

Local Spotlight: John Stromberg, Mayor of Ashland, 2008-2020

The Spirit of Ashland: Artistry of Leadership in City Government

A Three-Part Interview Series by **Jordan Pease** and Three-Term Ashland Mayor **John Stromberg**
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Photo by Graham Lewis

Great community leadership is born from an artistry in combining disparate talents and crafting them with vision, wisdom, dedication, and hard work. In this three-part interview series, former Ashland mayor **John Stromberg** talks about the quality of leadership that is required to make a city great. John talks about his philosophy and his experiences in city government following his twelve years leading the City Council, helping make Ashland such a quality place to live.

John and his wife **Jane Stromberg** have lived in Oregon for 35 years, and John served three terms as Ashland's Mayor, 2008-2020, plus four years on the Planning Commission, and two years as Commission Chair. Prior to moving to Ashland from Eugene in 2000, he worked in the private sector for twenty years as an organization and management consultant. His major emphases were on enabling groups to work together more effectively, facilitating organizational change, and training workers to do highly complex jobs. He has a Ph.D. in Business Administration and a Masters in Statistics from **UC Berkeley**, and a Bachelor's degree in Physics from **Caltech**. He was recruited by the Economics Dept. of the **RAND Corporation**, where he did his dissertation on the "Internal Mechanisms of the Defense Budget Process".

Thank you for doing this with me, John. What are three of your favorite things in the world? Looking back at my life I would have to say, number one is cars. My first dream at age three was about our family car. And at age 13, my parents let me buy a 1930 Packard for \$15. Also, I love French vanilla ice cream. And the music of the 60s and 70s. Add teamwork; doing it or witnessing it in action. Lastly, genuine magic, such as we have in Ashland.

Oh, one other thing I like is bumper stickers. When our kids were in private school, I put two on the bumper of our Chevy Malibu wagon: "Great beer bellies are made, not born" and "This car protected by Rambo." My favorite for Ashland is, "Don't believe everything you think." And for the Council, "Be worthy of our City workforce."

Please describe the *artistry* of your work, in taking leadership in our community and conducting city business? First, educate yourself to what the City actually does. Second, accept the workload that goes with the job, day in and day out. Third, build relationships of honesty and trust with everyone. Fourth, recognize that Ashland has a 'brand' that can be used to our advantage, for example as a demonstration site for innovation. Fifth, recognize that quality of life is our strength because everyone who lives here wants to be here.

When I was eleven my parents bought their first car after WWII. It was a baby blue Hudson Hornet sedan with Twin H-Power and a Step-Down design. The most interesting thing about it (to me) was the

salesman. Polite, no push, just talked to us. My whole family wondered; how did he do that? Manage to sell the car?

I realize now that was my first experience of art in social relationships. Sometimes in Council meetings I would wait for a pause, since pauses can be more 'substantive' than additional content. Helping the Council make up its collective mind was an important part of the Mayor's job. I also had to learn to accept losing a vote and then to support the Council's ultimate position. That's also the art of letting things happen.



Photo by Graham Lewis

capacity, he/she can do important relationship-building that helps the collective of the City government live up to its capabilities.

How do you give voice to those who most need it? At certain times, for example, shortly after **George Floyd** was killed, I wrote a public statement and also signed on to President Obama's Pledge - "8 Can't Wait" the day it came out I also spoke with APD **Chief Tighe O'Meara** to make that we were already working on the "8 Can't Wait" actions, which the **Ashland Police Department** under his leadership has completed.

Jane and I and **Pam Marsh** attended one of the first workshops in the Rogue Valley on micro-aggressions and implicit bias. Also, earlier I attended the remarkable event, "Unpacking Racism" at the **Ashland Armory**, which really deepened my understanding of prejudice against all groups experiencing discrimination both past and present: racial, LGBTQ+, women, and others. And I convened an informal small group of community leaders on the issues from the City, with HR Director and **Councilor Dennis Slattery**, **Southern Oregon University**, **Oregon Shakespeare Festival**, and **La Clinica** to establish relationships in anticipation of crises that might arise, so that we had someone to talk to informally about the difficulties and complexities that might come up.

Soon after being first elected, I visited the City of Eugene's staff person associated with homelessness, who connected me with the **Salvation Army** (the City's main partner in providing services to Eugene homeless individuals), and met with the founders of **Safe Spots**, **Cahoots**, and a nationally known facility/program for people previously incarcerated, to help them reintegrate into society. A couple of years later, when **Jackie and Jim Bachman** had just come to Ashland, we went back to Eugene with

What is your idea of the true responsibility of leadership? I think the leadership of the City consists of the Mayor, The City Council, and the senior staff. The City Manager, Attorney, Department Heads, acting together. Together, they must discern the direction in which the City needs to be heading and communicate it to the community, the staff, and our partners in the region of the Rogue Valley.

The Mayor's position is unusual in that she/he has almost no power that is not conditioned by the Council, but has entry to almost anyone who is involved with the City and its business. In that

them to follow up on our first visit. Now Jackie is on the Board of **Options for Helping Residents of Ashland (OHRA)** and Jim is on the Budget Committee. And, of course, I was Mayor when the Council first funded what is now the **Ashland Resource Center** and we expanded the 20-degree shelter into the extreme weather shelter program.

There are other social service programs in which the City participates or runs, like the **Senior Center**, winter and senior utility subsidies, Etc. And the recently disbanded 'small grants' programs. And, of course, our climate change efforts that have included the 10x20 Ordinance, the Climate and Energy Action Plan, wildfire prevention, forestry, smoke regulation, Etc.

As Mayor, I found it most relevant for me to get to know individuals involved with emerging issues that were not yet part of the City's "essential services" but were very important in terms of the community's values, in order to help their concerns and ideas to find their way into the Council's decision-making process.

Also, I interviewed every person I appointed to every commission during the 12 years I was in office, except for the Climate Energy Action Committee, and to every ad hoc committee except the Budget Cost-Control Ad Hoc Committee Chaired by **Councilor Dennis Slattery**, who made the primary selection subject to my ascent. When I assumed the Mayor's position, and had a responsibility to help the Council understand what citizens and staff were trying to communicate to them, would frequently do a pre-session meeting in my office with the citizens or staff, which usually started out with my question, "What are you trying to say, in simple terms?" And then figure out how to minimize jargon, and/or more clearly communicate complex ideas.

You have many years of experience in leadership, what's your approach to dealing with the difficult situations that arise? To the extent I have an approach it's this: 1) Take the *urgency* of the situation and make it my urgency as well. 2) Attempt to articulate the specific concerns of the aggrieved party or group - and then ask to be corrected. Persist until they confirm I understand exactly what's wrong and why they are they are so upset. 3) Only when they confirm I get the problem from their point of view, ask what it will take to make things right and be prepared for a lengthy process to follow.

We are living in times when so many mistakes, faults, crimes etc. of our society must be remedied before we can move forward to fulfill the great promises and possibilities of democracy. Discrimination of every kind and the harm that is born out of it - all the way to genocide - is on the table. Equally, abuse of the environment and our fellow creatures on the planet.

The playwright, **Christopher Fry**, wrote, "*Thank God our time is now when wrong comes up to meet us everywhere never to leave us till we take, the greatest stride of the soul man ever took. Affairs are now soul size; the enterprise is exploration unto God. Where are you making for? It takes so many thousand years to wake. But will you wake for pity's sake?*" Now, how do we do that...?

Part 2, September 2021:

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Please share your perspective on the 5G cell tower controversy?

[Approaching that contentious issue] is another good example of how I would manage conflict during my time in office in general. Whereby I would take as much time as necessary to be sure everyone felt completely, accurately represented. Often this would change the tension by everyone feeling understood. From that point I might try to move toward building more points upon which everyone could agree, essentially engaging the entire group in working together on their issue instead of trying to attack, out-argue, or overwhelm the opposition.

Sometimes someone would make a creative proposal, or a heartfelt compassionate understanding of someone else's feelings. Or a suggestion for a next step, taking a break, or researching factual issues under dispute, etc. There might be a breakthrough that led to a resolution, or taking a next step in genuinely working together, or deciding to have recourse to a fact-finder. Or, simply deciding to take a break and only *then* coming back together if everyone was willing to try to get further with the issue.

So, in the case of the 5-G towers; the FCC regulations prohibited the consideration by local entities, of any health effects from the system, which is based on saturation coverage of the community via many small antennas all over town. A citizen group had formed that was outraged by the restriction and wanted to present scientific studies that showed negative health effects. Whenever they talked about the issue to individual City Councilors, that outrage tended to dominate the conversation. Plus, they presumed that all the negative scientific studies were correct if a qualified scientist said they were.

The City Council wisely decided to devote a separate study session to the issue, which gave me time to help the group make its presentation and I spent many meetings with this, helping to shape what they would say and how it would be structured so that the Council, and the public, would feel they were getting objective information even if the Council's hands were tied; so far as the City's power to regulate the system. My main goal was to make a case for an interested, intelligent person who had no previous knowledge of the technology. They diligently organized their presentation, divided it up into manageable chunks, presented by different members of the group, and were able to bring in a technically knowledgeable attorney to draw their argument together at the end.

The City Council appreciated the efforts at organizing and presenting their material and also hearing from the expert, but they still felt they couldn't take any action without getting into a legal struggle that the City Attorney said would be expensive and doomed to fail.

[It's also worthy to note that] during our preparation, I found a professor at the **University of California School of Public Health**, who had organized a large amount of current research on the negative effects of 5G. But I didn't feel I could bring his information into the presentation without taking it over. I hoped the Council would ask for follow up, but they felt they couldn't devote more time to an issue when

then couldn't take meaningful action. I refrained from contesting their decision. The group's leader ran for the Council in the next election but didn't win.

In what ways have you seen the advent of social media affect politics at the local level, distinct from the national level? In 1987, I was working on several projects for a large corporate client and the internet and World Wide Web were just emerging as significant means of communications. Remember that the World Wide Web was first designed as a way for scientists, especially physicists, from many nations and cultures to share and discuss scientific discoveries. All of a sudden, the world had taken a huge step forward in its ability to communicate; not only across cultures, but across groups with different levels of power. The political implications were quickly apparent; how populist and 'revolutionary' groups could more effectively challenge the status quo.

Initially, I thought, this is going to be hard on autocratic regimes, which I think was true. But recent developments around the world demonstrate that the same technology, now much refined, can be used to attack political regimes. Not only is the ability to reach virtually everyone now possible, but propaganda is possible at the local level. By 'propaganda' I simply mean something loosely tethered to truth, repeated over and over as if it were true. For example, these days a lot of complex messaging is going on, with life and death implications, about vaccination and personal freedom. My point is that the political world at every scale, with minimal technology, had changed forever. And this has included our community of Ashland.

Around 2016, when I was just getting involved in governmental affairs, the main way to catch the attention of the community was to write an op-ed to the **Ashland Daily Tidings** newspaper, or to appear at a City Council meeting and hope one's message would be reported by the Tidings. At the same time, the Tidings started allowing the posting anonymous messages on various online bulletin boards. This opened the door for propaganda in a different form: attacks on character, intentions, expertise, etc., that might or might not be true, and would not be attributable to a particular individual person. There were no fact checkers until much later, and news sources of all kinds eventually attempted to protect against abuse by implementing 'acceptable use standards' and online moderators.

My answer to your question is: what's happening nationally is going on in the Ashland environment as well, with possibly different issues, values, and intentions; but a lot of equivalent impact on our community. Interestingly, intentional online communities have been formed recently to promote healthy, socially just communities.

Coming from a career as a problem solver in the private sector before you became mayor in 2008, what are the best short-term and long-term approaches in city government? I don't see myself as a problem solver, because problems are often illusive issues. What I try to do is help organizations - in this case city government seen as a municipal services coop - function more effectively for *all* of the community as a whole.

From this position a lot of things follow: First, take care of the workforce, so they feel recognized, valued and supported. Also try to create a working environment that embodies the key values of the community. In our case, that's basically the full spectrum of progressive liberal values including

tolerance for members with different values. Plus, for Ashland; all the aforementioned wrapped up in high quality of life, anchored at one end by the national cultural treasure of the **Shakespeare Festival**, at another end by our extraordinary natural environment and by the rich 'diversity' of the individuals who have chosen to come here over the years. In the 16 years I have been involved as a city official, I have seen an exceptional movement towards instability, but also the need and opportunity to reinvent ourselves.

Part 3, October 2021:

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You've done a lot of work with wildfire control policy and forest undergrowth management. Please explain. When I was first elected Mayor, in Nov 2008, I immediately began informing myself about the **Ashland Forest Resiliency Project (AFR)**. The purpose of AFR was to make the forest in our watershed resistant to wildfire by removing excess 'fuel' and by thinning existing trees to restore it to the condition before European settlers arrived and began putting out all fires in the forest. The previous condition being an open forest with large Ponderosa Pines, from around which the undergrowth was removed every 7-8 years on average by naturally occurring, low-level fires. AFR proposed to remove excess fuel by mechanical (hand) thinning, and then maintain low fuel levels through periodic controlled burning of the understory.

There had been years of controversy about AFR, which had eventually been resolved through the creation of a 'community plan' for how it was to be conducted. There had been significant citizen input, summarized in a draft Record of Decision (ROD) that specified how the work would be done and what it would cost. Only three key issues remained to be decided: (1) two lawsuits in different federal courts had been decided by different judges, in 'opposite' ways; (2) since the project plan was now a community creation it wasn't clear who was actually going to implement the plan; (3) nobody knew how to come up with the \$10.5 million budget.

Sometime in the following spring the lawsuit conflicts were mysteriously resolved; the Forest Supervisor (USFS) decided to create a four-way stewardship agreement with the **Forest Service**, the **City of Ashland**, the **Nature Conservancy**, and **Lomakatsi Restoration Project** (a local non-profit that was in the business of environmentally sensitive forestry). And \$6 million of the funding was provided, with significant assistance from Senators Wyden and Merkley, through the federal government under ARRA (the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009).

The concept of a community plan proved to be visionary and was faithfully implemented. The FS decided which parts of the Watershed were to be 'treated' and how; Lomakatsi's teams carried out the environmentally sensitive fuel removal; The Nature Conservancy – by independent monitoring and on-site scientific research – made sure the environmental aspects of the plan were adhered to; and Ashland Fire & Rescue Deputy Chief for Wildfire, **Chris Chambers**, involved the community in continuous opportunities to track what was going on in the forest, learn how the plan worked, and view ongoing progress. This remarkable work became a platform that one day the five of us would use

to help AFR become a national example of 'restoration forestry' for wildfire prevention – but it took a real crisis and great collaboration by all four members of the stewardship to pull the project through...

Sometime in 2013-14 I asked the Stewardship Team how much money was needed to complete the project (Stimulus funds were covering the first part of the \$10,000,000 budget but where were the remaining \$4,000,000 coming from?).

I'd been asking this question more than once for several months and was increasingly concerned by their answer: they didn't know. I think we all assumed the City would take the lead for controlled burning because it was maintaining what I referred to as our 'wildfire prevention infrastructure' – but how did we get from here to completion of that infrastructure? They had asked our best source, a former senatorial staff forestry specialist who lived in Ashland and had a simple answer: it was time for Ashland to "put some skin in the game" and that meant cash, not 'soft' financial contribution such as funding for Chris's participation in the Project.

We had discussed this "skin in the game" idea before and all thought it unlikely. The City Budget Committee was preparing for the upcoming fiscal year and no such line item existed. I had no idea where to turn and was, in fact, blocked by my own incredulity that the Forest Service would invest \$6,000,000 in an important project and then walk away from it, but that was appearing more and more likely to be the reality we were facing, the key factor being initial stimulus funding, that wasn't part of the Forest Service budget.

It was some time the following week or so that I woke up one morning with the inescapable realization that it was up to me as Mayor to come up with the funds. At that point I set aside my resistance and my belief there was no way we could do it and personally, privately accepted the responsibility. Also, I knew I had to give up my 40+ year commitment to running and working out in the gym and put that commitment into the task. This latter I didn't tell anyone – but personally I was all in. The Mayor had a new responsibility (and also put on an extra 50 pounds in the ensuing months).

Once the decision was made, I realized what my first step would be. I would bring a proposal to the Budget Committee that they make a provision in the upcoming Budget for funding for maintenance of our wildfire prevention infrastructure, a cost those of us working on AFR knew was coming in a few years but one which I would ask the BC to 'advance' to the current year's budget to give me something to work with by demonstrating our "skin in the game." Soon thereafter at the next Budget Committee meeting I made my 'ask' – that we budget 'in perpetuity' \$350,000 per biennium for direct costs of creating and maintaining our wildfire infrastructure. I explained why I wanted it and how it amounted to accelerating by 3 or 4 years the costs of controlled burning to the coming fiscal year. I remember finishing off with, "This is non-negotiable," and I really meant it. I was indeed all in.

To my surprise, the Budget Committee voted unanimously to include the appropriation in their recommended Budget, and when the Budget came to the Council it passed unanimously and I knew then I would have to deliver.

The reaction was swift. The next day all four of the AFR Team members contacted me to tell me how excited they were about my action and the Budget Committee's response. TNC's **Darren Borgias** invited me to a TNC conference coming up soon in Sisters for all 16 of its 'restoration forestry'

projects, of which AFR was one. I immediately accepted. At the conference I realized the context for AFR was national and I had personalized the project with a major national environmental organization, plus met several key staff, which included the restoration forestry national manager for TNC, **Chris Topik**. I especially liked being able to rapidly expand the circle of face-to-face relationships in support of our projects.

The next step was pure serendipity – I got an invitation from the **Shakespeare Festival** to attend the preview performance of "**On the Way**" in the Neil Simon Theater on Broadway and I could bring a guest. I realized Jane and I were attending (another non-negotiable) – and then had an important thought: we had a friend who lived in DC and had often invited us to visit and stay with her. While in Washington couldn't Chris Chambers and I lobby for funding for AFR?

We called our friend and asked if we could come for a visit and lobby for AFR. She immediately said yes, and we were on our way. I called Ashland Fire & Rescue Deputy Chief for Wildfire, Chris Chambers, and told him to make his reservations.

The next day I contacted The Nature Conservancy's Darren Borgias to tell him Chris and I were going to Washington and asked if TNC would help with the lobbying. He got back to me right away: TNC would schedule appointments for Chris and myself including with the Chief of the Forest Service; provide us with a handler who would guide us around the Capitol; plus, Chris Topik, Manager of TNC's restoration forestry projects, would join us when we met with the FS Chief, whom he knew well.

A few weeks later, when Chris and I found ourselves with our handler on our way to a photo op with **Senator Wyden**, an in-person meeting with Portland Congresswoman **Representative Bonamici**, and another with **Representative De Fazio**'s environmental staffer, I realized the great value of our Nature Conservancy partnership. Later in the day we were set to meet a key Forest Service manager who worked on the statistics of wildfires and wildfire fighting and then go on to what would be a memorable encounter. This meeting was scheduled for the Chief of the Forest Service but on the way, we learned the Chief couldn't attend. However, the Undersecretary of Agriculture – the Chief's boss – would meet with us instead. The Undersecretary was gracious, intelligent, well-informed and interested in our project.

Chris and I laid out in some detail how the project was going and answered the Undersecretary's questions but didn't mention our funding problem. Then it seemed natural to ask if he had seen a recent video we had commissioned by a gifted local videographer. He didn't, so I gave a brief description and suddenly I found myself saying, "...and in the middle of this video there's a Ken Burns effect shot of a male Pacific Fisher. He's almost six feet long, that smokey beige mink color, lying in the snow and [pause – leaning forward] there are *snowflakes* in his whiskers!" And then the following words appeared in my mind, "And do you know what that Fisher is saying?" For a brief moment I paused, remembered we were all in, and plunged ahead. "Do you know what that Fisher is saying," I asked. The Undersecretary leaned forward, "What?!!!" "He's saying, "I want my four million dollars!" There was a sudden pause and then everyone in the room broke out laughing.

The Undersecretary picked up the conversation, "How can I see this amazing video?" We gave him the URL, thanked him for spending so much time with us, and departed. In about two hours I got an

email...he loved the video and wanted permission to show it throughout the Forest Service nationwide. Permission granted, with pleasure. That completed our lobbying in DC.

Aftermath: In the weeks and months that followed AFR was visited by a number of FS staff: first the Forest Supervisor of an adjacent National Forest. Later the Regional Forester for Region 6 came (Region 6 contains the **Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest**, to which the **Ashland Watershed** belongs.) The Oregon State Conservationist visited (this position is in a different part of the Agriculture Department that manages farm subsidies but also funds fuels reduction work on private forest lands that are potential pathways for fire to lands such as the Ashland watershed.)

In addition, I met the Executive Director of the Forest Service Foundation, a non-profit that helps fund projects that don't get adequate funding from the normal FS budget, who happened to pass through town on **Cycle Oregon** (ultimately the Foundation contributed \$175,000). And the **State of Oregon Board of Forestry** decided to hold its annual meeting in Ashland during this period as well. They all came on an AFR tour too. The visits culminated in a visit from the WFLC (**Wildland Fire Leadership Council**), the body charged with setting wildfire policy nationally, which decided to have its annual meeting with a two-day session in Ashland, with Day #1 devoted to visiting and discussing AFR and Day #2 for a working session of the Council (we were told to prepare for 70 people plus federal security!).

Members of the AFR Stewardship Team made presentations on Day #1 as well as the Executive Director of the Ashland Chamber of Commerce, which had strongly supported AFR, a social science professor from Southern Oregon University, who had done important sociometric studies of community attitudes about AFR and its effects. Chris and **Fire Chief Karns** reported on communicating with the community both in the field and via the media and also plans for wildfire prevention within the city itself. The focus of interest for the WFLC was Ashland as a prime example of a Fire Adapted Community.

After the WFLC conference was over, a senior national Forest Service manager emailed me, "You have changed the face of wildfire prevention in the West."

We subsequently received a visit from the Oregon Water Enhancement Board, which distributes lottery funds to projects concerned with protecting water quality throughout the State. OWEB has since made multiple contributions to AFR.

Sometime in 2014-15 other money had started flowing to AFR. At first \$350,000 mysteriously appeared in its budget, we didn't know from whom. Then AFR was included in a Joint Chiefs Grant (for complimentary thinning work on private lands that could become pathways bringing fire into the Watershed) and Erin Kurtz joined the Leadership Team. Her job was to recruit private landowners in the 57,000 acres surrounding the watershed, along pathways for fire, to have Lomakatsi perform thinning on their lands. Erin was a perfect fit right away.

In addition, a significant number of trees were removed via helicopter logging, with several million board feet of marketable lumber taken out through the streets of Ashland – with positive public reaction, because it was seen as contributing to the prevention of wildfire in the Watershed. The revenue from the logs at the mills had, by law, to be spent only for direct costs of AFR but defrayed a significant portion of the costs of the helicopter logging operation (every log removed in this process

was measured in diameter, sorted by species for separate mills and summarized on graphs for public consumption).

Another apparent outcome of our lobbying trip – and perhaps the visits – was that Chris and I, both separately and jointly, were invited to many conferences and workshops. The most “high level” was a Whitehouse Roundtable on Wildfire in which I was an invited panelist (pre-Zoom, actually in the Executive Office Building). Also, one of both of us were invited to panels at the Western Governors Conference, Oregon State University, the University of Oregon, and City Club of Portland; a Conference in Boulder organized by a consulting firm that promoted the use of land use regulations for wildfire prevention; and events in Flagstaff which Chris attended. And, in 2020, Chris was named to the Governor’s (of Oregon) Wildfire Council, which would in 2021 develop a strategy for the State that included progressive ideas that go beyond but complement the restoration forestry approach.

Plus, for years TNC has sponsored a two-week TRXX training program in Ashland for controlled burning that has drawn both nationwide and international participants.

When the Region 6 Regional Forester came for a visit, we met in Pioneer Hall before and after the tour and while we were debriefing, I realized the Regional Forester reported directly to the Chief of the FS. As various members of the group were debriefing, a woman behind me began speaking in such an intelligent and informed way I was struck...and made a point to get to know her. She had been the State Forester in Washington State and was obviously a key player at the top of the FS (in fact she went on to become Chief of the FS during the Trump presidency and just retired last year).

At some point a very senior manager with his staff came out from Washington DC and Chris and I realized it was the person whom we had heard of only as “he who has the money.” So, Jane and I had a catered meal at our home for the whole group and made a nice mutual connection. Afterwards I walked to his car with him, and he said simply; “We’ll take care of you.” He went on to become FS Chief and then Undersecretary during the time of Trump. We had lunch together about 18 months ago when he was out on the West Coast and passing through Ashland. The latest I saw online was that President Biden has appointed the same Agriculture Secretary, Undersecretary, with this individual as Chief, as had existed during the Obama administration – so we should have some entree for participating in new initiatives addressing wildfire safety.

As for the money, after a couple of months some \$350,000 appeared mysteriously in the AFR budget (“he who has the money”.) Larger amounts came from many sources. Plus, we were invited to apply for other funding. Chris estimated at one point that we had received between \$10 and \$20 million (the project had expanded to being part of a joint project with another part of the Department of Agriculture, that provided funding for treating paths of fire in the private lands surrounding our watershed.)

What really made our efforts successful was the ability of our community and especially the AFR team, Chamber, university, newspaper, city government, etc. to truly work together for a project of great importance to all. In Forest Service parlance, Ashland was and is a “Fire Adapted Community.”

Lastly, early on as AFR was starting up, I casually said to the team that AFR should have an educational component. Marko Bey of Lomakatsi took up the idea and invented a month-long paid summer

internship program for 20 high school seniors from the Rogue Valley and local tribal areas to work as a Lomakatsi crew thinning the forest.

The work is hard, hot, with yellow jackets and poison oak, and the interns must learn how to work together for safety as well as getting the work done. At the end of every day an hour is devoted to a lecture in the field by a subject matter expert, for example in entomology, hydrology, tree and plant species, First Nation forest practices, etc.

The experience is transformative: what starts as a random group of young men and young women ends up a month later as a closely bonded team that is confident in its skills and committed to the environment and its protection.

When all is said and done, I believe this is the most important “product” of the Ashland Forest Resiliency Project.

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