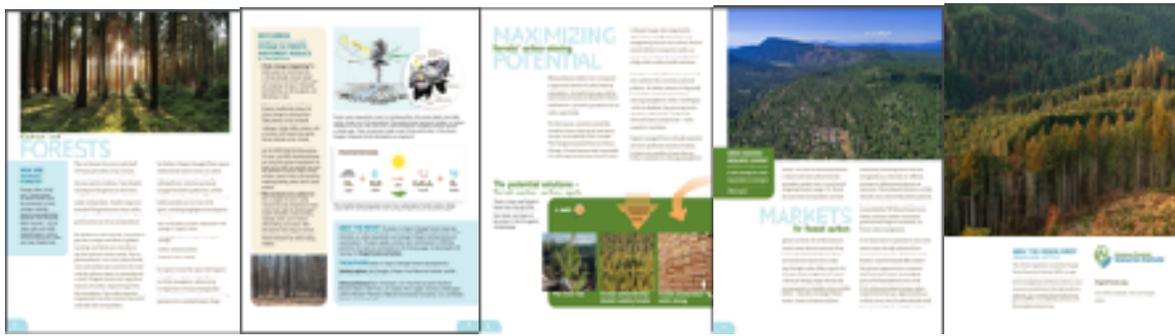


## Examination of OFRI's Claims on Climate Science & Carbon Storage in Oregon's Forests



On August 4, 2020, *The Oregonian-OPB-ProPublica* published a report exposing the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) for suppressing science on forest-carbon, downplaying the impacts of industrial forestry on Oregon's drinking water supplies, and engaging in illegal lobbying efforts to further the timber industry agenda. This brief examines OFRI's messaging about carbon storage.

In a recently released summary report, "Carbon in Oregon's Managed Forests," OFRI selectively uses facts that present the timber industry in a positive light. In explaining the process of forest-carbon sequestration, the report states, "Oregon's forests store significant amounts of carbon, sequestering it from the atmosphere. That carbon remains sequestered even after trees are harvested and made into wood products." This phrasing is misleading. The report implies that all the carbon that was once sequestered in trees remains in wood products for a long time. This claim is false. In reality, about 40% of carbon in harvested trees is emitted into the atmosphere almost immediately in the manufacturing of wood products and the burning of mill waste. The duration of the storage in the product depends heavily on the life of the products - paper, pallets, decking - are short lived.

Later in the same report, OFRI writes, "Half the dry weight of wood is carbon removed from the atmosphere by trees as they grow. That means using wood products in place of materials that don't store carbon and take more energy to produce can help combat climate change." While there is some truth in wood acting as a sustainable alternative to materials like plastic, ultimately, for Oregon to "help combat climate change," it must cut down fewer, not more, trees. An Oregon State University research team concluded that allowing trees to grow for longer rotations before cutting them down would significantly reduce Oregon's carbon footprint.

OFRI writes, "Wood products that store carbon long-term include those used for home and other building construction, such as lumber and plywood, the two most commonly made wood products in Oregon." These sentences send the message that the wood used in buildings stores a substantial amount of carbon. But, compared to trees that remain in forests, the carbon in human-made structures is stored for less time because of replacement, such as demolition or wood materials like exterior wall sheathing and roofing during operational use. Research shows that the average carbon lifespan of trees left standing in Oregon forests is eighty-seven to two hundred years (accounting for harvest practices), while lumber has an average lifespan of only fifty to seventy-five years. Furthermore, a 2016 analysis found

## Examination of OFRI's Claims on Climate Science & Carbon Storage in Oregon's Forests

that only 52% of Oregon's timber harvest ends up as longer-lived wood products. The rest deteriorates as short-lived products (41%), and as waste (7%). The detail OFRI includes about plywood and lumber being "the two most commonly made wood products in Oregon" only presents part of the story. Even if the two types of wood that are most commonly used in quasi-long-term structures predominate, no wood product stores carbon as long as trees, which can live to 800 years or more in Oregon.

OFRI's carbon fact sheet lacks a full picture of the timber industry's relationship with carbon and climate change. The second sentence of the report reads, "Carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, is released through natural events such as volcanic eruptions and forest fires, as well as through human activities such as burning fossil fuels." The claim about carbon emissions is true, but the sentence fails to mention logging, one of Oregon's largest climate polluters.

The OFRI fact sheet also misrepresents the impact of wildfires. According to the top experts, wildfires only emit 5-10% of carbon stored in a forest. OGWC points out that fires are "an essential and unavoidable element in Oregon forest ecosystems, so eliminating or suppressing normative occurrences of fire in forests cannot be a preferred option for reducing Oregon's greenhouse gas emissions." Despite what OFRI claims, we don't have "a problem with too many dense, overstocked forests;" we have a problem cutting trees before they've reached their carbon-storing potential. And due to OFRI's misleading messaging, we have a problem with fully realizing the negative effects of logging.

### Works Cited:

Cara Nixon. "Investigators Find State Timber Agency Corrupt." *The Corvallis Advocate*, Aug. 16, 2020. <https://www.corvallisadvocate.com/2020/investigators-find-state-timber-agency-corrupt/> (Last visited Jan. 27, 2021).

Erica Simmons, Micah Scudder, Todd Morgan, Erik Burg, Glenn Christensen. "Oregon's Forests Products Industry and Timber Harvest 2013 With Trends Through 2014." *United States Department of Agriculture*. [https://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/pnw\\_gtr942.pdf](https://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/pnw_gtr942.pdf) (Last visited Feb. 8, 2021).

Oregon Forest Resources Institute. "Carbon in Oregon's Managed Forests," 2020. [https://oregonforests.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/OFRI\\_CarbonSpecialReport\\_DIGITAL.pdf](https://oregonforests.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/OFRI_CarbonSpecialReport_DIGITAL.pdf) (Last visited Jan. 26, 2021).

Oregon Forest Resources Institute. "Fact Sheet: Carbon and Climate." <https://oregonforests.org/pub/fact-sheet-carbon-climate> (Last visited Jan. 27, 2021).

Oregon Global Warming Commission. "Forest Carbon Accounting Project Report," Nov. 2018. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59c554e0f09ca40655ea6eb0/t/5c094beaaa4a99fa6ad4dcde/1544113138067/2018-OGWC-Forest-Carbon-Accounting-Report.pdf> (Last visited Jan. 26, 2021).