



FOREST NEWS

The Newsletter of Forest Service Employees For Environmental Ethics

Fall 2024

Protecting Water

From Wildfire

Inside

GUEST AUTHOR: ANDY KERR / BRITISH SEQUOIAS /
PARACHUTING BEAVERS / HEAVY EQUIPMENT IN WILDERNESS

Gutting the Forest Service Workforce

Amazon announced last month that revenue forecasts require that it cut staffing at its fulfillment warehouses. “We’re forced to lay off all of our package handlers,” said Jeff Bezos. “They’re our cheapest labor and lowest in our corporate hierarchy so, obviously, they’re the first to go....”

No, that’s not a real Amazon press release. It’s the one the Forest Service would have written if it wanted to explain why it decided to eliminate all of its seasonal employees. These are the 2,500 workers who build and maintain hiking trails, clean campgrounds, staff visitor information centers, survey for wetlands and rare plants and animals, and conduct the field work necessary for scientific research. If you meet a Forest Service employee in the woods, that person is likely a seasonal worker. Should Chief Randy Moore’s decision stand, you won’t be seeing any of them next year.

Of course, it’s unimaginable that Amazon would cut the very workers who do the essential task that make it one of the world’s most successful companies. Yet that’s exactly what Chief Moore is doing – he is gutting the Forest Service of the people who do the day-to-day job of taking care of your national forests.

His reasoning, such as it is, could not be more transparent. He’s chosen to protect feather-bedded senior administrative staff from budget cuts and lay all of the pain on his least powerful

employees. He cannot explain (nor has he even tried) how eliminating on-the-ground workers versus cutting fewer senior-level positions best meets the Forest Service’s “Caring for the Land and Serving People” mission. One middle-management GS-11 employee’s annual salary equals four seasonal GS-5 salaries. It takes a special kind of idiocy to cut staff based solely on rank without regard to the effect the cuts have on the organization’s work and mission.

Chief Moore has exempted one flavor of seasonal worker from his across-the-board knife – firefighters. It is now all but official; the U.S. Forest Service has become the U.S. Fire Service. In recognition of that fact, it is time to transfer management of our national forests to the Department of Interior, which continues to employ the seasonal workers essential to stewarding public lands. The U.S. Fire Service can remain behind in Agriculture (or Homeland Security), a shell of its former self, on-call to the responsible federal land agencies when they need someone to put out a fire.

Sincerely,



Andy Stahl

Cover: The McKenzie River in Oregon flows out of the Willamette National Forest in 2003 (Forest Service photo).

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The Ottawa National Forest as seen from Wolf Mountain (Forest Service photo).

Featured Forest

Ottawa National Forest

The [Ottawa National Forest](#) encompasses 1 million acres on Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, extending from the south shore of Lake Superior to the Wisconsin state line. The Forest is home to abundant wildlife, scenic views, rolling hills, lakes, rivers, waterfalls, and vibrant displays of fall colors. The Ojibwe people ceded the land to the U.S. government in the 1842 Treaty and retained the right for future generations to hunt, fish, and gather on the lands. Enrolled members of a dozen federally-recognized tribes in the area can still use Ottawa National Forest campgrounds for free.

The Forest includes more than 50,000 acres of designated wilderness. The [Sylvania Wilderness Area](#)’s old-growth forests and pristine lakes provide habitat for a wide range of animal and plant life, including rare orchids, bald eagles, loons, and osprey. Abundant lakes offer plenty of opportunities for canoeing and kayaking.

The Wild and Scenic Sturgeon River flows from the [Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness Area](#). The gorge is a mile wide and up to 350 feet deep. Whitewater kayaking is popular on the river but can be dangerous during spring runoff.

The landscape of the [McCormick Wilderness Area](#) was willed to the Forest Service by Gordon McCormick, a descendant of Cyrus McCormick, inventor of the reaping machine. The forest here has recovered from the

logging era that ended in the early 1900s. Straddling the divide between the Lake Superior and Lake Michigan Watersheds, the Wilderness Area shelters headwaters of the Huron, Dead, Pahokee, and Yellow Dog rivers.

The Ottawa National Forest provides a variety of camping opportunities at established campgrounds as well as dispersed backcountry camping. The Forest’s waterfalls are popular attractions, and wintersports enthusiasts enjoy cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling on the Forest.

The Ottawa is also home to the J.W. Toumey Nursery, established in 1935 to meet the need for more tree seedlings. As described on the [Forest Service Nurseries and Seed Extractories webpage](#), the purpose of the nursery is to “provide locally adapted plants and seed for reforestation projects, provide an assured source of desirable species and stock types for restoring native ecosystems, and maintain the agency’s position as a conservation leader.”

Toumey is the last remaining Forest Service nursery in the eastern half of the country. It grows 12 million seedlings during the summer, and about 4 million of those are shipped to northeastern national forests each year. The nursery greenhouses produce an additional 600,000 plants to supply other forests each year. The nursery grows shrubs, grasses, forbs, and herbaceous plants in fields and greenhouses. It also extracts and cleans seeds.


Protecting Water Resources From Wildfire

Protecting water resources is a common justification for conducting wildfire mitigation projects on our national forests. The concern is valid, as forestland provides “the cleanest and most stable water supply compared to other lands,” according to a [2022 Forest Service analysis](#) conducted in support of the Agriculture Department’s [Wildfire Crisis Strategy](#). The report demonstrates that 99% of people on municipal water systems in the lower 48 states receive water from forested lands. Wildfire is a direct threat to these water supplies, especially in the arid West.

“High severity wildfires increase runoff and erosion rates by two or more orders of magnitude, while low and moderate severity burns have much smaller effects on runoff,” according to [Cumulative Watershed Effects of Fuel Management in the Western United States](#), a Forest

Service technical report published in 2010 by the Rocky Mountain Research Station. Because soils absorb less water following wildfire, flows from precipitation increase at burn scars, causing erosion, sedimentation, and debris flows. The harmful effects to water quality from sediment, ash, and pollutants like heavy metals are felt far downstream. Sediment collects in reservoirs, lessening their storage capacities and shortening their lifespans. Water infrastructure maintenance and repair costs increase significantly, along with water treatment costs, following severe wildfire.

The Forest Service currently focuses billions of dollars on mechanical “fuel treatments” to reduce fuel loads and, therefore, minimize post-wildfire consequences for water resources. Like traditional logging, these tree-cutting projects require roads. Chapter 5 in the [2010](#)



Unpaved forest roads like this one in the San Juan National Forest are necessary for fuel treatments. They are also chronic sources of erosion and sedimentation, and the cumulative negative impacts to water resources could be worse than the harm caused by post-wildfire erosion and sedimentation.

technical report, “Fuel Management and Erosion,” identifies these unpaved forest roads as chronic sources of erosion and sedimentation. Combined with the “impacts of fuel treatments, repeated at 10-20 year intervals,” the cumulative effects of fuel treatments “may be similar to the pulse impact from wildfires.”

Lee MacDonald, senior researcher at Colorado State University, and Isaac Larsen, associate professor at the University of Massachusetts – Amherst, authored “Runoff and Erosion from Wildfires and Roads: Effects and Mitigation.” Over the long term, they say, “the amount of sediment delivered to streams from unpaved forest roads is equal to or greater than the amount of sediment that is delivered from high-severity wildfires. The chronic delivery of sediment from roads may be of greater significance to aquatic ecosystems than the pulsed delivery of sediment from high-severity wildfire.”

As is common for government agencies, the Forest Service plays the climate card, emphasizing that the “expected” and “anticipated” effects of climate change will increase fire frequency and severity. They focus on the past 20-30 years of data to show that wildfires are worsening, but forest lifespans are measured in centuries, and multi-century time scales reveal that current climatic conditions are not unprecedented. A recent report coauthored by MacDonald, *Forests and Water: A State-of-the-Art Review for Colorado*, cites long-time Colorado meteorologist Nolan Doesken’s statements on climate change: “The problem is that current models do not consistently indicate whether precipitation in Colorado might increase or decrease, and historic precipitation data do not show a clear trend over time.” Therefore, MacDonald concludes, “In the absence of a reliable prediction or documented trend in precipitation, it is not possible to predict how global climate change might affect fire frequency and fire severity, and thus how a change in climate might affect water quality.”

As the 2010 report concludes, “Additional research is needed to understand the cumulative effects of fuel treatments at the watershed scale.” More recent studies have reached similar conclusions; furthermore, mechanically thinning trees produces more greenhouse gas emissions than if the trees were to burn. While the Forest Service pushes funding into fuel treatments that most people would consider to be logging, the available science suggests that the treatments and associated forest roads cause just as much water-resource damage as severe wildfire.

For protecting water resources, a much less costly alternative to mechanical fuel treatments is process-based restoration (PBR), which Dr. Timothy Beechie et al. first defined in a 2010 report. PBR incorporates strategies that



Downstream from California’s massive CZU Complex Fire, Research Geologist Renee Takesue samples stream sediment in the lower parts of burned watersheds to measure contaminant concentrations following major storm runoff. (U.S. Geological Survey photo by Amy East).

seek to restore the “physical, chemical, and biological processes that sustain river and floodplain ecosystems” – e.g., sediment transport, water storage, water routing, and nutrient cycling. The Beachie paper points to the Bridge Creek Project, designed to restore 20 miles of Bridge Creek in eastern Oregon. The creek had carved an incised channel deep enough to drain its alluvial aquifer, which once stored water that created wetlands and supported more consistent stream flows.



Pre-planning for post-fire impacts on the Santa Fe National Forest includes building beaver dam analogs (BDAs). BDAs decrease stream velocity, reduce channelization and sedimentation, and improve cold-water habitat by reconnecting the stream with its floodplain and increasing groundwater recharge (Forest Service photo by Preston Keres).

Researchers determined the river incision had been caused by a combination of beaver removal and channel straightening. “The primary restoration actions include riparian revegetation to increase habitat capacity for local beaver populations, and the use of small wood posts to support beaver dams during high flows and encourage beaver population expansion.” This low-cost project proved highly successful and gave rise to the terms low-tech process-based restoration (LTPBR) and beaver dam analogs (BDAs). BDAs are in-stream structures built with natural materials to promote effects that mimic beaver activity. As BDAs trap sediment, stream levels gradually rise, floodplains reconnect, and aquifers rehydrate. As incised streams begin to reconnect with their historic floodplains, they become habitable by beaver, which can maintain and expand upon these temporary structures to create beaver complexes like those that were common across the landscape prior to European influence.

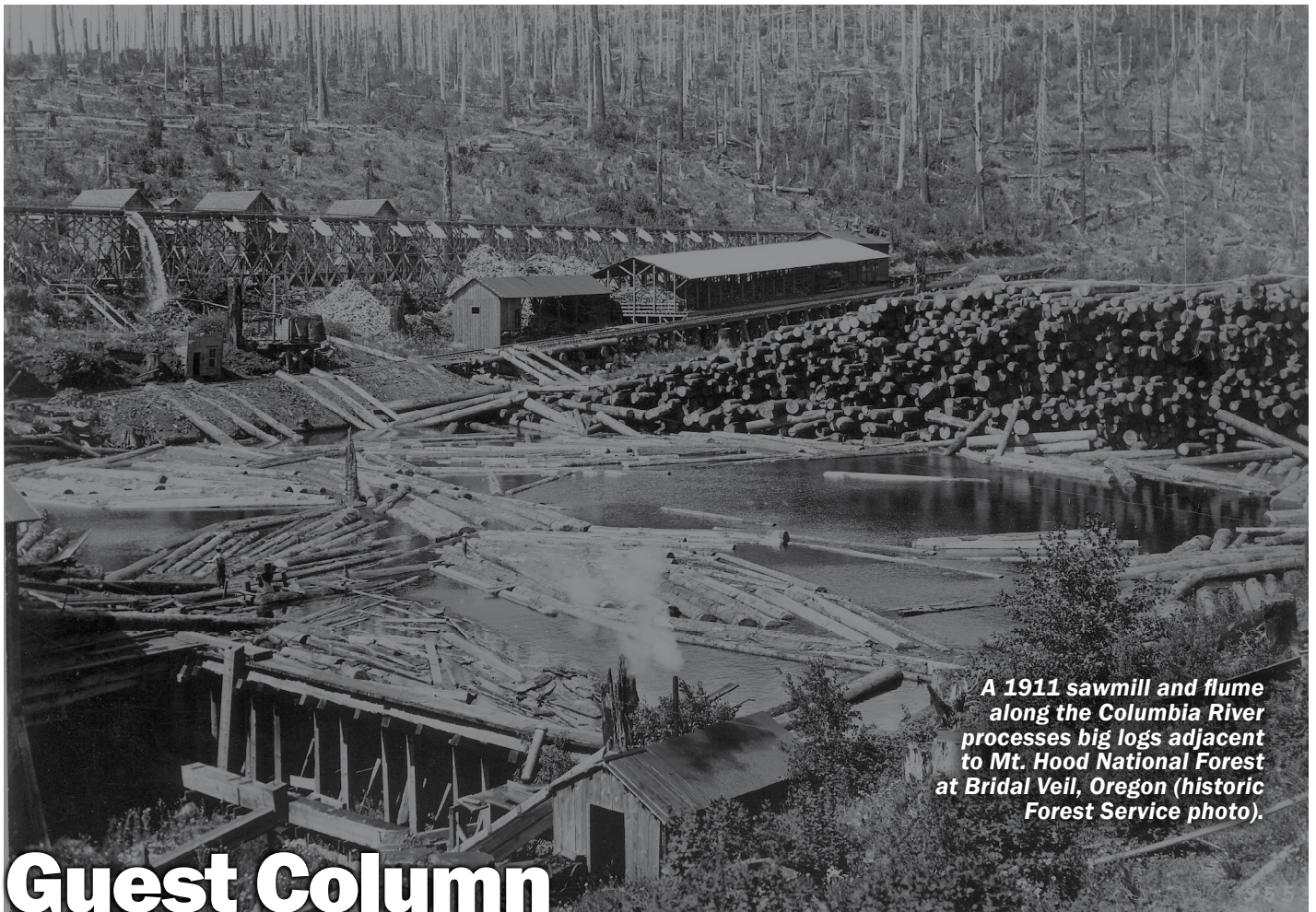
As Jackie Corday notes in her 2022 review of LTPBR projects and studies, LTPBR utilizes native, locally sourced materials and minimal equipment; therefore, “it is gentler on the land” than the types of heavy equipment employed for mechanical fuel treatments. As LTPBR treatments allow beaver reintroduction, the improvements to ecosystem health and resilience become increasingly apparent. Corday cites numerous studies affirming these benefits,

demonstrating that “restoring headwater floodplains and wetlands has been shown to reduce the risk of natural disasters, including drought, wildfires, and floods.”

In a 2022 article in *Scientific American*, Isobel Whitcomb reports that lush post-fire beaver-complex refuges have been documented “from Colorado to California, Idaho to Wyoming. Now, scientists are discovering that these green sanctuaries are part of a larger story of how beaver dams contribute to fire resilience. Along with deterring the flames themselves, beaver dams and ponds also function as filters for ash and other fire-produced pollutants that enter waterways – thus maintaining water quality for fish, other aquatic animals, and humans.”

Beaver complexes also mitigate post-fire flooding. A research group that included Cheri Westbrook with Colorado State University monitored the largest recorded flood in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, which occurred west of Calgary, Alberta. The researchers determined that 68% of beaver dams fully or partially survived the flood, and “the beaver dams (even failed ones) delayed downstream flood peaks.”

As Corday observes, “Research is showing the path forward moves away from using costly and unscalable restoration approaches that rely on diesel power and heavy equipment toward approaches that restore natural processes.”



A 1911 sawmill and flume along the Columbia River processes big logs adjacent to Mt. Hood National Forest at Bridal Veil, Oregon (historic Forest Service photo).

Guest Column

The Continuing Reduction in the Number of Sawmills in the Pacific Northwest

by Andy Kerr

Two more Oregon sawmills are shutting down. The Malheur Lumber Company mill in John Day in Grant County and the Western Cascade Industries mill in Toledo in Lincoln County are “the latest in a long line of closures,” according to the *Oregonian*. Michael Lang of the Wild Salmon Center astutely noted that Hampton Lumber gets most of its logs from private timberlands.

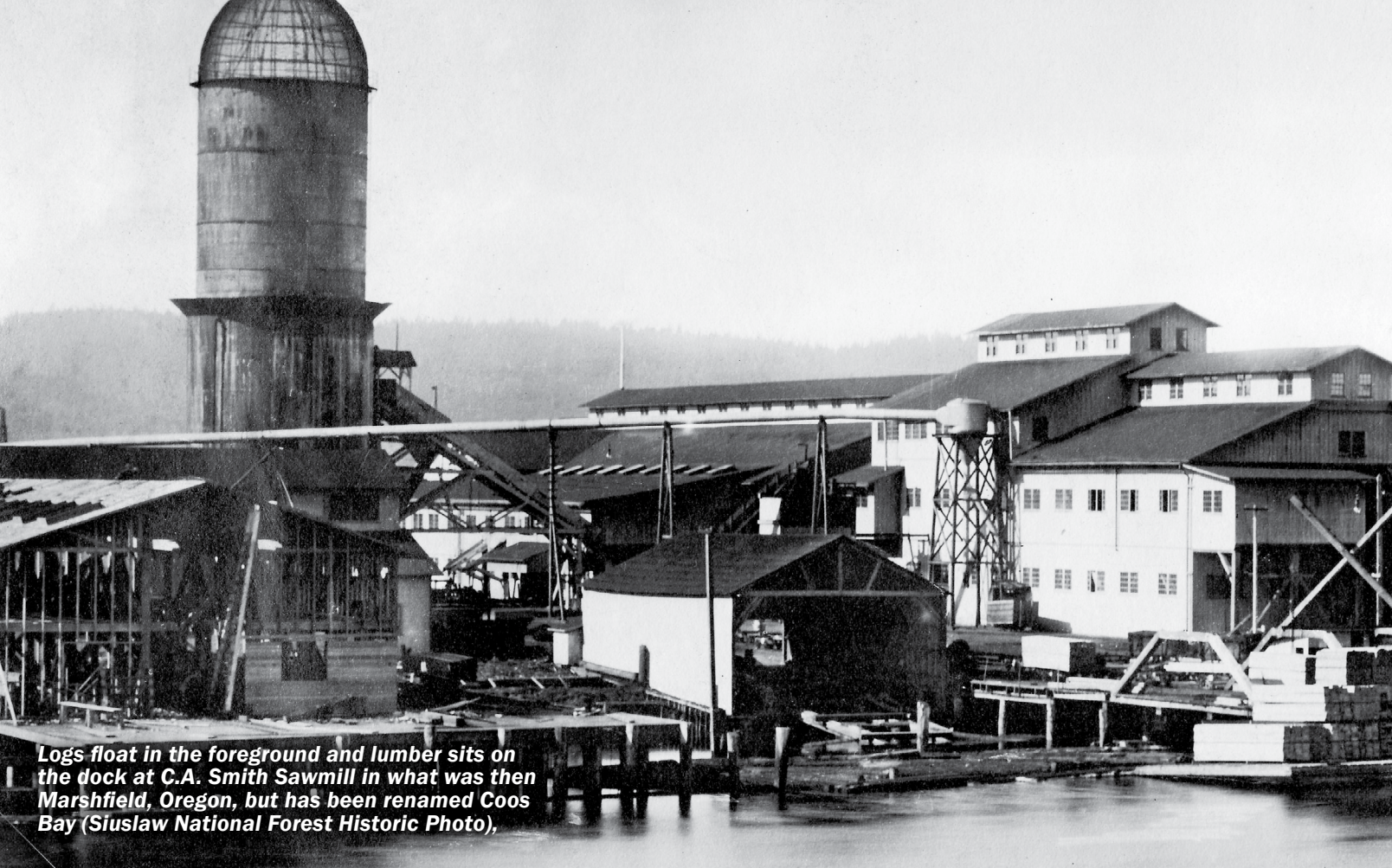
In January 2024, Hampton closed its mill in Banks in Washington County. Hampton partially blames prospective reductions in log supply from state forests as a new habitat conservation plan is finalized. Yet, Hampton is expanding its mill in Willamina in Polk and Yamhill Counties, an hour’s drive by log truck. Hampton also has mills in Tillamook and Warrenton, not to mention three mills each in Washington and British Columbia.

The reduction of surplus production capacity continues to result in lumber mill shutdowns, though the contributing factors cited have changed.

In February 2024, Rosboro Co. shuttered its Springfield mill in Lane County. Its business model of making commodity studs was squeezed by higher log prices and lower lumber prices. Also in February 2024, Interfor closed its Philomath sawmill in Benton County. Interfor noted the same reasons for closure as did Rosboro.

In August 2024, the 135-year-old paper mill at Willamette Falls in Clackamas County announced it’s closing permanently, unless a new buyer is quickly found.

In what to me is a refreshing and telling change, no mention is being made of the supply of federal logs as a contributing factor. These closures are part of the lumber industry’s long restructuring, which includes larger and faster small-log mills crowding out older and slower large-



Logs float in the foreground and lumber sits on the dock at C.A. Smith Sawmill in what was then Marshfield, Oregon, but has been renamed Coos Bay (Siuslaw National Forest Historic Photo),

log mills, as well as lumber production shifting from the Pacific Northwest to the American South. A grand bargain between the conservation community and the timber industry that helped to save mills about a dozen years ago may no longer make sense.

THE CONTINUING RATIONALIZATION OF SUPPLY, PRODUCTION, AND DEMAND

The general manager of Western Cascade Industries' 25-year-old Toledo mill told the Lincoln County Leader that the lumber market has “just kind of been down across the board.” (The owners were avoiding the media so made no comment.) He also noted that the mill had stopped buying logs well before the announced closure.

In the Blue Mountains of northeastern Oregon, Malheur Lumber Company ran the sawmill in Grant County. The mill was a subsidiary of Ochoco Lumber in Prineville.

In a letter provided to the Blue Mountain Eagle, company officials said that the lumber industry had been struggling for years and noted that many other wood products manufacturers had been forced to close.

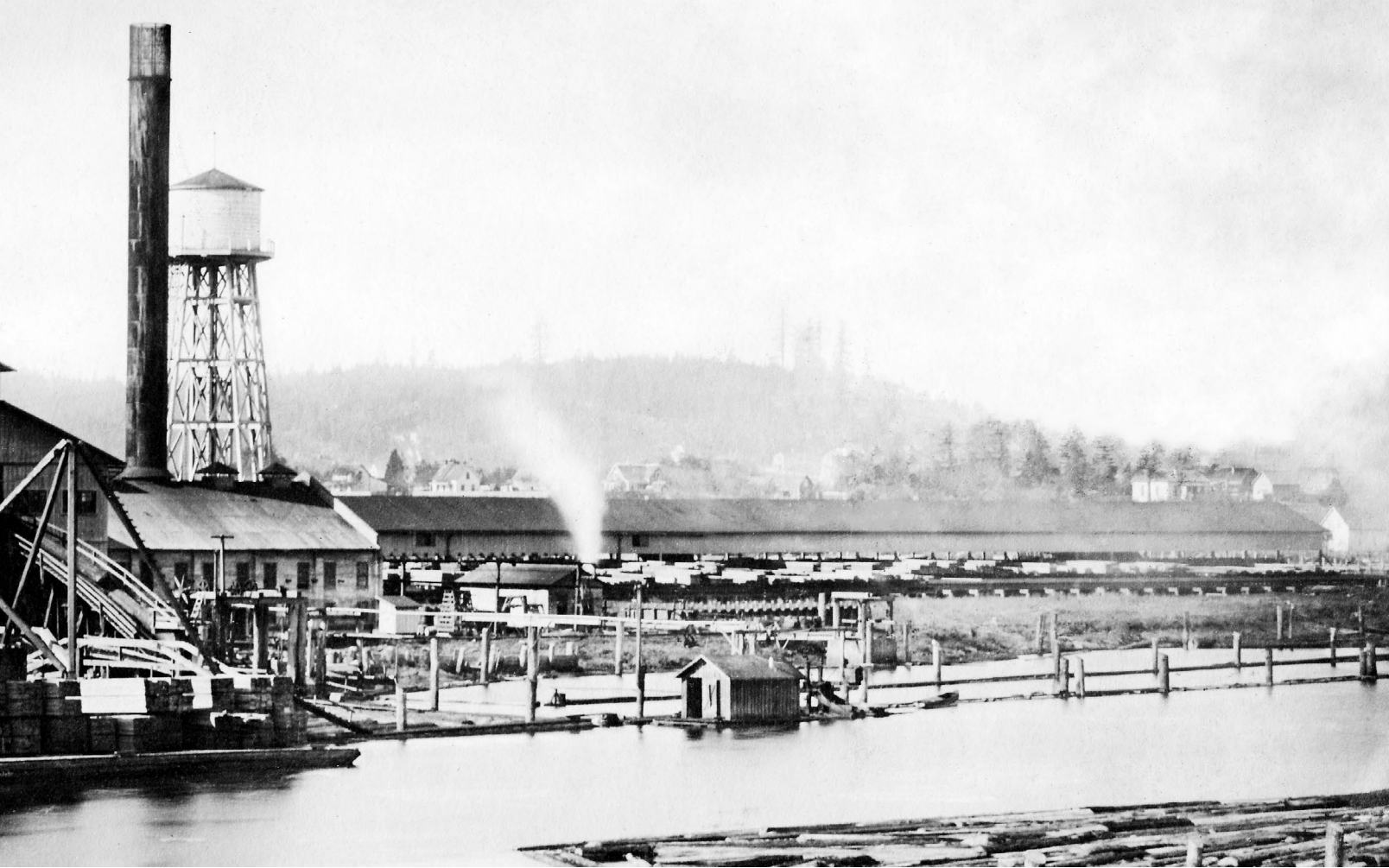
“The current cost of operating a small manufacturing business in the rural part of the state seems no longer sustainable,” the letter stated.

It went on to cite a number of factors that contributed to the decision to close up shop:

- *Lack of a willing and drug-free workforce.*
- *Lack of housing to recruit workers from outside the area.*
- *Unfavorable market conditions for lumber in recent years.*
- *High manufacturing costs due to inflation.*
- *Low and inconsistent production due to workforce issues.*
- *Continued layering of government regulations on small business in Oregon.*

The closing of these sawmills is the latest in the continuing rationalization of wood supply, production, and demand. After the imposition of the Northwest Forest Plan for federal forestlands in the western Pacific Northwest and of the “eastside screens” for such lands in eastern Oregon and Washington in the mid-1990s – which significantly reduced the supply of logs from such lands – the remaining mills had to get bigger and faster (more efficient) or die. There was an orgy of retooling of old mills and building of new ones. These modern computerized and laser-driven mills didn’t need as many workers, and the industry didn’t need as many mills.

While the number of all Oregon primary wood product manufacturing facilities and lumber and wood products jobs both decreased 53% between 1995 and 2010, between 1995 and 2012 the timber-processing capacity of the remaining large softwood sawmills increased 25% above the industry’s 1995 levels. Large-capacity Oregon softwood sawmills have a milling capacity far in excess of current and likely domestic demand. These mills also are



generally failing to compete with mills in China and Japan for Oregon private logs. Because they are being buffeted between low product prices and high supply prices, these mills seek to increase federal logging levels (federal logs cannot be exported and are thus significantly less expensive to domestic milling operations) from federal public forestlands. Production (utilized capacity) has declined dramatically with the collapse of the American housing bubble, but milling capacity has not (yet).

CAN A GRAND BARGAIN SAVE MILLS THIS TIME?

Uncharacteristically, I supported a deal brokered by Sen. Ron Wyden (D, Ore.) in 2012 to keep the Malheur Lumber mill in John Day operating. The essence of the deal was that the Forest Service issued a 10-year “stewardship” contract to a local logging company that did “stewardship” work (removing unnecessary roads, reducing stand density to give the residual old-growth trees a fighting chance, and such), and the logging company sold the logs it received in exchange for the work to Malheur Lumber. Other lumber mills several hours away couldn’t compete, as hauling costs were high and log values were low. These timber companies believed Malheur Lumber got a special deal not available to them, and they were right. Of course, these companies weren’t willing to live on the diet of small- and medium-size logs yielded by the ecological restoration thinning, and Malheur Lumber was. Had the others, they could have consummated similar deals for themselves.

I supported the Wyden deal because many ponderosa pine-dominated dry forest stands were in danger of losing their remaining old-growth trees due to competition from younger trees that were growing up under their canopies. This was a result of the previous logging of the largest trees, past and current livestock grazing, and past and current fire suppression. Reducing stand density by removing small (not large) trees followed by prescribed fire could restore the ecological function of such forest stands.

Wyden has pledged again to try to save the mill. This time I am more ambivalent, for two reasons.

First, economically, the company’s stated problems today are different from 2012. Then, it was primarily inadequate log supply. Now, it is workforce issues, poor market conditions, high costs due to inflation, and low and inconsistent production due to workforce issues and government regulations.

As for regulations and inflation, these constraints apply to all of Malheur Lumber’s competitors as well. Back in the day, many a lumber producer solved the worker housing shortage by creating company towns of company-owned housing. *The Oregon Encyclopedia notes:*

Nearly all of Oregon’s company towns, which once numbered more than 35, were created for logging or lumber production. While such towns were located in every quarter of the state, most were east of the Cascade Mountains.

To name a few, Hines (now greater Burns), Brookings (saved by U.S. 101), Valselt and Wendling (both long ago razed and planted with Douglas-fir), Shevlin (located in three different places in Deschutes and Klamath counties as it moved when the local forest was cut over), and Gilchrist (last company town in Oregon) were all lumber company towns.

I've not kept up, but back when I was a teenager and not choosing a career as a logger or millworker, a lot of workers used speed (amphetamines) to keep up with the speed of the production line and/or dope (marijuana) to blunt the boredom of the job. Pulling and stacking lumber on the green chain has long been automated, but apparently the demand for such drugs in the workplace continues.

Second, the fundamental grand bargain has changed. The elements of the bargain were:

- The mill would live on small- and medium-size logs, not old growth.
- The Forest Service would sell such smaller – but nonetheless still commercially valuable – logs as a by-product of scientifically sound ecological restoration thinning designed to give the residual old-growth trees a fighting chance to survive a couple more centuries without dying out due to competition with smaller trees or from uncharacteristic wildfire. The agency would also utilize prescribed fire after each logging treatment, as the thinning had no significant ecological benefit without fire being reintroduced into the ecosystem.
- The conservation community would support the “projects” (the agency no longer calls them “timber sales”) because the forest restoration would result in once again having more and larger old-growth trees.

For economic reasons, many of

the mills that subscribed to the deal (in several other places in the West besides John Day, including Lakeview, Oregon) can no longer uphold their end of the bargain. For bureaucratic reasons – including an irrational fear of fire – the Forest Service has consistently failed to hold up its end of the bargain. The bureaucracy delivered the wood to the mills but has fallen down on doing prescribed burning after mechanical treatment (i.e. “logging”), thereby negating most of the benefit of ecological restoration thinning.

Such a deal can only work if all sides uphold their ends of the bargain.

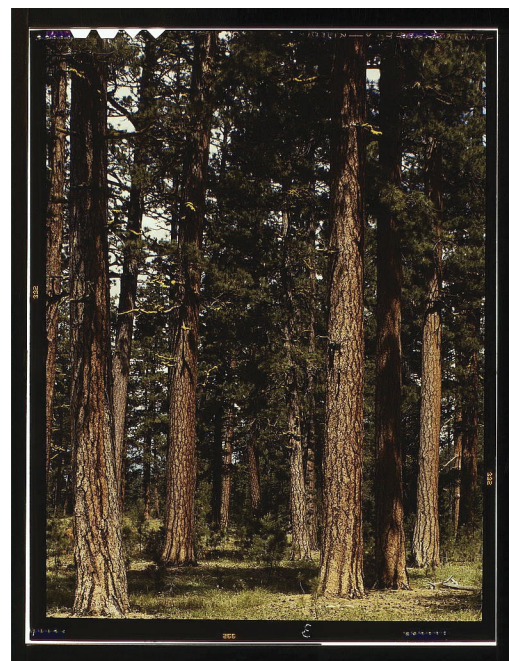
CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

The owner of Ochoco Lumber Company, which also owns Malheur Lumber, is **John Shelk**. During the timber wars of the 1990s, Shelk and I were bitter enemies, each viewing the other as an existential threat. His mills were consuming old-growth trees, and I was trying to stop it.

After the Clinton administration imposed the “eastside screens” on the national forests in eastern Oregon and Washington, generally the threat of logging larger trees ended. This allowed the conservation community to pivot from a totally defensive posture to a more proactive restoration one as many old-growth stands in frequent-fire forest types were in bad shape due to previous logging, livestock grazing, and fire

suppression. In the “isn’t-life-ironic department,” more logging (albeit of much smaller trees) could be helpful in ecologically restoring forests that had suffered from too much logging (and grazing and fire suppression).

Shelk realized that the industry’s social license to log old growth had expired and would not be renewed. To survive, his remaining mill (his Prineville mill closed in 2001) would have to live on a diet of smaller logs from smaller trees that were, to



A stand of old-growth ponderosa pine in 1947 on Oregon’s Malheur National Forest (Library of Congress photo by Russell Lee).



Old-growth ponderosa pine logs in 1942 on their way to the now long-closed Edward W. Hines Mills in Hines, Oregon (Library of Congress photo by Russell Lee).



A private company logs a plot of land on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest in 2023 after submitting a winning bid. Trees harvested within the 3,000-acre area are smaller than the old-growth trees that older sawmills were set up to process (Forest Service photo by Paul Wade).

conservationists, ecologically problematic if they continued to live in the woods.

In January 2008, at the prompting of Wade Mosby of Collins Pine and Tim Lillebo of Oregon Wild, I went to see Shelk in his office in Prineville. The conversation was difficult at first, but by the end we had agreed to meet again, this time in the forest. Eventually, we each realized that the other was not (or was no longer – I leave it to others to judge) a total jerk. We actually, I daresay, came to like each other, and we agreed on many things, mostly having nothing to do with forests. While our fundamental beliefs did not change, our respective circles in a Venn diagram did shift. We could be useful to each other. Unfortunately, the crap John used to take from conservationists was replaced by crap from his lumber baron colleagues. Shelk suffered from the curse of being ahead of his time. His cohorts hung him out to dry. Yet Malheur Lumber survived while many of their mills did not.

Ochoco Lumber Company is one hundred years old this year. Looking toward the future, it **built a new headquarters in 2023**, less than half the square footage of the old one. Shelk still **owns 47,507 acres** of private timberlands in two separate blocks near Prineville and John Day. While I'm not a fan of industrial timberlands per se, John's stewardship focuses more on long-term productivity and somewhat takes into account other values than just board feet. He's not bent on maximizing net present value (making

as much money as possible today, and screw the future).

The Forest Service's circle in this Venn diagram is also changing. The agency's fire fixation is resulting in the bureaucracy logging big and old trees in the name of preventing forest fires. Actually, all the Forest Service is doing is preventing forests.

The next *Public Lands Blog* post, to be titled "Rethinking Commercial Thinning as a 'Tool' to Ecologically Restore Forests of the Frequent-Fire Type" will argue that such grand bargains made (including by me) decades ago between Big Timber and the conservation community no longer make sense economically, socially, politically, or – most important – ecologically.

Bottom Line: For reasons having nothing to do with the supply of federal logs, timber production from federal lands in the interior American West will continue to decline.

For More Information: Kerr, Andy. 2013. "Oregon Softwood Lumber Industry 1995–2012: Fewer Mills and Jobs, But Larger Timber-Processing Capacity." Occasional Paper #19. The Larch Company, Ashland, Oregon, and Washington, D.C.

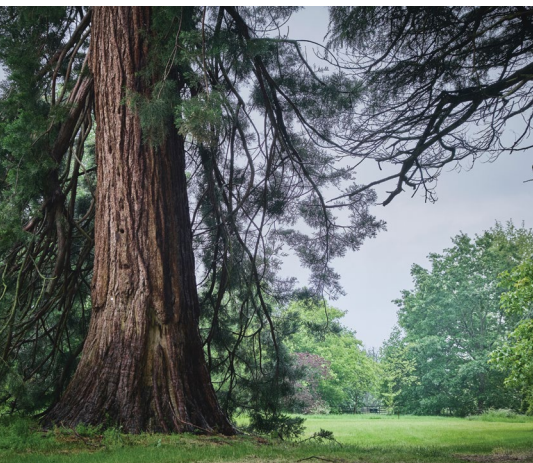
Andy Kerr is the czar of The Larch Company (www.andykerr.net) and consults on environmental and conservation issues. The Larch Company is a for-profit non-membership conservation organization that represents the interests of humans yet born and species that cannot talk.



Flying out of Medford Air Tanker Base, a DC-10 very large air tanker drops fire retardant (Forest Service photo).



Mature and old-growth Jellico forests targeted for logging in Daniel Boone National Forest (photo by Jim Scheff).



A giant sequoia tree growing in England, where there is interest in planting more of the trees to sequester carbon.

Record Retardant Drops From Medford Air Tanker Base

Planes launched from the Medford Air Tanker Base in Oregon have dropped 1.7 million gallons of fire retardant so far this year, **breaking the airbase's previous record** set during the 2023 fire season.

The Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest announced the new record on its Facebook page, stating, "330 loads of retardant have been delivered out of the Medford Air Tanker Base.... 230 loads were dropped out of the Large Air Tanker Base for 781,630 gallons, while the VLAT [Very Large Air Tanker] Base put out 100 loads for 891,112 gallons."

Planes flying out of Medford this year have been dispatched 67 times across Oregon, 25 times to California, five times to Washington, and once each to Idaho, Utah and Wyoming. Slurry bombers launched from Medford range from smaller single-engine air tankers (SEATs) to DC-10 VLATs with a **9,400-gallon retardant capacity**.

Forest Service Continues Allowing Old-Growth Logging

The Forest Service continues to approve old-growth logging projects in spite of the Biden administration's executive orders promoting old growth protections.

One of the more egregious examples is the **Black Ram Project**, a plan to cut 95,000 acres in the Yaak River Valley in Montana, an ancient forest of subalpine fir, spruce, red cedar, western hemlock, and larch trees, some of which are more than 600 years old. A federal judge halted the plan after the Forest Service approved it, but the Forest Service has appealed the decision.

The **Telephone Gap project** targets 11,800-acres of mature and old-growth trees on the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont.

On the **Daniel Boone National Forest**, the **Jellico project** will cut mature forests and more than 1,000 acres of rare Eastern secondary old-growth forest. From coal-mining to clear-cutting to oil-and-gas extraction, the Jellico Mountains have experienced extensive exploitation. The return of mature and old-growth forests demonstrates amazing resilience.

Great Britain's Sequoias Outnumber California's 6-1

Sequoias are thriving in Great Britain, both giant sequoias (*Sequoia giganteum*) and coastal redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*). **Scientists with the Royal Society report** that some stands have matched the average growth rates of similar-aged sequoias in their natural habitat of California.

The world's largest trees were introduced to British country estates in the 19th century as status symbols, and there are now an estimated **500,000 sequoias in Britain**, compared to 80,000 trees in their natural habitat of California's Sierra Nevada.

The Royal Society report states, "The presence of *S. giganteum* in the UK is particularly interesting because the UK lacks the narrow adaptive niches of the species' native range; however, they have seemingly thrived and are already some of the largest trees in the UK within 170 years after their introduction."

The Royal Society reports, "There is increased interest in planting giant sequoias in the UK, given their potential carbon sequestration capacity and apparent suitability to the UK climate. However, there is little quantitative evidence to support these observations."

Forest Service Releases Seasonal Employees

The U.S. Forest Service has suspended the hiring of all seasonal employees with the exception of firefighters for the 2025 fiscal year due to anticipated budget shortfalls.

Letters sent to regional leadership teams were leaked via social media site Reddit, prompting Forest Service Chief Randy Moore to confirm, “We will not be bringing on any additional seasonal [employees], outside of fire.”

The letter sent by Jacqueline Buchanan, regional forester over the Pacific Northwest Region, states, “We are likely confronting a very budget-limited environment in FY 2025.... We are also navigating the exhaustion of the supplemental funding we received through both the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.”

In addition to halting new temp worker hires, the memo announces that “existing tours” of “permanent seasonal employees” will not be extended.

Utah Seeks Control of Federal Lands

In 2015, a Republican-led commission of Utah legislators voted to file a lawsuit challenging U.S. government control of federal lands in the state. Almost a decade later, Utah’s Republican governor and attorney general are following through by petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court.

Federal agencies have jurisdiction over almost 70% of Utah, including nine national forests. As reported by Associated Press journalists, the lawsuit targets BLM lands, about 29,000 square miles that are used mainly for energy production, livestock grazing, mining, and recreation.

Mark Squillace, an environmental law professor at the University of Colorado, called the lawsuit “a political stunt.” He pointed to the Utah Enabling Act of 1894, through which Utah was granted statehood under specific conditions. One condition is a promise that Utah won’t make any claim on federal land.

Additionally, Squillace said, the property clause of the U.S. Constitution gives the federal government absolute authority over federal public lands.

Forest Service Authorizes Heavy Equipment in Wilderness

“Forest Service leaders in the Pacific Northwest have authorized the use of heavy equipment and fire retardant to suppress wildfires in Roadless and Wilderness Areas,” reads a press release from the Forest Service.

“When we approve the use of heavy equipment and retardant in protected areas, it’s because professional firefighters deem it an absolute necessity to protect lives, property, and irreplaceable natural resources like old growth,” said Regional Forester Jacqueline Buchanan.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 established the parameters for wilderness areas for multiple federal agencies, yet the Forest Service has decided that it will single-handedly override an Act of Congress based on the agency’s own fear-mongering about fire, a key natural element of a healthy forest.

The press release continues, “Aerial retardant drops are not allowed in mapped avoidance areas for threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species, identified cultural resources, or in waterways.”

If the Forest Service had kept toxic retardant out of waterways instead of dumping hundreds of loads into streams, FSEEE would not have sued successfully to enforce the Clean Water Act.



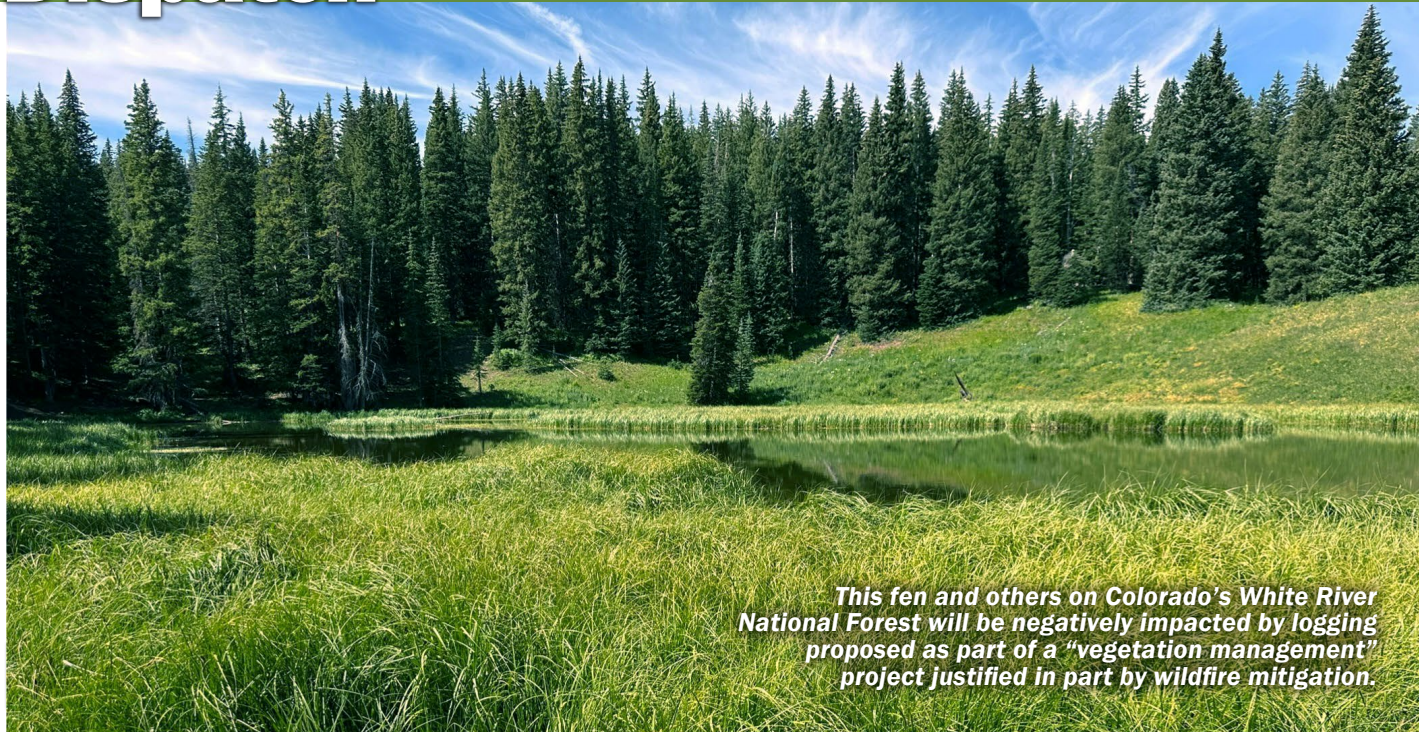
A seasonal employee performs trail maintenance on the Flathead National Forest (Forest Service photo).



BLM lands in Utah include part of the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area near Moab (BLM Photo by Bob Wick).



A recent Forest Service authorization threatens virgin forests in the Pacific Northwest like these in the Buckhorn Wilderness on Olympic National Forest.



This fen and others on Colorado's White River National Forest will be negatively impacted by logging proposed as part of a "vegetation management" project justified in part by wildfire mitigation.

Logging Threatens Fens on White River NF

The Lakeview Project on the White River National Forest in Colorado proposes to employ “commercial thinning” in the 6,661-acre project area, much of which is characterized by wetlands, including irreplaceable fens. According to the Notice of Proposed Action (NOPA) issued by the Forest Service, the purpose of this “vegetation management” project is to “Improve forest resilience to disturbances by ... enhancing species, age class and structural diversity within the spruce-fir cover type.”

A Forest Service press release states that Englemann spruce and subalpine fir will be cut “to increase age and size diversity.” It also identifies “insects and disease” as “disturbances” to be protected against. The insect-and-disease threat? “Western spruce budworm is present within the project area.... Defoliation caused by western spruce budworm is currently minor.”

Western spruce budworm is a native species that exists, in part, for “enhancing species, age class and structural diversity within the spruce-fir cover type.” Yet, the Forest Service wants to build 2.5 miles of new roads through wetlands, then use heavy equipment and chainsaws to accomplish “age and size diversity” that is already happening through natural processes.

But that’s just Part One. “Additionally, trees would be thinned within 200 feet of either side of

National Forest System Roads 1831 and 1834 to create a boundary to better manage wildfires.” Thanks to a computer model, “We’ve identified the roads along the ridge between Eagle and Summit counties as potential control features to better manage a wildfire in the area,” said Dillon District Ranger Adam Bianchi.

Of course, high winds (a fairly common occurrence in the Colorado high country) drive catastrophic wildfire and render fuel breaks ineffective. Even so, the spruce-fir forests of Colorado seldom burn, with “fire frequency often exceeding 150-250 years.” This forest was shaped by natural processes and has never needed humans to manage its vegetation.

Nonetheless, “It is anticipated that a changing climate would create future conditions that have an increase in the occurrences of drought conditions.” But anticipation has more to do with Carly Simon and Heinz ketchup than forest ecology. Anticipation is essentially emotionally biased guessing. It has very little to do with science, yet it justifies a mechanical intervention into a natural, beneficial ecosystem.

Colorado’s mountain wetlands, especially the fens, which have persisted for millennia, are miracles of resilience and sustainability in a drought-prone landscape. They provide fire refugia from which entire forests can regenerate after catastrophic wildfire. “Vegetation management” would damage these wetlands and lessen fire resilience, not improve it.

Idaho's Parachuting Beavers Build Forest Resilience

In 1948, Idaho Fish and Game began parachuting “nuisance” beavers into the backcountry in spring-loaded boxes that opened upon landing. The “nuisance” began in the wake of WWII as prosperity returned to the nation and more reliable automobiles allowed people to discover places like McCall, Idaho. People started building homes near beaver complexes. Suddenly, the beavers became a problem.

Elmo Heter worked for the Fish and Game Department in McCall, and he came up with the idea of parachuting the industrious animals into the wild. Heter believed that the Chamberlain Basin, in what is now the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area, would be the perfect location. The beavers would be away from people, and their natural activity would benefit the landscape. But with no roads into the basin, delivering 76 beavers to their new home would be challenging. The combination of WWII paratroopers, a ready supply of airplanes, and cheap fuel supported beaver airdrops. The parachuting beavers thrived in the wilderness, and so did the local ecosystem.

Beavers are a keystone species that once shaped ecosystems across North America. Their elimination from the landscape had altered ecosystems, leaving them drier and more susceptible to wildfire. In the decades following the release of Idaho's skydiving beavers, the benefits of beaver activity **caught the attention of NASA analysts**, whose satellite imagery revealed lush landscapes in areas where the beavers had landed. As it turns out, the beavers created and are sustaining ecosystems that represent a front-line defense against wildfire and drought.

A recent study conducted by Forest Service researcher Sebastian Busby and Portland State University professor Andrés Holz demonstrates the importance of fire refugia for forest regeneration. “After the fires,” Holz said, “these green islands that we term refugia may be the last bit of hope we have for the forests to recover naturally.”

In the aftermath of wildfire, beaver complexes are green islands in a charred landscape. The beavers' handiwork also protects water resources by reducing sedimentation and ensuring cleaner water for downstream communities.

A beaver-dam complex on Baugh Creek remains green amid a charred landscape in the aftermath of Idaho's Sharps Fire. This green island or fire fugia created by beavers is an invaluable resource for mitigating drought and wildfire threats (photo by Joseph Wheaton, Utah State University)





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A seasonal recreation crew repairs fences on the Little Missouri National Grassland (Forest Service photo by Rob Schilling).