

Forest Cluster Economic Development Strategy

Forestry Workforce

Strategy Recommendations

- Establish employer-led training consortia by county or workforce region.
- Expand forest cluster employers outreach programs to teachers, school counselors, students and parents that promote career opportunities in the cluster and develop appropriate forestry education programs and specific skill training for students who want to pursue university/community college education or enter the workforce directly from high school.
- Establish a Career Pathways in Wood Products programs to link high school students and adults with careers in the cluster based on the Oregon Forest Resources Institute's Careers In Forestry Program model.

Immediate Actions Needed

- Support the Governor's *Investing in Human Capital and Promoting Innovation* Initiative.
- Support increased investments in forestry, business, and engineering programs at public universities and community colleges to increase the supply of professional graduates
- Maintain the involvement of the forest cluster in comprehensive state workforce development initiatives.

Why actions are important

Of the 12 statewide-traded industry clusters tracked by the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department, the Wood and Other Forest Products Cluster trails only Businesses Services in the number of people employed. While the forest cluster is vulnerable to the availability to sufficient timber resources for stability, it also needs access to a skilled workforce. Historically, the forest cluster had few problems attracting workers. Today, however, significant issues are emerging that must be addressed. These issues include:

Skill Shortages

Wood products manufacturing employers report difficulty in filling the following skill positions: industrial electricians, welders, maintenance workers, supervisors, truck drivers and information technology technicians. Other shortages have been identified for workers with basic math skills and knowledge of quality assurance techniques.

Recruitment

Many of the skill shortages identified above are not unique to the wood products industry. There is a general shortage of skilled electricians, welders, truck drivers, etc. across Oregon and nationally. However, rural wood products manufacturers report difficulty recruiting skilled workers from outside their communities for the following reasons:

1. Metropolitan communities offer many employment opportunities for the skilled worker, but the rural wood products manufacturing facility may be the only significant employer in a community. This leaves the employee with few alternatives if employment is interrupted.

2. Housing availability and high housing costs are an issue in some coastal and Central Oregon communities.
3. Limited spousal employment opportunities have been named as an issue in rural communities.
4. Cultural – some of the technical professions like Information Technology are populated by younger workers in their 20s and 30s. This group seems to prefer an urban lifestyle.

Soft Skills

Soft skills are the most cited issue in employer surveys and interviews. Soft skill examples:

- Attendance/dependability
- Responsibility/professionalism
- Good work habits
- Positive attitude
- Willingness to work hard
- Willingness to work as team member
- Ability to work in a fast-paced environment

Wood products employers in Douglas County indicated in a survey that, for many positions, the basics of a good work ethic were more important than specific technical skills.

Perception

Perceptions of undesirable working conditions and weak employment conditions (mill closures and layoffs) may be discouraging young people from pursuing careers in the forest products sector. Meanwhile, perceptions of rising wages and employment prospects in service-sector businesses seem to be attracting more young people. However, wood products manufacturing provides higher pay for new hires of all age classes versus general merchandise stores – the most common source of service-sector employment in non-metropolitan communities.

Retirements and Replacement Openings

Although economists expect low employment growth in Oregon's manufacturing sector over the next decade, the Oregon Employment Department expects nearly 47,000 current manufacturing workers to retire or move to another profession during the next decade.

Like manufacturing in general, wood products manufacturing is projected to have fewer openings due to growth. However, the Oregon Employment office projects more openings due to retirements in the wood products manufacturing segment (19%) than the average in the general manufacturing category (15%).

Needed private sector actions

- Work with legislative leaders to develop more career development/work readiness programs for the K-12 system.
- Work with legislative leaders to fund more skill training (welding, supervisory, etc.) programs.
- Forestry and wood products employers need to share leadership with local educational and workforce/training organizations.

- Work with faculty at Oregon higher education institutions to develop continuing education and professional development courses that are relevant to industry workforce needs
- Actively communicate employee skills needed from new college graduates
- Explore Career Pathways type programs to:
 1. Build general work readiness for high school students
 2. Improve perceptions of the industry
 3. Provide a skill training road map for a career in wood products manufacturing
 4. Reestablish your industry as a career option for that large portion of high school graduates that don't opt for college
- Establish regional employer driven training consortia.
- Financial participation, if possible.

Role for state government

- Increase investment in Career and Technical Education Programs.
- Increase the size and flexibility of the Employer Workforce Training Fund.
- Encourage programs that reinforce personal effectiveness.
- Increase focus on critical competencies.
- Maintain the OFRI Careers in Forestry Program.
- Use OCEDD Business Development Officers as Regional Workforce Response Teams to inform industry partners of skill training resources and opportunities.

Agency assignments

- Oregon Economic and Community Development Department
 1. Distribute The Ten-Year Plan for the Forest Products Cluster and Wood Products Industry developed by the Oregon Consortium and Oregon Workforce Alliance.¹
 2. Investigate the Tillamook forestry workforce pilot project and distribute results.
 3. Solicit regional workforce plans and evaluate for applicability for the forest cluster.
 4. Notify regional cluster companies of opportunities to apply for training funds.
 5. Involve forest cluster team and industry members in new workforce development proposals.
- Oregon Forest Resources Institute
 1. Maintain the Careers in Forestry Program
- Oregon Department of Forestry
 1. Maintain forestry education opportunities through the Tillamook Forest Center and other venues
 2. Maintain the student forestry intern program
- Oregon State University
 1. Maintain concentrated recruitment efforts at OSU's College of Forestry to sustain a pipeline of qualified graduates especially suited for industry needs
 2. Develop and offer professional development courses and materials for forest industry professionals

Milestones

- Implementation of at least one regional Forest Cluster Career Pathways project. Tillamook and Douglas counties are two candidates.

¹ <http://www.tocowa.org/Wood%20Products%2010%20Year%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf>

Additional resources needed

- \$250,000 is needed to fund a career pathways project for a two-year period.

Deliverables

- Five completed forestry related skill specific (welding, supervisory, etc.) training projects
- Implementation, in at least one region, of the The Oregon Consortium and Oregon Workforce Alliance ten-year strategy

Measures of success

- Skill certificates
- Higher Wages
- Increased productivity
- Increased workforce interest in the cluster
- More motivated and dependable workers