GNU Stow Symlink farm manager

CONCEPTS

Each package is a directory that mirrors the target tree. Stow symlinks its contents, so ~/dotfiles/vim/.vimrc becomes ~/.vimrc.

Stow dir ~/dotfiles
↓ stow <pkg>
Package vim/.vimrc
↓ symlink
Target dir ~/.vimrc

The default target is the parent of the stow dir, so keep the repo in ~/dotfiles or pass -t ~.

Stow only removes symlinks it owns and reports a conflict rather than overwriting a real file.

STOW AND UNSTOW

stow *<pkg>...*
Link packages (default action)

stow -S *<pkg>*
Explicit stow action

stow -D *<pkg>*
Delete a package's links

stow -R *<pkg>*
Restow: unlink then link again

stow -n *<pkg>*
Simulate, change nothing

stow -v *<pkg>*
Verbose output (repeat up to -vvvvv)

stow --verbose=*<n>* *<pkg>*
Set verbosity level 0-5

stow -D *<old>* **-S** *<new>*
Mix actions in one run

DIRECTORIES

stow -d *<dir>* *<pkg>*
Set the stow directory

stow -t *<dir>* *<pkg>*
Set the target directory

stow -t ~ *<pkg>*
Link into your home directory

DIRECTORIES (cont.)

STOW_DIR=*<dir>* **stow** *<pkg>*
Stow dir from environment

stow --dir=*<dir>* **--target=***<dir>* *<pkg>*
Long form of -d and -t

DOTFILES AND CONFLICTS

stow --dotfiles *<pkg>*
Turn dot- prefix into a leading dot

stow --adopt *<pkg>*
Move existing target files into package

stow --no-folding *<pkg>*
Link files, never whole directories

stow --override=*<regex>* *<pkg>*
Take over paths owned by another package

stow --defer=*<regex>* *<pkg>*
Skip paths already stowed elsewhere

--adopt rewrites the files in your stow dir. Commit first so git diff shows what it took, then git checkout . to keep your repo version.

IGNORING AND CONFIG

stow --ignore=*<regex>* *<pkg>*
Skip names ending in a Perl regex

~/.stowrc
Default options, one per line

./.stowrc
Per-directory default options

.stow-local-ignore
Per-package ignore patterns file

~/.stow-global-ignore
Ignore patterns for all packages

stow -V
Print version

stow -h
Show command syntax

TREE FOLDING

Folding behaviour

Situation	Result
`Target dir missing`	One symlink to the whole directory
`Target dir already real`	Links go inside it, file by file
`Second package needs folded dir`	Symlink split into real dir, both linked
`Package removed, one left`	Directory refolded to one symlink
`--no-folding`	Always file-level links

If an app writes new files into a folded directory they land in your repo. Use --no-folding or pre-create the directory.

RECIPES

First-time dotfiles setup

```
mkdir -p ~/dotfiles/vim
mv ~/.vimrc ~/dotfiles/vim/.vimrc
cd ~/dotfiles && stow -nv vim
stow vim
```

New machine

```
git clone <url> ~/dotfiles
cd ~/dotfiles
stow -nv bash vim git   # check
conflicts
stow bash vim git
```

Adopt existing configs safely

```
cd ~/dotfiles && git status   #
must be clean
stow --adopt vim
git diff                       #
see what was adopted
git checkout .                 #
keep repo version
```

Install software under /usr/local

```
cd /usr/local/stow
sudo stow -v <pkg-1.0>
sudo stow -D <pkg-1.0>
```