Standing atop a high point in the former Tillamook Burn, Ed Schroeder reflected in 1985, a newly green landscape of the Coast Range and said something that in many ways sums up his own remarkable career: “It’s wisdom in a man’s lifetime that he can see something like this happen.”

Schroeder believed that the monumental change visible in the Tillamook Forest brought about through a quarter-century of reforestation after the devastating fires of the 1930s and 1940s, was the greatest landmark of his leadership and perseverance—is the forest come to life from the ashes of the Tillamook Burn.

By 1955, Schroeder was looking for a new challenge and actually thought about making a move into private industry. But New Forest Steward Dwight Flippes had other ideas. Flippes recognized that the next big challenge facing ODF would be establishing a solid forest management program and he could think of only one person for that challenge.

Schroeder moved to Salem in 1955 and took on a new organizational task as Assistant State Forester for Forest Management. The state was acquiring new lands, most of them burned or cut-over, in Clatsop and Tillamook counties. Existing forests in Coos County presented other management challenges. With a clear plan, Schroeder laid the groundwork for today’s State Forests Program.

In the following year, Flippes promoted Schroeder to Deputy State Forester. Over the next seven years, Flippes and Schroeder furthered decentralized the agency, strengthened its relationships with landowners and operators, and set a tone that ODF was an organization that knew how to get things done.

In 1963, the Board of Forestry asked Schroeder to take over as Chief of Operations for the agency, allowing Flippes to release those responsibilities, but to stay on as he struggled with health issues. When Phipps retired two years later, the Board of Forestry asked Schroeder to assume the State Forester’s job. Despite a family tragedy at that time—the untimely death of his son and daughter-in-law in an auto accident—Schroeder agreed to the challenge. He had a few more accomplishments in mind.

With ODF earning a reputation for effectiveness under his leadership, and rehabilitation of the Tillamook Burn well on its way, Schroeder took on two new initiatives: developing forest regulations for Oregon’s private forests and articulating a vision of long-term sustainability for all of Oregon’s 28 million acres of forest.

In the mid-1960s, ODF began to see disturbing results about the effectiveness of the Forest Conservation Act that required operators to leave seed trees standing to ensure new trees would grow after harvest. On-the-ground surveys were showing that the act was not getting the job done, and many harvested areas were becoming brush fields where no new trees would grow. The Board of Forestry asked ODF to develop a new approach that would increase the effectiveness of reforestation and examine other protections to put in place during harvest operations. Not everyone was wild about the idea, including one Board member who resigned in disagreement. Within the industry, support for the reforms remained tepid, yet Schroeder decided to forge ahead.

A series of public meetings and workshops was held around the state in 1969 and 1970 with representatives from the industry, environmental groups, government, and the general public. Other meetings were held with Governor Tom McCall and the legislative leadership to shape what became the Oregon Forest Practices Act. The 1971 legislature was the final arbiter of the long process, as the package transformed from idea into statute.

Schroeder remembers having to address many legislators’ questions and misgivings about the bill. When it passed, Oregon had the distinction of being the first state in the nation with a comprehensive Forest Practices Act. Rule-making followed adoption of the act, with more meetings around the state. There remained a healthy level of skepticism from the industry and at one public meeting, Schroeder was even threatened with physical violence. Fortunately, an influential member of the industry stepped in to settle the situation with a vote of confidence for Schroeder and the act.

Over time that confidence spread across the industry, which today is one of the act’s strongest supporters.

In addition to providing leadership for this landmark legislation, during those years Schroeder was also involved at the national level, serving as the Oregon representative on the National Council of the Society of American Foresters, the National Smokey Bear Advisory Committee to the U.S. Forest Service, and as the first State Forester from Oregon to become president of the National Association of State Foresters.

Schroeder also initiated a conversation among the Board of Forestry about planning for the future. In the mid 1970s, Oregon State University Professor John Beuter prepared a landmark analysis of timber harvest and supply trends for the Board of Forestry that raised questions about the viability of a long-term timber supply in Oregon.

Schroeder recognized that these issues spanned all forest ownerships and jurisdictions, and that strategic planning and long-term thinking was necessary to avoid a supply crunch in the 21st Century. Again, Schroeder took the discussion on the road, meeting with landowners, legislators, interest groups, and opinion leaders, and worked with the Board of Forestry to express policy direction that promoted protection of the forest land base and called for intensive forest management, particularly on smaller non-industrial ownerships. The output of this thinking and planning became a blueprint for the future: the Forestry Program for Oregon, or FPFO. The FPFO has been revised four times since, and it remains the only multi-ownership, statewide vision and guidance document pertaining to Oregon’s forests.

At age 65, Schroeder was ready for a change of pace. He retired from ODF in December 1979, but his work in service to Oregon wasn’t over. A few years after Schroeder’s retirement, Governor Vic Atiyeh asked him to serve on the board of the Public Employees Retirement System, which he did for nine years - four of those years as Chairman. Schroeder also spent eight years of his retirement as a contract public affairs representative for Willamette Industries.

Looking back over his career, Schroeder says the whole journey has been a great adventure. From logging camps to fire camps, from a new-hire employee to running the whole show; hobnobbing with Governors and other leaders to guiding new employees and young foresters. And, of course, watching a new forest come to life from the ashes of the Tillamook Burn. Schroeder’s best hope and wish for the future—and ultimately the greatest landmark of his leadership and perseverance—is growing today in Oregon’s forests.