Got Computer? Then you are ready to submit your "Notice of Operation" to ODF!
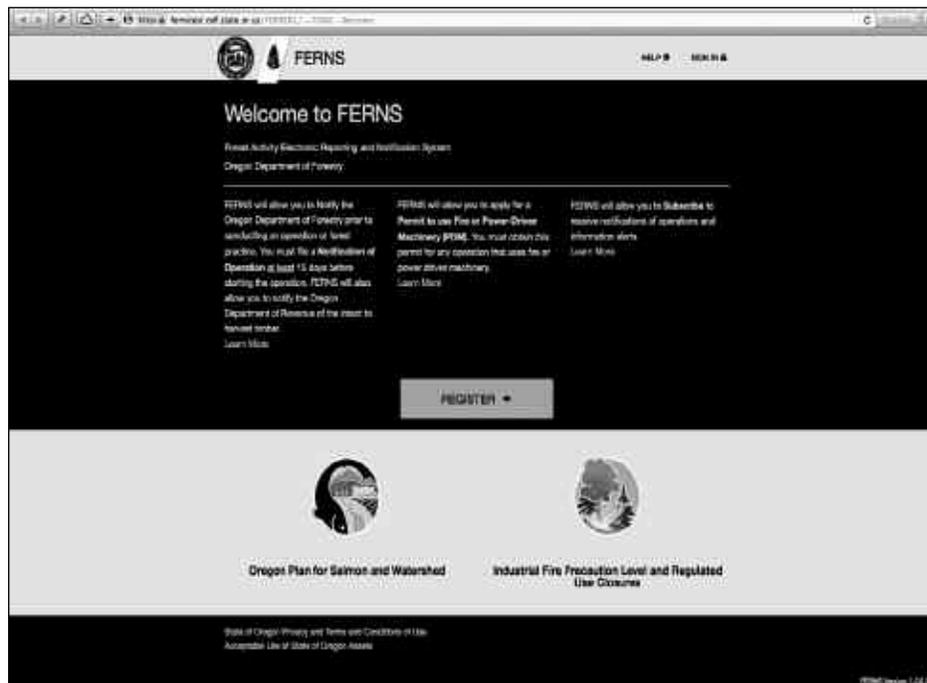
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It's called the **F**orest activity **E**lectronic **R**eporting and **N**otification **S**ystem (FERNS) and, beginning October 1st, it is how you will submit your Notices of Operation to the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). The *only* way you will submit your Notices.

I attended a training session on FERNS in August at the ODF Molalla Unit office given by the ODF FERNS Project Manager Mark Wigg and Kyle Kaupp, a Forester in the Santiam Unit temporarily assigned as a GIS Information Specialist for this project. I think they sensed anxiety in the room, and were hasty to distinguish their product from other state hi-tech projects, like the DMV computers a few years ago or the Cover Oregon debacle going on now (even though the framework was built by another big contractor, the Timmons Group of Richmond, VA).

And I think they're right—I found the system to be simple enough to navigate AND be a resource for all parties involved—including you!

Some of us had questions as to why this change is happening, or about the process used to develop FERNS. We learned that more efficient use of information has been a high priority

Screen shot of FERNS welcome screen

for the state legislature and leadership in the last several years, and that automating the Forest Notification of Operation process was mandated to help make this happen. We were assured that interest groups representing all aspects of forest management were consulted throughout the development process, that being 'user-friendly' was a priority for everyone. Wigg also said that the project team will remain open to suggested improvements in the future. I saw

them taking notes on our feedback, and at the end of the class said they had received many good suggestions at this, their first "live" FERNS training session in the state (I think they were prepared to be 'eaten up', so were pleased at only receiving a couple little bites).

You'll need the same information for FERNS as you have for the paper form. That is, landowner, timber owner, and operator information. Activity and methods used, site codes, concerns, waters, and resource sections are also similar to what you are reporting now. Also the same is the 15-day waiting period before the operation can begin, as well as a method for the ODF Forester to waive the waiting period if requested.

FERNS will link you to a very detailed User Guide that can be easily found and navigated from any screen. It includes pictures and instructions for every possible situation that could pop up in front of you.

Some other features of FERNS:

• You can begin an entry and leave it to come back and finish later. It's not complete until you consciously enter "submit".

• If you or anybody involved with your operation (landowner, operator, ODF, etc.) reports or amends a detail of the forest operation, all parties are notified simultaneously, so 'surprises' during the operation should be minimized!

• If you're a consultant or big land baron, you can track all of your projects and/or properties from the same log-in.

• FERNS will help you create a cool map of your property/operation. I found it to be more accurate than some other mapping tools currently available to woodland owners on-line. I was able to define my property boundaries to within a fraction of an acre, and could see 'layers' of information about my property, including some information that I didn't even know about before!

• You can upload documents you already have such as maps, written plans, study documents, or other documents that will clarify your operation.

• You can save and print a summary of your Notice, including all the information you've entered, the map and the ODF Forester contact information who will be processing the Notification. You'll get the Notification Number for the operation immediately (but don't forget the 15 days before you start!).

• When your operation is complete, you can request to have your information removed from the system, or else leave it for the next time you need to submit a Notice.

I told the FERNS project team about the American Forest Foundation's "My Land Plan" Internet resource tool (www.mylandplan.org). They were interested in what this tool and others like it can do for us. It turns out they would like to incorporate a forest management plan template into FERNS as an option in the future.

Oregon Department of Forestry currently has a test/training version of the FERNS available on-line for us to familiarize with. Go to https://ferns-test.odf.state.or.us/FERNSR1 and follow the instructions to gain access and practice. You can also easily access the ODF website from here and sign up for email messages regarding FERNS.

Oh yeah—You're going to need one thing to make FERNS work for you—an email address.

CCFFA has email addresses for only about 1/2 of its members, so I know that some of you don't have an email account, or otherwise "don't do computers". For you folks, I apologize (the world is passing you by). But alas, there is help! Molalla ODF's

Forester Mike Haasken reports that there will be a kiosk in the Molalla office for this purpose, and office staff will be available to assist you in any way as they always have in the past.

Additionally, CCFFA members are welcome to telephone me and I will personally help you through the whole thing. Reach me at 503-631-3185 or e-mail at tdahl@ccffa-oswa.org. ∎