



J. Ed Schroeder

1914 - 2010

Standing atop a high point in the former Tillamook Burn, Ed Schroeder looked across the newly green landscape of the Coast Range and said something that in many ways sums up his own remarkable career: "It is seldom in a man's lifetime that he can see something like this happen."

Schroeder was reflecting on 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. But he could have been talking about his own life and pathway to Oregon's highest position of forest leadership. Over the 70-plus years of his working life, Schroeder came to know and shape Oregon's forests and forest policy in a personal and enduring way.

Born in 1914 into a pioneer family that homesteaded east of Gates in Linn County, Schroeder quickly learned that forests, trees, and timber were the family business. His earliest years were spent in a logging camp near Detroit, and in the 1930s, Schroeder sought out the risky but high-paying work of a contract timber faller and buckler. He knew that if he was going to go on to college in forestry, he was going to have to work his way through, one job at a time.

One of Schroeder's first jobs was in 1933-34 for the Civilian Conservation Corps teaching hundreds of young men how to operate a saw, fell snags, and stay alive as they cleared corridors in the Detroit Ranger District of the Willamette National Forest. Schroeder also spent the summer of 1934 in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness on a maintenance crew. He enrolled that fall at (then) Oregon State Agricultural College in pursuit of his forestry degree.

All during the mid and late 1930s, Schroeder saved his money from contract logging and later paid it out for tuition. The late 1930s were also a personally satisfying time as Ed met and married Louise Walsh in 1938, and began married life in a small cabin they built near Detroit.

In 1940, Schroeder suffered a serious accident that changed the course of his future. He was standing on a cedar windfall to get out of the way of a Douglas-fir he was felling, when the fir came down wrong and unexpectedly hit the end of the log he was standing on, sending Schroeder flying into the air and back down, landing on his back across the windfall. As a result of the injuries he sustained, he could not return to difficult logging jobs.

In the midst of his recovery, a pathway opened for Schroeder's forestry career with ODF. The 1941 legislature had approved the Forest Conservation Act and appropriated funds to hire five technical foresters to administer the new rules. The act is largely recognized as the precursor to the Oregon Forest Practices Act and evidence that forestry in Oregon had begun to evolve from simply cutting trees and fighting fires.

In the spring of 1941, Schroeder was hired to administer and enforce the new act and state forest fire laws in Clackamas County. Schroeder immediately created an organized approach to the job. This became a hallmark of Schroeder's career - his ability to create order and routine, and a practical approach to getting the job done, out of a disorganized or unsettled situation. During the mid-1940s, Schroeder also finally completed his college degree in forestry.

In the summer of 1945, Schroeder led a division of firefighters working the big Tillamook Fire. His crews were credited with saving an 18,000-acre "green island" in the middle of The Burn. While pulling off this minor miracle, Schroeder was troubled by how the private Northwest Oregon Forest Protective Association (responsible for providing fire protection in the area) managed the firefighting. At an impromptu fire debriefing with State Forester

Nels Rogers, Schroeder stated that if he had his way, the whole operation would be run differently. In the fall of 1945, Rogers reminded Schroeder of his comments, and asked him to take on the task of developing a better approach to fighting fire in the Tillamook Burn.

For the next 10 years, Schroeder built a new organization. In Forest Grove, he created the jobs of District Forester and Area Director, positions that remain essential to the leadership of ODF today. He built new working relationships with the counties, landowners, loggers, and business in the local communities. He got training for private operators. He instituted decentralization and created an effective fire protection model that would eventually be used statewide. And he paved the way for the beginning of the State Forests Program that would go on to plant more than 72 million seedlings in the Tillamook Burn.

By 1955, Schroeder was looking for a new challenge and actually thought about making a move into private industry. But new State Forester Dwight Phipps had other ideas. Phipps 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, Phipps promoted Schroeder to Deputy State Forester. Over the next seven years, Phipps 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 Phipps 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 forestry 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 ran the spectrum from tepid to cool.

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.

Rulemaking 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 these 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 camp; 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.