Oregon Forest Resources Institute

Oregon's Forest Sector Workforce

A Summary of the OFRI Workforce Summit

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Contents

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A Summary of the 2026 OFRI Workforce Summit

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Introduction

In May 2026, the Oregon Forest Resources Institute (OFRI) in partnership with the Western Forestry and Conservation Association convened a statewide forest sector workforce summit in Bend. Over two days, approximately 50 leaders from state and federal agencies, the forest industry, contractor associations, education providers, workforce development boards and nonprofits examined what it will take to build and sustain a workforce adequate to meet Oregon’s forest sector needs.

The summit was convened at a critical moment for Oregon’s forest sector. Federal funding is contracting, an aging workforce is retiring without clear successors in place, and a generation of Oregonians who might work in these careers don’t know the jobs exist, or don’t see them as something meant for them. All three are happening at once.

The summit was the initial delivery on a commitment OFRI made in its 2023 strategic plan: to convene stakeholders and facilitate the development of recommendations for how Oregon can move forward comprehensively on forest sector workforce development. OFRI’s intent in convening the meeting was to create a forum for discussion, identify possible opportunities for collective action and carry the work forward.

This report synthesizes what the presentations and breakout discussions covered, what participants identified as their priority challenges, and the possible ideas generated for collective action. The purpose is for general readers to understand the landscape of opportunities and challenges, and for the OFRI Board of Directors to use it to determine next steps for the organization.

Oregon’s Forest Sector Workforce: The Lay of the Land

The Sector’s Scope

Oregon’s forest sector encompasses a wide range of jobs, employers and career pathways. At one end is the logging contractor running a crew of four people on private timberland. At the other, the agency forester managing landscape resilience across hundreds of thousands of federal acres. Between those roles are the mill workers, truck drivers, wildland firefighters, reforestation crews, consulting foresters, equipment operators, forestry technicians, and the growing corps of restoration and fuels treatment specialists working across all ownership types.

The sector spans the full credential ladder. Some roles require no formal degree, including logging, mill operations and equipment operation, which depend on hands-on skill and industry-specific knowledge that formal credentials don’t always provide. Others require trade certifications, four-year degrees or graduate training. One of the sector’s genuine competitive advantages is that it has a place for people at every level of formal education. That breadth is also part of a central challenge; building a workforce pipeline that works for a logging contractor with seven employees, a federal agency hiring certified foresters and a mill running three shifts requires different strategies, different institutions and different entry points, often simultaneously. The summit was organized around three of those subsectors: forest operations and support, forest management, and forest products and manufacturing.

To understand the scope of that challenge (how many workers, in which roles, and through which pathways) the summit opened with a panel focused on workforce needs, featuring three presenters who each brought different data and framing to the conversation. Their presentations created the analytical foundation for the two days that followed.

Julie Woodward, deputy director of OFRI, presented a preview of *The 2026 Forest Report*[1], which had not yet been publicly released at the time of the summit. She described the sector's economic footprint, including 103,000 jobs directly and indirectly attributable to Oregon's forest sector, representing about 4% of total state employment, with approximately 63,000 jobs directly tied to forest-to-mill operations. Oregon remains the nation's largest producer of softwood lumber, holding approximately 14% of the U.S. market, with 133 mills still operating statewide.

Wages in forestry rank among the highest in rural counties, making the sector a meaningful anchor of rural Oregon's economy. Woodward also noted that Oregon's mills still have unused capacity — sawmills operated at 73% of capacity in 2022, plywood and veneer at 76%. Those numbers reflect not only workforce gaps but also log supply constraints and underscore the importance of addressing workforce and log supply as interconnected issues.

Amanda Sullivan-Astor with Associated Oregon Loggers (AOL) presented findings from the Higher Education Coordinating Commission's (HECC) 2025 *Oregon Forest Operations and Management Workforce Study*[2], which was initiated through Oregon Senate Bill 1552 and conducted by ECOnorthwest. The study's scope, which included forest operations, management, transportation and technical services, but not mills or manufacturing, estimated approximately 31,500 workers in those subsectors. The sector will need an estimated 3,400 new workers every year simply to replace retirements and turnover, more than 10% of the current workforce annually. OFRI's Executive Director Jim Paul framed that number at the summit as a floor, not a ceiling, suggesting that the sector needs to attract more candidates than it has positions for so that it can select from a strong pool rather than hire out of scarcity.

Sullivan-Astor also shared a finding that complicates how pipeline investments are typically designed, noting that the sector's workforce is more interdisciplinary than aggregate numbers suggest. Survey respondents in the HECC study averaged seven to eight types of work, meaning that focusing pipeline investments on a single occupation, such as fuels reduction workers or

[1] Mindy Crandall et al., *The 2026 Forest Report*. Oregon Forest Resources Institute, 2026. TheForestReport.org
[2] ECOnorthwest, *Oregon Forest Operations and Management Workforce Study*. Prepared for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2025. https://www.oregon.gov/workforceboard/data-and-reports/Documents/Forestry%20Operations%20%26%20Management%20Workforce%20Study.pdf

climate-smart forestry specialists, risks leaving out activities such as commercial logging, road work and transportation work that knit the rest together.

A Sector Under Pressure

Heidi Huber-Stearns of the University of Oregon's Ecosystem Workforce Program framed the challenge not as a training problem but as a system design and job quality problem. Her presentation drew on findings from *Fire Paths*[3], a research project conducted through the Ecosystem Workforce Program in collaboration with FireGen, a nonprofit led by early-career workers in the fire and restoration sector. Fragmentary, temporary work doesn't constitute a career, and people who have better options are likely to leave. Huber-Stearns said the program's eight-need framework spans the conditions that a functional workforce system requires: strong wages and labor standards, empowering workplaces, clear career trajectories, health and family benefits, good workforce data, place-based and Indigenous systems, sustained funding, and stable government capacity. Every one of these conditions was raised in the summit discussions that followed.

Federal funding contraction is a significant disruption the sector is managing right now, and it cuts across every subsector simultaneously. Corps programs, state agencies, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, consulting foresters, and restoration contractors all carry substantial exposure to federal dollars that are contracting. Huber-Stearns pointed to a specific consequence: Contractors doing labor-intensive forest work are taking contracts at cost, sometimes losing money, just to keep their crews employed through the off-season so those same crews are available for fire season. Separating the forest workforce from the fire workforce, as policy often does, misunderstands how these businesses actually operate.

The data from the HECC study showed that logging employment has declined 29% over the past decade, even as nurseries, support activities and forest management have grown. These divergent trends are largely invisible in aggregate numbers. The sector grew at 2% over that period, while Oregon's overall employment grew at 14%. Inflation, supply chain uncertainty and depressed timber markets have led many employers to defer workforce investment in this cycle.

OFRI Board Chair Paul Betts offered a longer view in his closing remarks. Young people are reconsidering the cost-to-salary calculus on four-year degrees, and trades are recovering social respect they lost over the course of decades. The outdoor work required in forestry is a genuine recruitment advantage that most industries can't match. Whether that cultural shift translates into candidates, he suggested, depends on whether the sector can reach them.

Key Workforce Challenges and Conditions

Throughout the summit, participants and presenters repeatedly identified several workforce conditions and challenges that influence the ability to recruit, train and retain workers. These

[3] Heidi Huber-Stearns et al., *Fire Paths: Building Fire-Resilient Workforces.* Ecosystem Workforce Program, University of Oregon, forthcoming/draft.

themes emerged across research presentations, panel discussions and participant conversations, and provided important context for the discussions that followed. They include:

Fragmented labor markets. The “forest sector workforce” refers to a set of labor markets that share a landscape but not an employer structure. A large integrated timber company, a small logging contractor, a federal agency and a restoration nonprofit are all part of the same sector. They do not share hiring processes, compensation structures, career ladders or training infrastructure, and solutions designed for one part of the sector routinely miss others.

Small employers are structurally excluded. According to the HECC study, 69% of logging employers have 10 or fewer employees. They typically do not have human resources staff, budgets for career fair participation or bandwidth for programs that require sustained organizational engagement. Participants expressed concern that many workforce and pipeline programs are more accessible to larger employers and may not adequately reach the small contractors who make up much of the sector.

H-2B dependence is underexamined. H-2B visa dependence was identified by participants as an important but often overlooked workforce issue. Participants noted that H-2B visa workers play a significant role in portions of the logging and in-woods operations workforce, and fill positions that domestic recruitment has struggled to fill. Several participants suggested that workforce strategies should account for this component of the sector’s labor supply.

Identity and access are key barriers. Both were named consistently across every subsector. “Identity” refers to two distinct problems: first, young people who believe the private sector doesn’t care about the land and who therefore won’t consider forest industry careers; and second, young people who simply don’t know these jobs exist. Both require sustained personal contact (not a brochure or a website) when people are forming their career identities. “Access” refers to how people get in. Entry pathways into the sector are nonlinear and relationship-dependent. Family connections, entry-level crew positions, corps programs and informal referrals are how most people find their way to this work. This is how the sector has always operated, and it creates a challenge for anyone who doesn’t have those relationships.

The pathway problem is not in one place. The path from awareness to employment runs through career exposure, relevant training, connection to an employer, hiring and retention after the hire. Each step involves different institutions that often don’t communicate with each other, and connections are failing at multiple points across every subsector.

What the Panels Covered

Day 1 featured two additional panels, on K-12 education and post-secondary pathways, that grounded the research findings in practice. The themes that emerged from those panels run through the breakout session findings and the recommendations that follow:

The K-12 panel made clear that the sector’s most effective pipeline work is happening through sustained, relationship-based engagement, not one-time career fairs. Hampton Lumber’s Dave Kunert described a kindergarten-through-high-school natural resource program in Tillamook operating since 2005, with Hampton holding entry-level job postings until graduation each spring so students can be recruited directly into openings at the company. Justin Rowley, a 24-year-old heavy equipment operator at the same mill, described the progression firsthand — starting with participating in 16 field trips as a sophomore, then serving as his school's Future Natural Resource Leaders (FNRL) chapter president, working the mill's night-shift cleanup crew at 18 and being promoted to a full equipment operator at 22.

OFRI Director of K-12 Education Programs Rikki Heath described the infrastructure the Institute has built to reach students before high school. This includes a bus reimbursement program that allows any Oregon teacher to bring students on a field trip to a forest site, the Talk About Trees classroom program (run through Oregon Women in Timber) that reaches approximately 65,000 students annually, and free curriculum resources at LearnForests.org aligned with state science standards. Her presentation also covered teacher support, including OFRI's investment in the Oregon Natural Resources Education Program at Oregon State University (OSU), which trains 800 to 1,000 educators per year, and an annual CTE teacher conference designed to connect educators with current forest sector research and practice.

Reynold Gardner from the Oregon Department of Education reported that Oregon's natural resource CTE has grown from four programs in 2008 to 41 programs today, reaching 75 high schools statewide where agriculture programs with forestry content are included. FNRL is now the second-largest student leadership organization in Oregon. Across the panel, the same theme kept coming up: Prior relationships are essential. Industry partners hand business cards to students at competitions. Teachers who know employers refer students by name. George Virtue at Weyerhaeuser described building his entire hiring pipeline through advisory committee relationships that started with a single tour. Programs that work are personal and specific, and programs that don't tend to be generic and distant.

The post-secondary panel identified a different set of gaps. The bottleneck is not interest at the four-year level. OSU's College of Forestry places 100% of its graduates from the forest management, operations and engineering programs in jobs. Its enrollment has grown from roughly 600 students 15 years ago to 1,400 today, and forest engineering applications are up 60% for the coming year. Meanwhile, Mt. Hood Community College's two-year program graduates roughly half its cohort of 35 to 40 students directly into the workforce each year, and its gender ratio is approximately 50-50, well ahead of the sector's overall demographics.

Rather, the bottleneck for colleges is structural. Mt. Hood Community College's Jason Pinkerton carries nine different course preps per year alongside 60% field instruction. That workload is not replicable without investment, and program growth is constrained accordingly. Virtue named a specific gap nobody had filled: a community college mobile mechanic journeyman program, with students employed at the mill while completing coursework at night. The post-secondary panel also raised the skills-regression problem, noting that students are arriving without basic field competencies that instructors once took for granted, such as backing up a truck on a logging road or securing a load.

Austin Ernesti of Trajectory closed Day 1 with another kind of evidence. The model he shared is simple: Broker the relationship between K-12 students and industry professionals, then get out of the way. He takes student groups to different locations as part of a series and has found that hearing from multiple personal perspectives over the year has a dramatic educational effect, even taking some Portland homeschool groups from believing “cut tree bad” to supporting modern sustainable tree farming. His framing on what actually changes minds? Show you care about the same things, create a hands-on experience, and communicate but don’t confront.

Day 2 opened with two panels before subsector breakouts — one on apprenticeship and workforce pathways and one on programs and models that are working — that produced some of the summit’s most specific and actionable content.

The apprenticeship panel focused on what it would take to connect on-the-job training pathways to long-term careers. Mike Norman of HECC explained that Oregon’s corps programs, the Oregon Youth Corps and Oregon Conservation Corps, together reach roughly 1,000 young people annually across 32 of Oregon’s 36 counties. Norman flagged that these programs were built on a federal funding model that is now contracting and predicted that the future requires more private sector partnerships. He challenged employers in the room to build them before the next funding cycle forces the issue.

Patrick Orr from Heart of Oregon Corps described what corps do well. These programs get young people accustomed to a full day of physical work and build soft skills, such as showing up, emotional regulation and interpersonal communication, that technical training doesn’t address. He pointed out that this skill set may not sound as exciting as getting the “credential of running a chainsaw,” but “it is going to take somebody from not just finding a job but maintaining a job.” He named the identity barrier directly: Young people who have grown up hearing that the private sector doesn’t care about the land won’t consider industry careers on those grounds. The solution, he argued, requires industry involvement when those identities are forming, not after.

Courtney Griesel of Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) described the gap that the Manufacturing Accelerator program the company is involved in was designed to close. Students arriving at manufacturing sites have often completed K-12 or GED programs that didn’t prepare them for the pace and accountability expectations of a mill floor. “If they’re two minutes late, that’s a write-up and that can lead to termination very quickly,” Griesel noted.

The Manufacturing Accelerator, run in partnership with Connected Lane County, is a paid, cohort-based, eight-week bridge program. The first phase includes four weeks of tours, hard-skills introduction, and heavy soft-skills emphasis inside a retrofitted industrial space in the original Springfield Booth-Kelly sawmill. This is followed by a second phase where each participant spends four weeks as a paid entry-level SPI employee, with a personal advisor bridging communication between the participant and the employer throughout. The model is deliberately open-book — Connected Lane County holds the template, with no trademark, and has made it available for other regions to adapt. Griesel explained, “When a career has a university, a trade school or a certification attached to it, that tells us there is some bridging happening over the key soft skills, but when they come to us with no bridge in between, it is a stark experience in the sawmill."

The success stories panel reinforced the same point from a different angle. Blake Manley of the Western Forestry and Conservation Association (WFCA) named the clearest structural gap in the room, saying, "We don't have anything in the state of Oregon directed toward training a logger to be a logger." Foresters have college pathways, but loggers have nothing comparable. WFCA has written a federal Wood Innovations Grant to develop an Oregon equivalent of Shasta Community College's Heavy Equipment Logging Operators program, a 17-week equipment-intensive cohort program in Northern California with a two-year retention rate above 70%.

The High Desert Education Service District's Brook Rich pointed to a support gap on the educator side: FFA has a structured first-three-years teacher support program that has demonstrably improved teacher retention in agriculture CTE, and yet there is no equivalent for forestry and natural resources teachers.

Erin Feeney with WFCA described the association's Forest Sector Workforce Development Working Group, which grew after the 2024 Mapping the Course conference from a dozen people to 131 participants from 87 organizations across multiple states. The group is compiling a resource library of school districts, career fairs, employers, internships, scholarships and stakeholder maps, but those are not yet publicly accessible.

Before the subsector breakouts, participants were introduced to a Workforce Coalition Framework modeled on the Oregon Clean Energy Workforce Coalition, which has successfully organized workforce development across a similarly complex sector. The framework applies questions related to three cross-cutting organizing topics (Pathways and Training, Job Quality and Retention, and Sector Identity and Outreach) across the three forest sector subsectors: forest operations, forest management, and forest products and manufacturing. Participants had seen this structure going into the breakouts, and it is referenced in the final section as one possible scaffold for future coordination. The framework itself was not formally adopted or endorsed during the summit but served as a reference point for breakout discussions.

Breakout Summaries

After full group presentations on the morning of Day 2, participants self-selected into three concurrent breakout groups, each focused on a distinct subsector: forest operations and support, forest products and manufacturing, and forest management. Each group worked through challenges first, then solutions. What follows draws from each group's report-out and flip chart notes.

Forest Operations and Support

The forest operations and support group focused on logging, in-woods contracting, restoration, fire, transportation and the support services behind them. Three challenges dominated: wages, consistency of work and the structural exclusion of small employers from most training solutions.

Entry-level wages in logging and in-woods operations are being undercut by other industries. Truck drivers, which are already the hardest position to fill according to the HECC study, face expensive Commercial Driver's License training requirements and hours that don't justify the pay at current rates. Consistency compounds the problem; logging is cyclical, tied to timber supply and market conditions, and workers who can't count on year-round employment choose stability elsewhere. For small contractors, training a new hire costs time and money they can't reliably recover. The group also named engaging Hispanic and Latino communities as an underdeveloped opportunity. The HECC study found that Hispanic and Latino workers make up 35% of the support-activities workers in the sector, but only 9% of forestry and logging proper. No coordinated strategy for changing that proportion currently exists.

The solution the group endorsed most strongly was an Oregon logger training program modeled on Shasta Community College's Heavy Equipment Logging Operators program, which is cohort-based, equipment-intensive, and has a two-year retention rate above 70%. As noted earlier in this report, WFCA has already secured a Wood Innovations Grant to work toward a version of this program for Oregon, and identifying a host institution is the next step.

Forest Products and Manufacturing

The forest products and manufacturing group focused on the workers who run Oregon's mills and manufacturing facilities, including production workers, skilled trades and equipment operators in sawmills, veneer and plywood operations, pulp and paper mills, and secondary manufacturing. The group returned repeatedly to two related problems: entry-level readiness and the visualization gap.

Students in training programs who arrive at mills and manufacturing facilities often lack foundational workplace behaviors before the first shift, such as securing reliable transportation, self-advocacy, and understanding what mill-floor accountability actually looks like. Employers described needing to address basic workplace fundamentals before technical training can begin. The Connected Lane County and SPI Manufacturing Accelerator model was cited as a potential working solution because it is paid, cohort-based, advisor-supported, and includes a personal bridge between participants and employers during the transition into the workplace.

The group also discussed the sustained K-12 engagement approach demonstrated in Tillamook, where Hampton Lumber has built a pipeline directly from school into employment. Participants suggested that understanding the strengths and tradeoffs of each model — the Lane County accelerator and the Tillamook long-term engagement approach — would help identify what could be adapted for other Oregon communities.

The visualization problem is distinct from the awareness problem. Candidates from populations not historically represented in manufacturing can't picture themselves doing this work, and information campaigns don't change that. Exposure, representation and seeing people who look like you succeeding in careers in the sector are essential. Retention challenges include scheduling inflexibility, housing costs in rural areas, and wages that aren't as competitive as those offered in the healthcare or construction industries. Some of these are within employers' control. Others reflect structural conditions no single company can fix. Directions the group identified as worth pursuing included industry-recognized credentials for manufacturing roles, a pre-apprenticeship model, and local navigators to help students move from school into employment.

Forest Management

The session focused on people working across federal, state, private and tribal land management, along with consulting foresters and forestry technicians. The dominant theme was federal agency workforce contraction and its downstream effects. Federal agencies are the sector's largest employer of professional foresters and the anchor of the consulting pipeline. Fewer agency jobs, less funding for state programs and contracts, and increasing workload expectations are reshaping what a forest management career looks like.

Participants noted concerns about wage competitiveness for Oregon state agency positions, with some suggesting that compensation may lag behind comparable opportunities in neighboring states and parts of the private sector.

Fire is also reshaping the job profile, given it is now year-round. Participants expressed concern that workforce shortages and increasing fire demands are reshaping hiring and advancement patterns within agencies. Several noted that professional forestry and wildland fire require overlapping but distinct skill sets. Fire also pays better wages, pulling practitioners away from base forestry roles.

The solutions the group identified cluster around two themes. The first is competency-based hiring. For instance, Washington is building a database mapping the actual skills required per role and using it to design alternative credentialing pathways. The second is sustained, multi-touch K-12 engagement — not random one-off career fairs, but repeated contact with the same communities across grade levels. The argument for concentrating that effort in eastern Oregon and eastern Washington was direct: Public image barriers are lower there, and industry relationships already exist.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Six themes came up consistently across the breakout discussions. They are not specific to any single subsector and reflect areas where participants saw common challenges, opportunities or needs for collective action. They include:

The soft-skills gap. Every breakout named soft skills as an unglamorous but persistent challenge. The same set of skills came up repeatedly: showing up reliably, emotional regulation, self-advocacy and adult communication. Many viewed these skills as just as important to long-term success as technical credentials. Corps programs, bridge programs like Connected Lane County, employers and educators are all addressing parts of the challenge, but participants described a need for more consistent attention to these skills across the workforce pathway.

Federal funding contraction. A decrease in federal funding for forestry-related agencies and programs and uncertainty about these funds were raised as significant concerns affecting workforce planning and program stability. State agencies, corps programs, contractors and education providers all described some level of exposure to federal funding changes. Concerns centered on the implications for workforce programs, contracts and staffing, while discussions also pointed toward the need for new partnerships and funding models if existing sources continue to decline.

Personal connection. Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of personal connection in recruitment and career awareness. Across subsectors, direct interaction with practitioners helps students and job seekers understand the work and the people behind it. Existing venues and networks already connect employers, educators and workers, but they are not always used as part of a broader workforce development strategy.

The sector's advantage. The sector's connection to the land was frequently described as a distinctive competitive advantage that many industries do not share. People who work in Oregon's forests, mills and restoration crews tend to share a real affinity for the land, which is both a recruitment advantage and a complication, since that same motivation can pull people toward nonprofit and agency work rather than private sector employment. Translating that interest into long-term careers depends on whether jobs offer the stability, career progression and working conditions that attract people to the sector in the first place.

Retention and job quality. The summit's conversations focused heavily on strengthening the career pipeline of getting people aware of, trained and hired for forest sector jobs. Less attention was devoted to whether the jobs people enter are worth staying in. Wages that can't compete with neighboring states or adjacent industries, limited career ladders, inconsistent seasonal work and rural housing costs were all identified as factors affecting retention. Heidi Huber-Stearns highlighted many of these conditions in her framework, including pay, agency, career trajectory, health benefits and stable working conditions. Recruitment and retention were frequently discussed as interconnected challenges rather than separate issues.

Coordination gaps. Discussions repeatedly returned to a workforce pathway that relies on connections among schools, corps programs, community colleges, associations and employers. Yet those connections often depend on individual relationships rather than a coordinated system. The WFCA Forest Sector Workforce Development Working Group is the most concrete infrastructure for changing this at a Pacific Northwest scale, with 131 participants from 87 organizations as of May 2026. However, the working group operates without a counterpart at the system level. There is no organizational body whose job it is to identify gaps, coordinate across sectors and geographies, and make existing resources findable. The WFCA working group is a convening of practitioners, which is valuable, but it is not the same as a coordinating body.

Possible Next Steps

The ideas below came directly from summit discussions and are presented as potential areas for further exploration and coordination. They are not formal recommendations of the summit participants or OFRI.

Make resources visible and accessible. The WFCA Forest Sector Workforce Development Working Group has compiled a resource library (school districts, employers, scholarships, internships and career fair contacts) that isn't publicly accessible yet. Making it public is a near-term, concrete step.

Pursue an opportunity and gap analysis. Multiple participants called for a more fully articulated demand-side analysis of how many workers the sector would need at full capacity, absent supply constraints, that could inform discussions with the governor and legislature. The HECC study provides a foundation, but a sector-led follow-up analysis could build on that work.

Start an Oregon logger training program. WFCA has a Wood Innovations Grant in place to develop an Oregon equivalent of the Shasta model in California. The remaining question is which Oregon institution is willing to host it and what a sustainable funding structure looks like.

Replicate the Connected Lane County model. The template for this training program is open-book and available. The model requires a local convening partner with the trust of employers, schools and families; not just an organizational connection, but the relationship capital that makes participation worth the risk. Identifying those partners in other Oregon regions is the concrete next step.

Build a formal corps-to-private-sector pathway. Corps programs build the foundational skills private sector employers need, but most participants don't end up in private sector forestry jobs because the connection isn't made at the right moment. A formal memorandum of understanding between HECC and contractor associations to embed career-exposure components at the start of corps cohorts would be a structural fix, not a marketing fix.

Invest in teacher support infrastructure for forestry CTE. Unlike agriculture, which has established teacher preparation programs at several institutions, forestry and natural resources CTE has no equivalent pathway for developing new teachers, which influences who enters the profession and how prepared they are. FFA has a structured support program for the first three years of teaching agriculture that participants described as effective in improving teacher retention in agriculture CTE. Several participants noted the absence of a comparable support structure for forestry and natural resources educators and pointed to the FFA model as a potential starting point.

Establish a formal industry connection to FNRL programs. FNRL is the second-largest student leadership organization in Oregon. Participants noted that industry involvement with FNRL programs is often relationship-based and varies by community. A more formal advisory structure could give employers meaningful input before students graduate and provide FNRL programs with a clearer line of sight to employment opportunities.

Use the coalition framework as a scaffold for future coordination. Participants left the summit with shared exposure to a draft Workforce Coalition Framework. Whether OFRI leads that coordination or supports another organization in doing so is a question its board will need to engage. The framework was presented as a possible organizing structure rather than a formal proposal.

Looking Ahead

The OFRI Workforce Summit brought together approximately 50 leaders from across Oregon's forest sector to examine workforce challenges and identify possible directions for collective action. Across presentations, panels and breakout discussions, participants described a sector facing significant workforce pressures, including an aging workforce, funding uncertainty, wage competitiveness challenges and barriers that make recruitment, training and retention difficult to sustain.

The discussions also pointed to areas of opportunity. Participants highlighted existing programs, partnerships and models that are producing results, while identifying potential areas for coordination where collective action could strengthen workforce development across the sector. Some of those opportunities can be pursued in the near term. Others require new partnerships, new resources or an organization willing to play a coordinating role.

The sector's advantage is that it attracts people who care deeply about the work and the landscapes where it takes place. The challenge is making those opportunities visible early enough to matter and building the pathways, connections and working conditions that allow that interest to become a long-term career.