

Timber's fallen: A three-part investigative series on Oregon's reforestation workers

by Emily Green (/users/emily-green) | 18 Feb 2016

Oregon's immigrant forestry workers have little recourse to pervasive exploitation and labor violations



Photo by Marlin Olynyk, www.marlinolynyk.com

(http://news.streetroots.org/sites/default/files/styles/article_image_full/public/MJO6910_%28Hi%20Res%29.jpg?itok=3iw5Qyds)

For three decades, thousands of Latin American immigrant and guest workers have performed much of the most grueling work in Oregon's forests. Many have been exploited, intimidated and subjected to dangerous working conditions, but widespread fear of retaliation has kept the abuse in the shadows.

For this in-depth series on the conditions of Oregon's reforestation laborers, Street Roots interviewed past and present workers and their family members, pored over hundreds of government inspection records, and spoke with state and federal industry regulators, forestry experts and people on the ground working to change the industry from the bottom up.

[Part I: The plight of workers](#)

(<http://news.streetroots.org/2016/02/05/timber-s-fallen-plight-immigrant-forestry-workers>)

Language barriers and the isolated nature of forestry work have kept workers out of public view, have given them little recourse for workplace violations and have made them susceptible to widespread exploitation. Often, workers are denied basic rights, such as water and rest breaks, and their supervisors short them on pay. With inadequate government oversight, forestry workers' family members are fighting for improvements. ([Read more](#)) (<http://news.streetroots.org/2016/02/05/timber-s-fallen-plight-immigrant-forestry-workers>)

[Part II: Weak enforcement](#) (<http://news.streetroots.org/2016/02/11/timber-s-fallen-enforcement-forest-labor-laws-spotty-lacks-bite>)

The absence of thorough training among many reforestation workers performing laborious and often dangerous tasks in Oregon's forests each year is a primary concern of advocates fighting for better working conditions on their behalf. Research has indicated widespread abuse and dangerous working conditions in the industry in the region, and many of the state's 284 contractors have never been inspected. ([Read more](#)) (<http://news.streetroots.org/2016/02/11/timber-s-fallen-enforcement-forest-labor-laws-spotty-lacks-bite>)

[Part III: What's next](#) (<http://news.streetroots.org/2016/02/18/timbers-fallen-efforts-show-promise-working-conditions-oregon-forestry>)

Advocates and reforestation operators say effective policy changes will need to come from the top down – whether changes in government contracting policies, a better strategy for enforcing labor laws, stiffer penalties for serious safety violations, or all of the above. In the meantime, gradual policy shifts on the federal level and grass-roots efforts in Southern Oregon show that improvements to the working conditions of Oregon's reforestation workers are possible, if not expeditious. (*Read more*) (<http://news.streetroots.org/2016/02/18/timbers-fallen-efforts-show-promise-working-conditions-oregon-forestry>)

STREET ROOTS EDITORIAL: [Oregon must protect all its workers](http://news.streetroots.org/2016/02/18/street-roots-editorial-oregon-must-protect-all-workers)
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