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Oregon Carbon Stock Inventory – Assuring Data from Private Lands Is Not Shared

Jimmy Kagan, May 5, 2023

Although much of the information needed to create the statewide Natural and Working Lands (NWL) Carbon Stock inventory will be collected from the 52% of Oregon that is publicly owned, any inventory of Oregon Carbon Stocks and Fluxes will need to rely on some data collected from private lands. Current plans for the inventory rely on two sources of private land data collected by two federal agencies. These sources and the ways the privacy of these data are protected follows:

USDA Forest Service’s Forest Inventory and Analysis Program (FIA). The primary source of private land data from forest lands comes from the USDA Forest Service’s Forest Inventory and Analysis Program (FIA). The FIA program collects data in a grid on all forested lands in the United States. FIA data have been collected since 1930. These plots are revisited on a regular time frame to record how forests are changing across the country. Although the data collected by the FIA program is publicly available online, the exact locations of the individual plots are not shared to maintain the privacy of landowners. A description of the FIA privacy policy is available online at: <https://www.fia.fs.usda.gov/tools-data/spatial/Policy/default.asp>.

The USDA Forest Research Stations collect and maintain FIA data. The program allows for the exact locations to be shared with researchers under a strict agreement that requires researchers to store the locations on hard drives that are never attached to a computer connected to the Internet, and to have securely locked facilities to store these drives when not being used. FIA data locations can be used to develop maps and models, but the actual locations of the plots and the data used must be removed from any products created to assure their privacy.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Natural Resource Inventory (NRI). The primary source of information from agricultural lands comes from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Natural Resource Inventory (NRI), which began in 1972. The NRI is “a statistical survey designed to help gauge natural resource status, conditions, and trends on the Nation’s non-federal land. Non-Federal land, which includes privately owned lands, tribal and trust lands, and lands controlled by State and local governments, represents nearly 75 percent of the Nation’s total land area ... The data is collected by NRCS rangeland and soil specialists and NRCS contractors ... The data collected about range and pastureland provide information about land use, vegetative cover, composition, and effects of grazing lands conservation practices ... The location of NRI segments and points used to create the estimates and other identifying details are confidential information as mandated by law, 7 USC 2276, and interpretive policy delineated in NRCS General Manual Title 290, Part 400.11, B(4) in Appendix A. (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/nri>).”

The NRCS will not share location data with anyone, including other federal agencies. The NRCS provides staff with access to NRI private data to help other federal programs, such as the USDA LandFire program, create national, regional or statewide maps. For these uses, the partner agencies create their models and data without NRI private locations, and provide the models to the USDA NRI staff modelers, who create the final map products and remove all sensitive data before providing it back to the partner agencies. There is funding in new federal appropriations to provide for additional NRI staff to help improve data on soils and vegetation from croplands and grazing lands across the country.