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The U.S. Forest Service Research Legacy Collection: ScholarsArchive@OSU

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The U.S. Forest Service Research Legacy Collection:

ScholarsArchive@OSU

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http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/dspace/handle/1957/93

In July of 2005, OSU Libraries created a collection in its institutional repository ScholarsArchive@OSU (formerly, DSpace@OSU) to house the U.S. Forest Service research documents that we planned to digitize as part of an in-house project. The project and collection name, the *U.S. Forest Service Research Legacy*, is intended to convey a sense of history. The Digital Processing Unit at OSU Libraries is working with two series from the Forest Products Laboratory (at Madison, Wisconsin), Technical Notes and "mimeo" Reports. Other documents from this and other research stations will be added to this collection if further funding is available, but only if they are unavailable in electronic format elsewhere. Our intent is to contribute the scope of U.S. Forest Service research made available via the Web in such a way that each item is easily located through commonly available search engines.

Oregon State University is home to one of the oldest forestry education programs in the United States. To support this program OSU Libraries has developed, over many years, a strong forest research collection. At the heart of this collection are the publications of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Research and Development Program. Many consider this gray literature. It is at least a "graying" literature.

The USFS research has its roots in the formation of a Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin in 1901. The first forest experimental station began in 1909 outside of Flagstaff, Arizona and many others were established in quick succession. As a result of the merging of regional facilities in more recent years, today the USFS Research and Development Program is a network of six Research Regional Stations, the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture in Puerto Rico, and the Washington, D.C. Office. Each of these facilities may publish its own editions of four series: General Technical Reports, Research Papers, Research Notes and Resource Bulletins.

USFS researchers have contributed over a century of work and research findings in an attempt to better understand how to preserve and manage the national forests. For example, the earliest long term forest genetics studies in North America began after World War I on natural stands of Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine. Likewise, the basic studies of wood properties used today are the result of early research conducted by the USFS. But the context for this research legacy, if not the research itself, is being lost. Researchers retire and die and take with them a rich source of firsthand information about their work. Special or branch forestry collections and librarians are becoming a thing of the past as a result of funding and space constraints. This results in a loss of collective knowledge about both the content and context of published research findings.

Meanwhile, the research publications of the USFS began being "born-digital" and made available electronically around 1998. As an aid to researchers and others trying to locate this information, the USFS introduced the *TreeSearch* database http://www.treesearch.fs.fed.us/ early in 2004. While it was obvious to anyone visiting *TreeSearch* on a regular basis that this database was growing, there did not appear to be a master plan for digitizing retrospectively.

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This is the context that gave rise to OSU Libraries' modest efforts to preserve and make more widely accessible a portion of the U.S. Forest Service research legacy. In November 2004, the government documents librarians at the University of Montana and the University of Idaho invited OSU Libraries to participate in a project to digitize USFS publications from the three western regional stations. Our initial strategy was to complete digitization of the current series for these three stations and then proceed with digitizing earlier work held at our respective libraries. This was to be a digitization "capacity building" project and a contribution to the preservation and enhanced access of an important body of public domain research literature.

OSU students, among them Philip Vue shown here, are a critical component of the OSU Libraries Digital Production Unit.

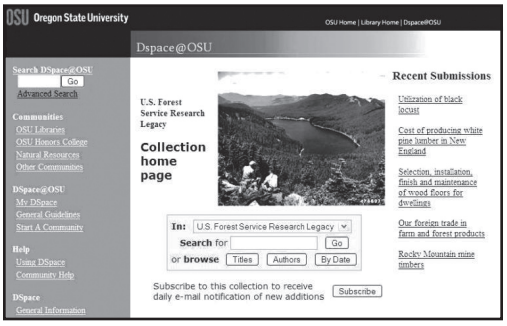
As our initial funding option evaporated each library found itself in a different position in terms of what constituted a logical "next step." While we continue to entertain the notion that a collaborative project could be beneficial to each institution, we have gone our separate ways for the time being. For OSU Libraries the next step coincided with our strategic goal related to making available digital collections of national and international importance and an increased involvement by subject librarians in initiating digitization projects.

In addition to adhering to high standards for digitization, we observe four guidelines in selecting what to include in the *U.S. Forest Service Research Legacy* digital collection. First, the collection must reside at OSU and be useful to OSU students and/or researchers so that digitizing this material provides better local access to a portion of our own collection. Second, the collection must be a contribution to research literature and therefore consist of a definable set of materials for which there are no current plans for digitization outside OSU. Third, after digitization and uploading to the ScholarsArchive@OSU, items in the collection must be easily located by anyone using the Web without special knowledge of this project. Finally the collection should provide a challenge in terms of adding to our knowledge of the digital production process.

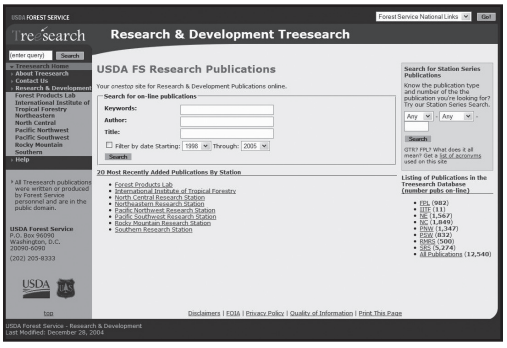
Since we hold material from all of the USFS research facilities and the breadth of research at OSU is sufficient to make any of these pertinent, the first criterion was easily met. Our initial choice for a definable collection centered on completing the four current research series for either the Pacific Northwest Research Station or Pacific Southwest Research Station. After several exchanges, we discovered plans within these two stations for digitizing this set of material and though the time frames were not definite, our second criterion dictated that we look elsewhere.

After an exchange of e-mails, it became clear that our biggest contribution would be to digitize the earliest reports series, *Technical Notes* and *Mimeo Reports,* published by the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin between 1919 through 1962. We were aided in our final decision by a strong interest on the part of OSU's Wood Science and Engineering faculty, which offered their in-house collec-

tion to augment our own. What has made this a successful effort is the enthusiasm of FPL librarian Julie Blankenburg, who acts as our liaison to the FPL and to the other *TreeSearch* collaborators. Ms. Blankenburg has provided knowledge of the publication record for this collection as a whole and copies of documents we lacked.



Dspace site: The ScholarsArchive@OSU serves as one open access archive for these materials.



TreeSearch site: Digitized documents will be up loaded into the USFS TreeSearch database.

The third "easy access" criterion is inherent in selecting a DSpace based repository as the home for this collection. Items in the ScholarsArchive@OSU can be located with a simple Google search and are made available there for anyone who wishes to download the PDF for their research, Web site or thematic portal. The library community has bibliographic access to items in this collection via WorldCat. For the forest products research community, the Forest Products Lab librarian is notified automatically as items are added to this DSpace collection and she can proceed to add these items to the *TreeSearch* database as their time permits.

Finally, the age and condition of this material has provided a sufficient challenge to increase our general knowledge-base during this project. Enhanced OCR capabilities will allow full-text searching of the "mimeo" report series. For added subject description, CABI Publishing granted OSU Libraries an educational license to its *CAB Thesaurus* to enhance the indexing of documents on this site. Indexing with *CAB Thesaurus* terms will begin in 2006.

We have learned that no one has the complete "digitization" picture for U.S. Forest Service research but that many groups have a stake in its future, including forestry librarians, government document librarians, forest researchers, and citizens with a local interest. It would be remiss of us not to note the contribution of regional, portal-centered initiatives such as Southern Oregon Digital Archive's Bioregional Collection http://soda.sou.edu/bioregion.html in helping to keep the U.S. Forest Service "research legacy" alive. In the future the content of this OSU collection may serve as the core of one or more regional or thematic portals, related to the U.S. Forest Service Research Legacy. There are sufficient research stories to support many portals and we are not proprietary about who starts or continues that process.