

Richardson Chair in Forest Science Mark Harmon

Professor Mark Harmon remembers that at the time he was appointed to the Richardson Chair in Forest Science, he was reaching the end of his rope. “In the beginning of a career as a research scientist at the university level, you are responsible for getting funding to support only yourself. But eventually you need a technician, and then another one, and soon thereafter, you have students working for you,” he elaborates. “It gets harder and harder to keep things going. I had to do several jobs at once, and it was very difficult to get money to support myself and the whole machine.”

He credits the Richardson Chair with helping him get his research efforts back on track. “Honestly, I would have probably left the field if I hadn’t been awarded this position,” says Harmon. “I’m extremely grateful to the Ward K. Richardson Family Forestry Faculty Endowment.” The endowment enabled the creation of the Richardson Chair in Forest Science, as well as two other chairs

As a research scientist, Harmon taught courses only rarely. “When you’re working in research, most of your money comes out of grants, which means that you are obligated to work solely on the grants. It leaves very little time or money to support teaching,” says Harmon. Since being named to the Richardson Chair, however, he has been able to teach specialty courses in his areas of interest, including a course for undergraduates. “I started teaching a regular course on forest ecosystems in order to introduce these concepts to students at a younger age,” he says.

Harmon has also been involved with several outreach projects since his appointment, including collaborative projects within the scientific community and efforts beyond OSU. “During the past year, I have spent a lot of time talking to technical groups about carbon sequestration, as well as given at least eight talks to the general public,” he explains. “The Richardson Chair funding enables me to conduct outreach efforts away from the College.” Harmon is a key member of the Climate Change Initiative at OSU and remains active nationally in the Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) program.

Finally, the Richardson Chair has also affected Harmon’s choice of research projects because it has given him the freedom to work on projects he is truly interested in. “With this position, one has the opportunity to pursue good ideas that may not immediately generate a lot of revenue, and I think there is a lot to be said for that.”





Mark Harmon leading a field tour of the 200-year log decomposition project at the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest. Photo courtesy of the USFS PNW-OSU Forest Science Data Bank. Harmon inset Courtesy of University Advancement.