

that the collaboration done to date will point the way to . . . a more positive and creative way of dealing with disagreement and controversy.”

### **SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY, PASSIONATE PHILOSOPHY: THE HAYES FAMILY AND HYLA WOODS**

As with Collins Companies and Malheur Lumber Company, widespread demand for workable solutions means that the forest products industry has benefited from thoughtful and innovative partnerships between nonprofits, philanthropy, business, conservationists, and communities. This is particularly true in eastern forests; west of the Cascades, the higher percentage of privately owned forests means that conservation groups have less traction.<sup>17</sup> But the Hayes family, owners of the experimental forest Hyla Woods, are working hard to find creative and positive solutions to the decades-old timber wars, and to prove that western forest products industries can balance profit and conservation as well.

Hyla Woods’ spokesperson and leader is Peter Hayes, the son of Ned and Sis Hayes (whose philanthropy has been so seminal to the Oregon Nature Conservancy); as such, Peter has both the timber industry *and* conservation in the genes. Building on his family’s sixteen decades of working with forests and quarter century of investing in Coast Range forests, Hayes is investing his own money to research best-practice forest stewardship and is donating long hours and expertise to help establish new markets for sustainable forest products. He is certainly a jack of all trades: a conservationist, forest products manufacturer, salesman, activist and policy advocate, researcher, educator, natural philosopher, and zealous volunteer all in one.

The Hayes family’s business and research base, Hyla Woods, is 1,000 acres of family-run forestland on the northeastern flank of the Coast Range near Gaston. The three properties that make up Hyla have a very typical Oregon history: logged between 1920 and 1950, their ecological value is much lower than what it was pre-logging, but they also have the potential to become biodiverse, richly productive forests once more.<sup>18</sup> Peter arrives at the gate of Hyla Woods’ Mt. Richmond forest in a mud-splattered stick-shift Subaru filled with tools and papers. Hyla’s mill and office are at the top of the forest’s steep slopes in a small clearing that, under previous owners, used to be a surely terrifying little airstrip. Rounding switchback after switchback, Peter knows exactly when to gun the car to get it up steep sections. He describes the forest as he goes, explaining dominant tree types, soil types, undergrowth, logging and replanting history, conservation milestones, and the highly localized thinning and logging tactics they have been experimenting with to help restore the working forest. Halfway up, in a stand of oaks, another car rounds a bend: the driver, one of the craftsmen who buys Hyla’s

wood, has just picked up a slab of milled oak destined to become a polished bar counter.

At the top of the hill the woods open up into a misty clearing. Two small buildings lurk in silhouette: the larger is Hyla's mill (tiny by mill standards), and the smaller is the one-room cabin that serves as an office and warming station. The cabin is a microcosm of Hyla Woods, built of thirteen different tree species all harvested and milled on the property. Inside, notebooks and diaries are scattered about: Peter and his family keep detailed daily logs of animal and plant sightings and phenotypes. Near the notebooks, a wooden cube rests on the table, with quotations pasted on each facet from Aldo Leopold. The nearest quotation reads, "The American public for many years has been abusing the wasteful lumberman. A public which lives in wooden houses should be careful about throwing stones at lumbermen, even wasteful ones, until it has learned how its own arbitrary demands help cause the waste which it decries. . . . The long and the short of the matter is that forest conservation depends in part on intelligent consumption, as well as intelligent production of lumber."

"Leopold made the case that we have choices in life and that we have a responsibility to the future to make the correct choices," explains Peter. Timber has been the family business for generations, Peter says, but early generations "had greater allegiance to capital than to place," progressing west from Massachusetts over decades and harvesting timber along the way. Like his parents, Ned and Sis, Peter has worked to ensure that disconnection with place is a thing of the past. His family's plan for Hyla Woods is, he explains, to find a way to create a replicable, transferrable model that unites forest stewardship with market demand for sustainable forest products. That means cultivating a healthy, biodiverse, and resilient forest that is also a working forest that will yield multiple products and generate multiple revenue streams. "Hyla's forests are recovering from decades of being used as a single revenue source created out of a single resource: a forest managed for its trees like an agricultural crop," Peter says. His goal is something more complex and enduring, a model that understands that the economic and social health of a timber community is intrinsically tied to the maintenance of a forest with all natural complexities intact.

The Hayes family's methods attend to both ends of the problem: on the one hand, they try to increase forest health by experimenting with best-practices in silviculture and harvesting; on the other, they are trying to assess community needs, build up partnerships, and develop a marketplace for sustainable forest products. Like many small family forestry operations, the Hayes log selected trees, sell logs to other mills, and mill their own logs as



Peter Hayes. Courtesy the Hayes family.



Hyla Woods' log yard. Photo by Michael Anderson.

well. Their milling operation is low-impact: the hand-built mill's equipment is compact and efficient, and to dry their lumber, they have built an ingenious solar-heated kiln. Hyla Woods is intentionally tiny, with small harvest and low production, and with an emphasis on product quality rather than quantity. They produce boards of varying dimensions and species, as well as artisanal, finely grained slabs, and finished items such as cutting boards and flooring.

But they also offer a product that does not yet have an easily assessed commercial value: their forest's health. The Hayes family harvests trees at a rate that is less than half the forest's annual growth rate, so the forest's volume and age continue to increase. They log carefully, with minimal habitat disruption, and they thin out weaker trees and replant with multiple species to increase ecological complexity. Education is another unquantifiable product Hyla offers: the family invites school and university groups to the area to learn about sustainable forestry and to help conduct research and species population surveys. And then, of course, there are the climate benefits of a healthy forest: Peter estimates that their forest's rate of carbon sequestration (that is, the amount of carbon taken out of the atmosphere and stored within the trees) increases annually and currently stands at roughly fifty times the rate produced by the Hayes family in a year.

With these products, Peter hopes to use Hyla as a testing ground for more sustainable forest-based economies. He and his family are working hard not only to develop and promote robust forest stewardship practices, but also to develop a marketplace that values goods produced to these standards. Peter spends much of his time building relationships: for example, since 2005, he has worked to create a collaboration between sustainable forest products manufacturers, contractors, architects, and craftspeople called the Build Local Alliance. Bridging the urban-rural divide is also one of Hyla's key strategies: to educate urban consumers to appreciate the higher value that local and sustainable products offer. Consumers' ethics are, for the Hayes family, just as crucial as producers' ethics—both of these essential ingredients drive conservation forward. The grower/consumer relationship taps into a core tenet of his beliefs: that the responsibility for conserving our lands lies with each individual. It's up to consumers to make conscientious choices as well as growers to provide them with the opportunity. "Business is a mechanism for making things happen," Peter says.

Hyla Woods is not a nonprofit—it explicitly sets out to provide a model of sustainable business—but it has been operating like one, with a strong educational and research agenda, and with a commercial model wholly founded on the family's conservation ethic. A healthy forest *and* a market for high quality, sustainable forest products are its long-term goals, and ambitious ones given that Peter has a business to run. When asked if Hyla Woods is breaking even yet, Peter laughs. "Yes, we break even and are profitable, but not as profitable as we must become to meet our goal of being a replicable model to others." Moreover, he says, "it also depends on how you define profits: we make choices, and part of the profit we generate goes beyond dollars and cents—storing carbon, providing clean water and safe havens to valuable species, or working with school groups don't have dollar values attached."

The family looks on its investments of time and money as a pragmatic form of impact investing that they believe will provide tangible returns to them and the larger community in years to come. Unlike many nonprofit advocates for sustainability, Peter's research and outreach are less constrained by the need to secure short- and medium-term funding while he works to pilot transferable models for long-term forest resiliency and business self-sufficiency. He resists being called a philanthropist, but the label fits. "Forests have been good to us, and it makes sense for use to try to return the favor," he explains. "We're fortunate to have the latitude to experiment to find out how we can make this a landscape that, in my children's and my great-grandchildren's times, can flow back into the community in a way that rebuilds its natural integrity."

Although their forests are only 1,000 acres, the Hayes family's idealism is a beacon for Oregon's rural economies. Russ Hoeflich, Oregon director of the Nature Conservancy, calls Peter "a powerful voice for conservation: he's learned from the best, and he's a highly principled visionary—a real leader among leaders." Aldo Leopold writes that "when the land does well for its owner, and the owner does well by his land; when both ends up better by reason of their partnership, we have conservation. When one or the other grows poorer, we do not." Peter and his family are working hard to prove that this elusive balance is possible.

**PLACE-BASED, PEOPLE-BASED CONSERVATION:  
SUSTAINABLE NORTHWEST, LAKE COUNTY RESOURCES  
INITIATIVE, AND WALLOWA RESOURCES**

As with many of these initiatives, effective conservation and sustainable development often depend on grassroots collaboration. Portland-based nonprofit Sustainable Northwest helps cultivate partnerships, and has itself partnered both with Hyla Woods and with Malheur Lumber Company to help build sustainable forestry initiatives, as well as with communities statewide to create a number of energy, rangeland, and water sustainability initiatives.

Sustainable Northwest was founded and for many years led by Martin Goebel, who cut his teeth as Mexico director of the World Wildlife Fund and held similar positions with the Nature Conservancy and Conservation International. For Martin, these experiences cemented the idea that conservation starts at a local and personal level. "People who think that you can do conservation and related economic development without community participation are 100 percent incorrect," he declares.

Created in 1994, Sustainable Northwest works to prove that assertion, providing support to local communities by facilitating conversations and collaboration around conservation issues. Over the last few decades, rural communities in Oregon found themselves at the center of rancorous standoffs between environmentalists and natural-resource industries, then the lifeblood of many small towns. Sustainable Northwest has worked with these communities to support local leaders as they find ways to restore ecosystems, create living-wage jobs, and build relationships within and between communities. Some communities find it helpful to have outside perspective, both for mediation in discussions and as a resource on working solutions. In those roles, Sustainable Northwest has helped to build lasting collaborations between often-disparate interest groups, including state, federal, and tribal government, ranchers, farmers, lumbermen, businesses, and environmentalists; it has also helped fund the resulting projects.