



# Oregon Forest Workforce Study

Presented to the Western  
Regional Council on Forest  
Engineering (WR COFE)

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## Why This Study?

- ◆ In 2024, Oregon Legislature passed **Senate Bill 1552** directing HECC to study workforce challenges in forestry.
- ◆ Focus on **forest operations and management**.
- ◆ Aimed to understand:
  - ◇ Size of workforce
  - ◇ Workforce conditions and needs
  - ◇ Training pathways
  - ◇ Barriers to entry, recruitment, and retention

### Why Forest Operations & Management Matter

- ◆ Supports **public revenues** (education, safety, infrastructure) and **rural economies**.
- ◆ Provides **ecosystem services**: wildfire mitigation, water quality, habitat protection.
- ◆ Engages youth and underrepresented groups in **place-based careers** through outreach and training.
- ◆ Forestry is a **pillar of climate resilience** and cultural continuity.

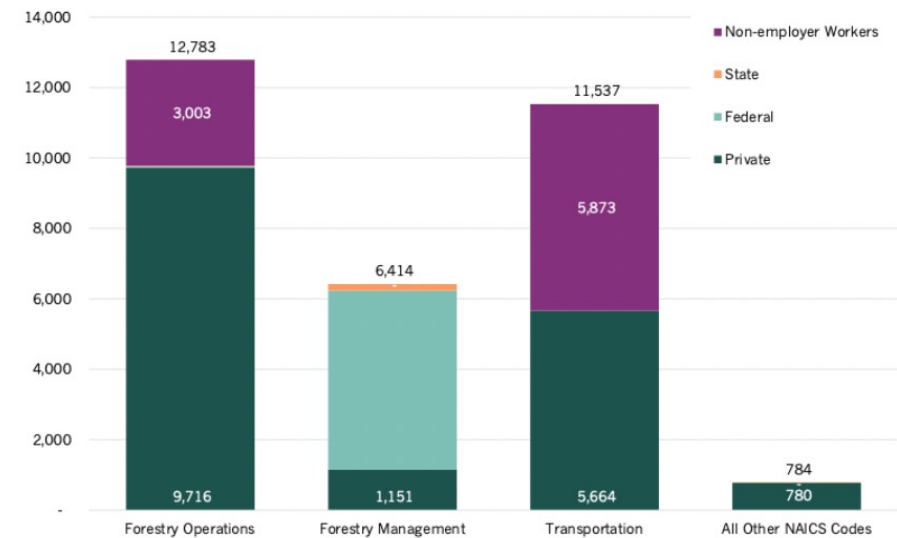
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## Scope and Methods

- **Mixed-methods approach:** quantitative data analysis and direct engagement
  - ◆ 106 survey responses from employers/self-employed workers
  - ◆ 28 interviews, 5 focus groups from employers, agencies, training orgs
  - ◆ Data from OED, Census, USDOT, and HECC
- Focused on five subsectors:
  - ◆ Forest Operations, Management, Transportation, Roads & Aggregate, and Technical Services

## Workforce Size and Structure

- ◆ Estimated total (2023): 31,513 workers
  - ◇ 22,642 employees; 8,871 sole proprietors/independent contractors
- ◆ Largest subsectors:
  - ◇ Forestry Operations
  - ◇ Transportation
  - ◇ Forestry Management
- ◆ Workforce is highly interdisciplinary and multi-role—many workers span multiple types of work

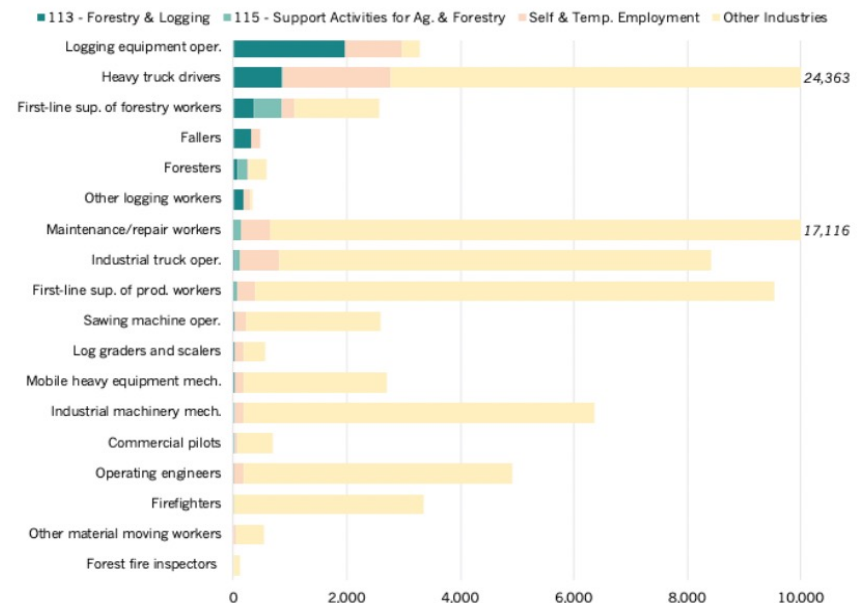


Data sources: Oregon Employment Department, QCEW, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, Nonemployer Statistics, 1-year estimates 2022.

# Occupation Analysis

- **18 Key Occupations identified, including:**
  - ◆ Logging equipment operators, truck drivers, foresters, firefighter, equipment mechanics
- 14 of 18 focal roles earn above the Oregon median wage
  - ◆ Wages vary by region but often exceed local averages (esp. in SW Oregon, Rogue Valley)
- Sector projects modest growth (~0.2% annually)
  - ◆ But 3,400 new workers/year needed due to turnover and retirements

Exhibit ES-3. Employment in Forest Operations and Management Focal Occupations, Oregon, 2023



Note: A large share of foresters who work in other industries work in government. Employment is capped at 10,000 for visualization purposes. Data sources: Oregon Employment Department, Industry-Occupation Matrix, 2023; OEWS, 2023; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Industry-Occupation Matrix, 2023.

# Workforce Characteristics

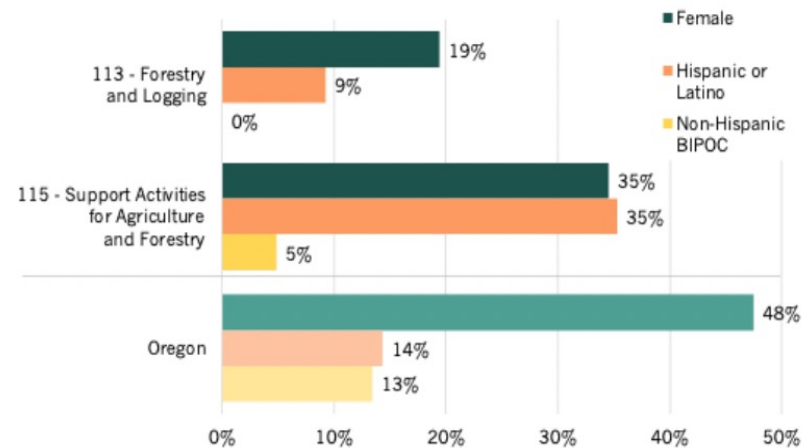
## Demographics

- ◆ Largely male and white; underrepresentation of women and BIPOC
- ◆ 35% of support activity workers are Hispanic/Latino (excluding H-2B Visa Workers)
- ◆ Workers are older on average; large cohort nearing retirement

## Education

- ◆ Just over 50% have some postsecondary education
- ◆ Heavy reliance on hands-on experience and on-the-job training

Exhibit ES-4. Employee Gender and Race/Ethnicity in Forest Operations and Management, Oregon



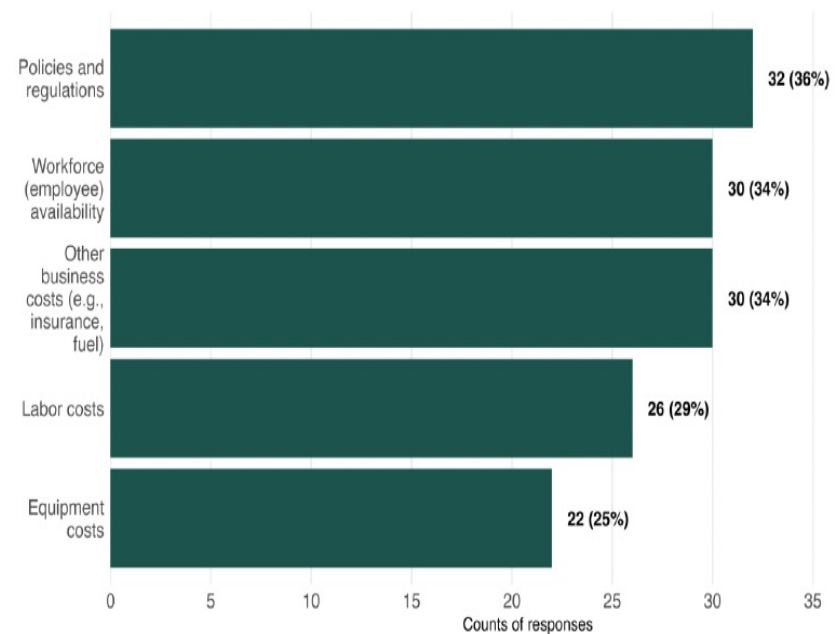
Data source: U.S. Census Bureau (2023) American Community Survey, 5-year Estimates

# Business Hiring and Retention Challenges

## Survey Findings

- ◆ **Work Availability & Regulation Barriers:** Self-employed respondents most often cited lack of work, followed by policies, regulations, and limited subcontractor access.
- ◆ **Top Business Challenges:** Employers pointed to regulations, workforce shortages, and high operational costs.
- ◆ **Critical Hiring Gaps:** Truck drivers, equipment operators, and entry-level woods workers (e.g., choker setters) are hardest to hire.
- ◆ **Retention Struggles:** Competition from other industries, skill shortages, and retiring workers hinder hiring and retention efforts.

Exhibit ES-5. Employer respondents' top business challenges in the past 12 months



# Business Hiring and Retention Challenges

## Focus Groups and Interviews

- **Recruitment & Retention Pressures:** Remote locations, housing shortages, and wage competition challenge hiring; employers respond with incentives.
- **Rural Workforce Advantage:** Local familiarity with forestry work, and local housing supports stronger retention.
- **Evolving Workforce Needs:** Flexible schedules and inclusive practices address generational shifts.
- **Subsector-Specific Barriers:** Logging is physically demanding, wildfire roles under-resourced, and public jobs hindered by complex hiring.

# Training Pathways and Programs Analysis

## **Progressive Training Pipeline:**

- Forestry workforce development spans K–12 education, CTE, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and postsecondary programs.
- On-the-job learning, peer networks, continuing ed (esp. for self-employed)

# Training Pathways and Programs Analysis

## Survey Results

- **Emphasis on Hands-On Learning:** On-the-job training and industry experience are seen as the most valuable by both self-employed workers and employers.
- **Alternative Learning Channels:** Continuing education, online courses, and informal training (e.g., word of mouth, family networks) also play key roles.
- **Networks Matter:** Relationships and peer connections are essential for gaining access, experience, and advancement in the field.

# Training Pathways and Programs Analysis

## CTE and Apprenticeship Programs

- **Widespread CTE Access:** 44 Oregon high schools offer Natural Resource/Forestry CTE programs; ~70 more include forestry in Ag Science & Tech tracks.
- **Career Preparation:** Programs equip students with hands-on skills for jobs, apprenticeships, or further education.
- **Relevant Training Areas:** Closely aligned programs include firefighting, operating engineering, trucking, maintenance, and industrial mechanics.

# Training Pathways and Programs Analysis

## Postsecondary Credential Pathways

- Forestry grads are the most likely to remain in-sector, with higher median wages over time
- Median quarterly earnings show clear premium for working in- or adjacent to forest operations
- Oregon's postsecondary capacity is still small relative to industry scale and future workforce demand

## Recommendations from Survey and Engagement

- Expand training infrastructure; improve regulatory policies; increase sustainable harvesting; reduce taxes; and increase industry awareness/public perception.
- Highlight how the sector supports **climate resilience**, **community impact**, and **sustainable land management**.
- Showcase the **full range of job and career opportunities**, including those centered on restoration and stewardship.

## Recommended interventions

- Conduct scenario/policy workforce gap analysis aligned with major policy initiatives (wildfire strategy, housing production)
- Promote Forestry careers to young people and broader audiences with messaging around community impact
- Strengthen employer-educator collaboration to align training with real-world roles
- Support equitable entry through inclusive practices and early exposure
- Modernize workforce data systems to better track outcomes

## Next Steps

- Establish or expand a **public-private coordinating body** to oversee continued research and implementation.
- Focus areas should include:
  - ◆ Workforce entry and onboarding
  - ◆ Upskilling and continuing education
  - ◆ Policy alignment and regulatory review