

An aerial photograph of a dense, lush green forest, likely a coniferous forest, covering a hillside. The trees are tightly packed, creating a vibrant green texture. The lighting is bright, highlighting the individual trees and their shadows.

SPECIAL REPORT

THE GREAT LIE

We are wasting
our forests, but it is
not due to logging
and harvesting.
We are ruining our
natural wealth with
political arrogance
and indifference.

PHOTO © BRIAN PARKER, TOM STACK & ASSOCIATES

LOOKING DOWN FROM 30,000 FEET BY TIM FINDLEY

Looking down from 30,000 feet, the great forests of the Northwest begin to roll away behind you from where the Rockies meet the plains. It is like crossing an infinite carpet of deeper and deeper greens etched faintly by shaded highways and roads, open only now and then to the clearings of towns or farming valleys. So immense is it as you are carried at hundreds of miles an hour toward the Pacific that many seeing it for the first time have been made to wonder at

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The forests are not vanishing. The epic of vast untrodden wilderness cannot be gone. The mystery is still there, the lost sense of curving river meadows and deep dark canyons cannot help but inspire imagination even from so great a height.

Yet the truth is surprising in its contradiction. If we could fly back in time to the 15th-century period of first European discoveries, our window view would seem little different—except to the trained eye able to recognize that there were not more trees in that presumed pristine time, but less. And that what we witness now after two most recent decades of mistruth is not a plan to recover the forests, but a misguided plot to murder them.

In the 21st century, we fly over a productive, ever renewable resource our own people are forbidden to harvest, and with each passing year we are losing more and more of the skills it would take to do so. The forest from on high seems so bounteous, but it is actually choking on itself in the thick clutter of unchecked growth. Clutched in impossible tangles, much of it suggests more of terror than tranquility. It is a fire waiting to happen. More in despair than peace is the dead dry evidence among the standing trees of insect infection killing at will.

We are wasting our forests, but it is not due to logging and harvesting. We are ruining our natural wealth with political arrogance and indifference too far out of reach to bring to earth.

“If the question is to thin or to burn,” said a Forest Service official to *RANGE* in 2000 with a statement that stands today, “then the answer is burn.”

Later that year on our imaginary flight you could have seen the smoke that covered hundreds of square miles in the Bitterroot fire of Montana and Idaho that still lies largely in infested ruin.

American forests have never been threatened by overlogging more than they are today by lies and mismanagement. ■

A decade ago, *RANGE* magazine ran a cover story called “Something’s Wrong In Libby, Montana,” which discussed the possible collapse of the forest-management culture in our rural public-land-dependent towns in the West. What has happened since that article was printed?

The numbers are sobering. According to Paul Ehringer & Associates of Eugene, Ore., 430 sawmills have closed in the West since 1988. The job losses in the milling and logging industries exceed 50,000.

Where I live in Lincoln County, Mont., (population 18,000) we’ve lost five sawmills and over 1,500 timber jobs. If the collapse is due to forest mismanagement, and/or the evening newscasts have been correct—“We’re running out of trees”—then the collapse would be easier to stomach.

The real reason for the collapse of public timberland management in the West is not a lack of trees, but a lack of understanding. Will Rogers was right when he said: “It ain’t what you don’t know that’s a problem. It’s what you know that ain’t so that’s a problem.”

ASH & SMOKE

© JIM PETERSEN

When it comes to forest management, the public knows a lot that ain’t so, and that lack of understanding is saving our forests and forest communities to death.

Many of the trees we enjoy today should have been killed by fires during the last 100 years. But with the advent of Smokey the Bear in the early 1900s, we minimized the impact of fire in our ecosystems. We now know this was a mistake. We should let fires burn the forest a bit at a time. After nearly a century of fire suppression, we now have a mammoth “fuel loading” problem.

Contrary to popular opinion, we do not have too few trees. We have too many trees of the wrong size, of the wrong type, and in the wrong places. When today’s forests catch fire, they burn as never before because the fuel load of dead and down timber is, in many places, over 500 percent of normal. The fires have way too much fuel to burn. Each summer, catastrophically hot forest fires engulf and consume vast watersheds of overstocked and overstressed trees.

None of this is news. The General

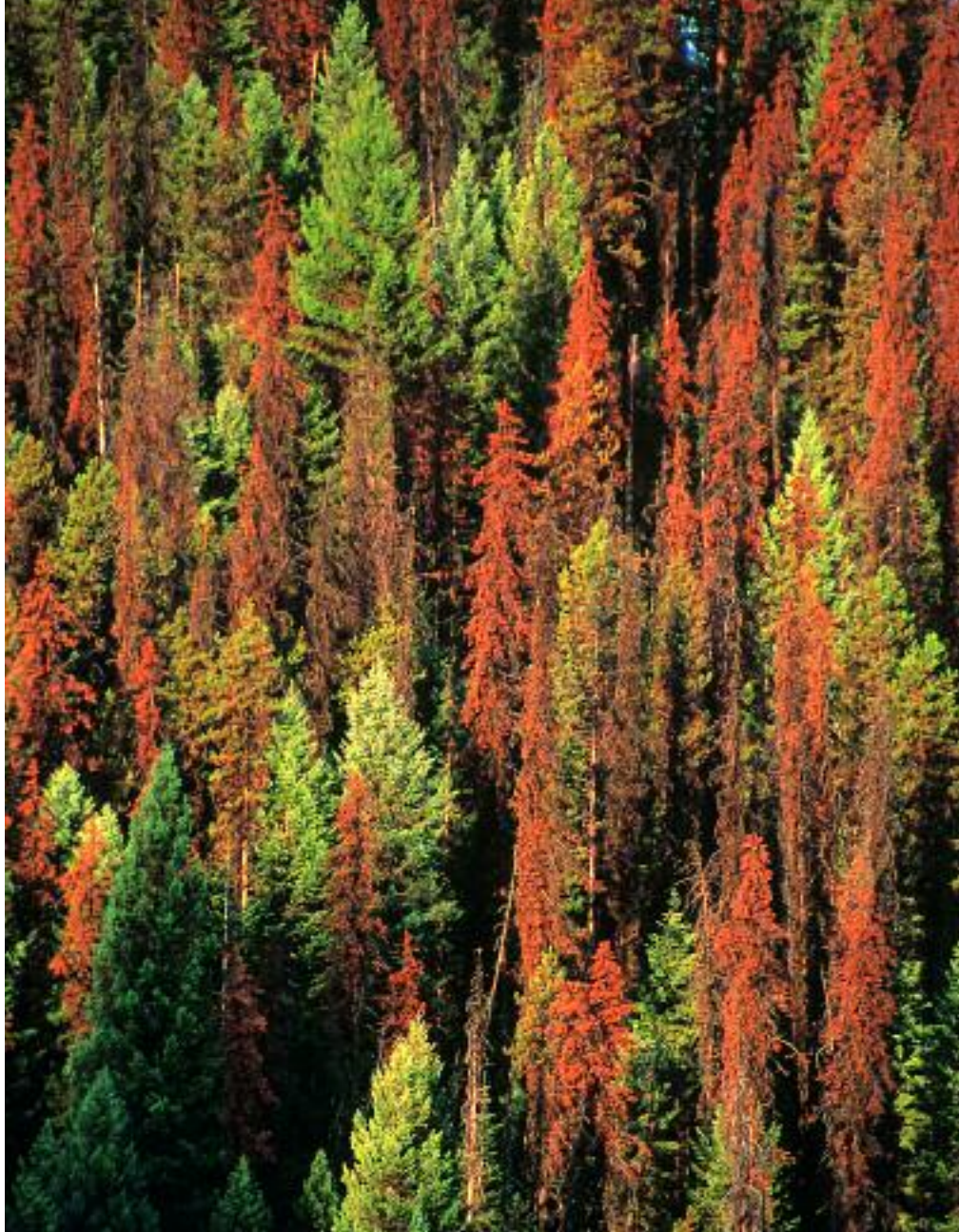
*We do not have too few trees.
We have too many trees,
of the wrong size, of the wrong type,
and in the wrong places.*

By Bruce Vincent

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This photo of the devastating aftermath of a 2001 wildfire in northern New Mexico shows just how thick the Southwest’s forests have become over the last half-century. Whether thinning would have prevented this is impossible to say, but the damage most certainly would have been less severe than this total loss. In some areas, stand density is now a hundred times greater than it was a century ago—an unintended consequence of the nation’s long-standing policy of excluding wildfire from forests the public values for its timber, recreation potential, wildlife habitat and watershed.



Mortality was near 100 percent in this lodgepole pine beetle infestation near Elk City in northern Idaho's Nez Percé National Forest, yet nothing was salvaged or replanted because environmental litigants blocked every Forest Service attempt to repair nature's wrath. Streams in this watershed provide critical spawning habitat for salmon and steelhead.

Accounting Office identified the problem in 1990. They reported that there were over 190 million acres of forestland in the West where the biggest ecological threat is a single wildfire. These unnaturally hot blazes race across the landscape, burning homes, threatening communities, toasting wildlife and its habitat, pulverizing watersheds and boiling stream courses.

There is a better way. We have the technology to do fuel-reduction projects that would let us remove some of this fuel, take the chosen trees to wood-processing plants in our communities, turn these "tubes of carbon" into consumable products for a consuming society, and then reintroduce fire into our fuel-reduced ecosystem. Unfortunately, the environmental-conflict industry has spent the

last decade litigating to stop this human intervention and force our rural communities into allowing nature to take its destructive course.

Thankfully, the policy discussion of forest management has changed in the last several years. It changed when tens of thousands of Southern Californians stood on the roofs of their million-dollar homes with six-dollar hoses trying to fight the blazes roaring out of their million-dollar viewsheds. The policy discussion changed because the residents of Arizona, Colorado, Oregon and California have all witnessed the largest fires in their histories in the last five years and, as the old song goes, "We've only just begun."

With the reality of natural management burning down to the edges of the San Bernardino Airport, President Bush's Healthy

This lodgepole pine beetle was dug from the bark of a tree on northern Idaho's Nez Percé National Forest, scene of a devastating infestation that has yet to run its course. Once beneath the bark layer, beetle kill is almost assured. Beetles can detect tree stress brought on by the presence of more trees than a growing site can support, especially during prolonged drought.



BEETLE © JIM PETERSEN

Forest Initiative passed both chambers of Congress and was signed into law in 2003. Unfortunately, attempts to implement this commonsense legislation have faced lawsuits from the professional litigants within the environmental-conflict industry. Very little positive action has happened in the forest near communities like those in northwest Montana. For many, such as those employed at the Owens and Hurst Mill in Eureka, implementation was too late.

In our rural communities, the impact of such closures is felt well beyond the sawmill fence. For every one of the nearly 200 jobs lost in Jim and Carol Hurst's manufacturing plant, another five jobs are lost in our county. These jobs are in the service sectors of oil and gas stations, grocery stores, hardware stores and restaurants.

In addition, the families employed at the plant leave with their children, and the schools then feel the double impact of a loss in students amid a collapsing tax base.

County Commissioner Marianne Roose of Eureka says: "The impacts just keep rolling through our town. We have a new eight-million-dollar school, and we have no idea how we'll pay for it now."

The sawmill and its workers also provided financial support for the community's civic and social network. Mrs. Roose wonders: "Who is going to contribute to our local churches? Who is going to contribute to the local Little League? Who is going to buy the children's stock at our annual fair 4-H sale? I bet it won't be the



This ponderosa pine thinning on private land in eastern Oregon is an excellent example of the kind of thinning work so desperately needed in federal forests in the interior West. Such thinnings almost always prompt appeals and litigation by radical environmental groups, which is sad because these projects reduce the risk of catastrophic fire and disease, increase wildlife forage and prompt natural regeneration.

attorney for the Ecology Center.”

In Libby, County Commissioner Rita Windom points out that we have 140 graduating seniors in 2006 from our high school and 75 incoming kindergartners. We have lost 1,200 students from our small system in the last five years. “The family-wage jobs that we have lost are now translating directly into lost families,” Mrs. Windom says. “If you want to live in an area and raise a family, you need a family-wage job, and the sawmills and logging jobs have left or are leaving—and taking the next generation with them.”

Will the timber culture ever return to Libby? I think so, but reality is a relentless dictator. The fact is that the Kootenai National Forest has 2.5-million acres of trees. Each year, this forest grows 492-million board feet of wood while 300-million board feet of timber dies due to windthrow, insects and dis-

ease. If we do not remove some of this fuel, we are simply stacking 300-million board feet of firewood in our forest, in our watersheds, around our communities and around our homes.

If professional litigants rather than professional managers continue to control our forests, America will, in time, get to enjoy a summer show of natural management that will be anything but benign. This is not conjecture. It will happen. Just as levee breaches in New Orleans were known threats to that city, the fuel buildup in our western forests is awaiting a “category five” firestorm event.

If we have not learned what science is telling us before that time, then possibly from the ashes will arise some sanity that will not ignore the realities of nature or the needs of humanity. Perhaps we will recognize the need

to provide for our domestic consumption of wood fiber rather than importing 65 percent of our wood-fiber needs from other nations with less environmental sensitivity than our own. Perhaps we will see a new generation of forest stewards move back into our area with the courage to invest in the multimillion-dollar machinery necessary to implement modern forest-management theory with the support of society rather than its scorn.

Perhaps. But if society waits for the realities of ash and smoke to dictate a positive step toward sanity in forest management, then our forest ecosystems and our forest social and economic systems will continue to pay a terrible price. ■

Bruce Vincent, a third-generation logger, lives in Libby, Mont. He is executive director of Communities for a Great Northwest.

DEATH OF A SAWMILL

Environmentalists wreck small businesses—and do ecological damage while they're at it. By Jim Petersen

My friend Jim Hurst auctioned his sawmill in August 2005. Jim's decision to pack it in after 25 years of beating his head on the wall made big news in northwest Montana but, alas, not a peep from *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times*. That's too bad, because the loss of our family-owned mills also signals the loss of technologies and skills vital to our efforts to protect the West's great national forests from the ravages of increasingly fearsome wildfires.

I was in Jim's office a few days before the auction. He told me he was at peace with his decision, but Jim has a good game face, so I suspect the decision to terminate his remain-

ing 70 employees tore his guts out. They were like family to him.

Jim's outfit was the economic backbone of tiny Eureka, Mont., a sawmill town since the early 1900s. I have a photo of my school-teacher great-aunt standing on the front steps of the town's one-room schoolhouse in 1909. Although the town has grown some since then, its rural charm is still very much intact.

Thanks to the nation's housing boom, business has been good for the West's sawmills for the past three years. But Jim faced an insurmountable problem: he couldn't buy enough logs to keep his mill running. This despite the fact that 10 times as many

trees as Jim's mill needed die annually in the nearby Kootenai National Forest. From his office window, Jim could see the dead and dying trees standing on hillsides just west of the mill. They might as well have been standing on the moon, given the senseless environmental litigation that has engulfed the West's federal forests.

Thanks to Jim's resourcefulness, his mill survived its last five years on a steady diet of fire- and bug-killed trees salvaged from Alberta provincial forests in Canada. Such salvage work is unthinkable in our national forests, forests that, news reports to the contrary, remain under the thumb of radical environmental groups whose hatred for capitalism seems boundless. Americans are thus invited to believe that salvaging fire-killed timber is "like mugging a burn victim." Never mind that there is no peer-reviewed science that supports this ridiculous claim—or that many of the West's great forests, including Oregon's famed Tillamook Forest, are products of past salvage and reforestation projects.

Jim shared his good fortune with his employees. Each received an average \$30,000 in severance and profit sharing: a tip of the hat from him to a crew who set a production record the day after he told them he was throwing in the towel. Such is the professionalism—and talent—found among the West's mill workers. A few Oregon mills tried to recruit them, but most don't want to leave Eureka. I haven't the faintest idea how they'll make a living, but in the 40-odd years I've spent observing forests and people who live in them, I've learned never to underestimate the power of roots.

Although he's still a young man filled with creative energy and enthusiasm, I suspect the government has seen the last of Jim Hurst. Three years ago, I called nearly 100 sawmill owners scattered across the West and asked them if they would invest \$40 million in a new small-log sawmill on the government's promise of a timber supply sufficient to amortize the investment. The verdict was a unanimous "No."

The never-reported truth is that the family-owned sawmills that survived the decade-long collapse of the federal timber-sale program no longer have much interest in doing business with a government they no longer trust. Most now get their timber from lands they've purchased in recent years, other private lands, tribal forests or state lands. Some even import logs from other countries, including Canada, New Zealand and Chile.

You would think that environmentalists



The now long-gone Owens & Hurst mill was ideally suited to processing small logs like those in this photograph. A perpetual supply of timber this size grows and dies annually on the nearby Kootenai National Forest, but thanks to radical environmental litigants almost none of it is available for harvest. It simply dies and falls down—or burns in increasingly frequent and ferocious wildfires. When it was still operating, the mill often got logs this size by the pickup load from nearby private landowners. Now they've lost their market for their thinnings—and have no profitable way to maintain the health and productivity of their forests.

who campaigned against harvesting in the West's national forests for 30-some years would be dancing in the streets. And, in fact, some of them are. But many aren't. Railing against giant faceless corporations is easy, but facing the news cameras after small family-owned mills fold has turned out to be very difficult. Everyone loves the underdog, and across much of the West there is a gnawing sense that environmentalists have hurt a lot of underdogs in their lust for power.

Environmentalists also face a problem they never anticipated. Recent polling reveals some 80 percent of Americans approve of the kind of methodical thinning that would have produced small-diameter logs in perpetuity for Jim's sawmill. We Americans seem to like thinning in overly dense forests because the end result is visually pleasing, and because it helps reduce the risk of horrific wildfire. That's a bonus for wildlife and for millions of year-round recreation enthusiasts who worship clean air and water.

Many westerners wonder why the government isn't doing more thinning in at-risk forests which are at the epicenter of our Internet-linked New West lifestyle. I don't. Until the public takes back the enormous power it has given radical environmentalists and their lawyers, the Jim Hursts of the world will continue to exit the stage, taking their hard-earned capital, their well-developed global markets and their technological genius with them.

Fifteen years ago, not long after the release of "Playing God in Yellowstone," his seminal work on environmentalism's philosophical underpinnings, I asked philosopher and environmentalist Alston Chase what he thought about this situation. Here is his answer:

"Environmentalism increasingly reflects urban perspectives. As people move to cities, they become infatuated with fantasies about land untouched by humans. This demographic shift is revealed through ongoing debates about endangered species, grazing, water rights, private property, mining and logging. And it is partly a healthy trend. But this urbanization of environmental values also signals the loss of a rural way of life and the disappearance of hands-on experience with nature. So the irony: As popular concern for preservation increases, public understanding about how to achieve it declines." ■

Award-winning journalist Jim Petersen is founder of the nonprofit Evergreen Foundation and the publisher of Evergreen magazine in Bigfork, Mont. <www.evergreenmagazine.org>

PHOTOS © JIM PETERSEN

In its heyday, the Owens & Hurst Lumber Company employed more than 200 Eureka-area millworkers. In its latter years, most of the mill's logs came from fire salvage operations in Alberta's provincial forests. In the distance, you can see the Kootenai National Forest, where more timber dies annually than grows or is harvested. The company tried many times to buy timber from the KNF, but the forest's timber sales were appealed or are in litigation.



"First and foremost, you can never forget for a moment what is the object of our forest policy. That object is not to preserve forests because they are beautiful, though that is good in itself; nor because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness, though that, too, is good in itself; but the primary object of our forest policy, as of the land policy of the United States, is the making of prosperous homes. It is part of the traditional policy of homemaking in our country. Every other consideration comes as secondary. You, yourselves, have got to keep this practical object before your minds; to remember that a forest which contributes nothing to the wealth, progress or safety of the country is of no interest to the government and should be of little interest to the forester. Your attention must be directed to the preservation of forests, not as an end in itself, but as the means of preserving and increasing the prosperity of the nation."

TEDDY ROOSEVELT, SPEAKING TO THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS, WASHINGTON, D.C., 1903



Buyers from seven states flocked to the Owens & Hurst equipment auction in Eureka, Mont., August 16-17, 2005. Most everything sold in two days, including the mill's nearly new debarker, which was purchased by Stoltze Lumber Company at nearby Columbia Falls. O&H co-owner, Jim Hurst, sold what little federal timber he still had under contract to Stoltze, the last family-owned sawmill in the area.

NOTES FROM AN OLD STUMP JUMPER

Rural America is falling prey to a subtle form of eco-terrorism. By Jim Hurst

I look out my office window at a site similar to a bombed-out munitions factory in World War II Germany and I have to ask myself, "What went wrong?" Seeing a once productive and efficient mill destroyed by the cutting torches of dismantlers is a gruesome sight witnessed far too often in rural communities adjacent to our national forests.

Rural America is falling prey to what I call a subtle form of eco-terrorism. These covert operations are perpetrated by a wide array of environmental groups in conjunction with their attorneys, do-gooder bureaucrats, liberal judges, a biased media, and urbanites who buy into the propaganda spewed forth by all the above. This menagerie of nonproducers is eroding the cultures and customs of rural America by taking away our ability to make a living and enjoy our surroundings. They do their damage primarily by using the courts to stop or delay worthwhile projects such as timber sales, oil and gas development, mining and grazing.

This form of eco-terrorism doesn't manifest itself in burned-out ski facilities, destroyed tree plantations, torched SUV deal-

erships or vandalized logging equipment. It's subtle, but nevertheless just as painful. It affects main-street rural America by eroding our lifestyles and taking away our ability to control our own destinies. It capitalizes on our independent values and our ability to handle adversity by ourselves without help from others. This admirable trait is in a significant way destroying us.

We go about our daily tasks, heads down and butts up, and our rural world continues to deteriorate. We can do our work in oblivion and allow this to happen, or we can make a stab at changing the direction we're heading. To me, rural Americans are the most unappreciated and underrepresented segment of our society. If this is true, then we're either indifferent or lackadaisical for not using the power we possess to effect positive and significant change.

After years of promoting rallies and letter-writing campaigns, testifying at senate hearings and generally raising hell, I have come to

the realization that if we are to improve our lot, it is going to have to be at the polls on election day. Rural America has the votes to swing any presidential election in a direction favorable to what we deem important. As a voting bloc we can impact most senatorial races as well.

There are rural areas in every state and candidates should not ignore us. They should seek us out. While reducing crime in urban areas is important, reducing poverty in rural America is just as important. It's high time decision makers come to us for our input instead of caving in to a rural economic-development group holding a hand out for a federal grant.

In our case, what went wrong is the fact that we had no control over our own destiny and no help from Washington. Environmental groups, many funded by green trusts and foundations, torpedoed the timber program on the Kootenai National Forest. Our case is not unique. It illustrates what happens when outsiders make decisions and we are powerless to intervene. Rural

dwellers who own private property should also beware, as government takings "for the good of the nation" will most likely accelerate in the coming years. And don't forget who covets our water. The effects of the Endangered Species Act will continue to jeopardize ranching, farming, timber and extractive industries. The environmentalists hang their hats on that rack while ranches, farms, mines, and mills hang a foreclosure sign on the same rack. And we let it happen over and over and over.

Personally, I don't care who represents me in Washington as long as he or she has rural America's interests at heart and is willing to fight for us. Rural Americans want what's best for this country—security, a livable wage, social justice, a clean environment, high moral standards, equal representation in Congress, and a president who can hear us. What we don't need are federal laws, mandates, and executive orders that take decision making away from us.

Rural America must organize or face oblivion. How it'll be done and who does it remains to be seen. One thing I know is that there is no room for extremists, self-promoters or large egos. Reasonable people with strength in numbers can effect positive change for rural Americans. That's the rack I'm willing to hang my hat on. ■

Jim Hurst lives in Eureka, Mont.



Desolation—both literal and figurative—characterizes this photograph taken in the winter of 2005 following the Owens & Hurst auction. Most of these buildings have now been sold for salvage. Little remains on the site other than the office. Jim Hurst has yet to decide what he will do with the acreage. Most of his former employees are reportedly still living in the Eureka area. Each got around \$30,000 in shared profits from Jim when he closed the plant.

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Just since the politically inspired environmental movement found trendy support for its campaign to “save” the spotted owl, timber harvesting on U.S. national forestland has been reduced by more than 85 percent.

It is a crippling and ultimately fatal blow swung by propaganda on the American lumber industry. Twenty years ago, Canadian lumber represented about 10 percent of the American market. Today, most of the basic framing material like two-by-fours used in American construction comes from the north and at least 35 to 40 percent of all lumber sold in the United States is of Canadian origin.

In Yakima, Wash., last May, the last mill in a once timber-driven region closed down, putting at least 200 people out of work. Local residents expressed concern that there will be no place for the unemployed to find new work. Already, they said, the community has been overrun by mostly Latino undocumented workers seeking jobs in the fruit orchards. It has presented a problem with the emergence of street gangs, two of which had recently engaged in a running gun battle through Yakima streets.

All over the Northwest, and all over the Southwest as well, mills have been forced to close—at least 300 of them in the last

15 years. What remaining independent loggers there are have been forced to transport even salvaged logs farther and farther to a handful of mills still able to operate. The result is ultimately higher prices to the consumer. But in the former mill towns the impact is more immediate, as collateral businesses like shops and grocery stores have also been forced to close. Several schools have shut down as parents moved on looking for new work.

The spotted owl, contrary to environmentalists’ claims, has been found to nest in second-growth forests and is still not considered endangered.

What is clearly endangered, however, is what former forester Jack Mahon calls the “culture” of workers with the skill and willingness to work as woodsmen.

The trees have not been helped. The owl didn’t need any help. The families and the children of displaced workers didn’t get any help. Is there some question left on the motive, or perhaps just the intelligence, of the environmentalists?— *Tim Findley*

OWL BE DAMNED

How and why the government failed so miserably in its costly attempt to protect spotted owls is a sordid tale that illustrates what happens when science is politicized. By Jim Petersen

Last January, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service published a call for proposals for development of a recovery plan for the northern spotted owl. It’s about time. The owl was added to the nation’s burgeoning list of threatened and endangered species nearly 16 years ago. That it took so long helps explain why only 10 of 1,264 species listed under the 32-year-old federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) have ever recovered.

If my gut sense is correct, the owl won’t be number 11. It is already doomed across much of its range, and the reason is well-known among field biologists who have been observing the bird for 20 years. More aggressive barred owls are pushing them out of their 21-million-acre home range, or killing them, or both.

Barred owls (not to be confused with common barn owls) migrated west from their native East Coast environs a century or more ago. No one knows why, and until they started killing already threatened spotted owls, no one cared. Now they do. Just how long it will take the barred owls to finish off

their brethren isn’t known, but the situation has become so precarious that a federal biologist recently opined that shooting barred owls might be the only way to save spotted owls.

How and why the government failed so miserably in its costly attempt to protect spotted owls is a sordid tale that illustrates what happens when science is politicized. It begins with the fact that protecting owls was never the objective. Saving old-growth forests from chainsaws was. The owl was simply a surrogate—a stand-in for forests that do not themselves qualify for ESA protection. But if a link could be established between harvesting in old-growth forests and declining spotted owl numbers, the bird might well qualify for listing—a line of thinking that in 1988 led Andy Stahl, then a resource analyst

with the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, to famously declare, “Thank goodness the spotted owl evolved in the Northwest, for if it hadn’t, we’d have to genetically engineer it. It’s the perfect species for use as a surrogate.”

Indeed it was. But to back their play, the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society and their friends in the Clinton administration needed a good story for the judge. They found it in three obscure reports: a 1976 master’s thesis written by wildlife-biology major Eric Forsman at Oregon State University; Mr. Forsman’s 1980 doctoral dissertation; and a 1984 report written by Forsman and two other biologists. All three reports suggested a strong

link between declining owl populations and harvesting in old-growth forests. Unfortunately, this hypothesis has never been tested. So despite 16 years of research, no link between old-growth harvesting and declining owl populations has ever been established.

We know little about the relationship between harvesting and owl populations. One such study—privately funded—infers an inverse relationship between harvesting and owls. In other

words, in areas where some harvesting has occurred owl numbers are increasing a bit, or at least holding their own, while numbers are



Saving spotted owls (above) may mean killing barred owls (p. 50).

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Old-growth sitka spruce, Olympic National Forest, Washington. INSET: Barred owl, the spotted owl's nemesis.

declining in areas where no harvesting has occurred.

This news will come as no surprise to Oregon, Washington and California timberland owners who are legally required to provide habitat for owls. Their lands, which are actively managed, are home to the highest reproductive rates ever recorded for spotted owls. Why is this?

One possible answer is that the anecdotal evidence on which the listing decision was based is incomplete. No one denies the presence of owls in old-growth forests, but what about the owls that are prospering in managed forests and in forests where little old growth remains? Could it be that spotted owls are more resourceful than we think?

We don't know. And the reason we don't know is that 16 years ago some federal scientists chose to politicize their hypothesis rather than test it rigorously. They flatly rejected critiques from biometricians, who questioned the statistical validity of evidence on which the listing decision was based, and declared with by-god certainty that once the old-

growth harvest stopped, owl populations would begin to recover.

Some biologists believe that spotted owls still have a fighting chance for survival east of the Cascades in Oregon and Washington. But there is a problem here: white fir is pushing native Douglas fir out of these forests in the same way barred owls are pushing spotted owls out of their home range. Minus a long-term thinning program opposed by many of the same environmental groups that pushed the owl's threatened species listing, the birds will probably vanish from these forests too.

No doubt one or more environmental groups will use the government's call for recovery plans to demand that even more habitat be set aside for spotted owls. When that demand is made, Congress must be forcefully reminded of a recent U.S. Forest Service estimate that an additional 1.1 million acres of federal forestland in the Pacific Northwest have grown into old-growth status since the owl's listing—and that despite this growth, spotted owl numbers continue to decline.

Senators especially must be reminded by voters of these facts, because they have yet to endorse changes in the Endangered Species Act ratified by the House of Representatives last fall. Among other things, the House version mandates immediate development and implementation of recovery plans for all listed species. To avoid repeats of the spotted owl fiasco, it will be necessary for the scientists involved to peer-review listing proposals representing all sides of inevitably controversial questions.

It should not take 16 years to write a recovery plan. The fact that it did ought to prompt some very pointed questions by concerned citizens everywhere about what went on behind locked doors in Portland, Oregon's U.S. Bank Tower. The building was nicknamed the "Tower of Power" by the government scientists who gathered there in the spring of 1990—beyond public and congressional scrutiny—to sift through the pieces of their story. Congress should ask for their notes, but shouldn't expect much to be revealed. I'm told they were shredded daily. ■

NO MILL NO MARKET NO FOREST

Lack of use causes landscape-scale risk of catastrophic fire. By Jim Petersen

People don't like what big wildfires do to forests. And in forest restoration, they see a proactive, therapeutic, nondestructive alternative. But in order to succeed, restoration must be pursued with the same intensity and effort that took us to the moon. That means paying close attention to at least six key aspects of restoration that are often ignored or downplayed.

First, forest restoration will fail if the work is not done on physical scales that are ecologically and economically meaningful. Small pilot projects that are designed to show the public what is possible and to encourage collaboration, usually along well-traveled routes near communities, do nothing to reduce the landscape-scale risk of catastrophic wildfire. Remember, some 70 million acres of federal forestland in the West need treatment, about 40 million acres sooner rather than later.

Similarly, we have to work well beyond the wildland-urban interface. If we don't, we risk the loss of millions of acres of forest habitat critical to the recovery of threatened and endangered species—and we risk the loss of our municipal watersheds. Water has replaced timber as the primary raw material the public needs from its forests. But far too little is being done to protect these watersheds.

Second, there is not enough gold in Fort Knox to pay for all the restoration work that lies ahead. The work has to pay for itself, which means it has to be done on physical scales large enough to accommodate the capital and operating costs of some quite sophisticated thinning and processing technologies. Mechanical harvesters cost about \$1 million new. High-speed, small-log sawmills cost \$25 million. In-woods chippers sell for about a half million. Trucks are extra. And small power plants built to convert woody biomass to energy cost a minimum of \$1 million per megawatt to construct.

Field research conducted in the northern Rockies and in New Mexico proves forest restoration can pay its own way—and perhaps even earn a modest profit—if the government widens its management horizon to include all plant and animal species, not just late-succession species.

We all seem to agree on the benefits of maximizing biological diversity, yet we are preoccupied with protecting old-growth forests, which provide precious little forage for animals. Why not protect the whole forest, which in turn could support a much wider variety of plant and animal life? Why not pay more attention to structural and age-class diversity? Imagine living in a town struck by a great plague, and learning that the city fathers had decided to make their limited supply of lifesaving vaccine available only to the oldest and sickest people in town. Can a community survive without the very young, without adolescents, without young families, without an able-bodied workforce? I don't think so. A forest can't either.

Third, before it tries to reinvent the wheel, the government should enlist the help of the wood-processing industry that is still here. Across the West, more than a thousand local sawmilling, logging and trucking businesses were wiped out by the collapse of the federal timber-sale program. Faced with the need to spend millions of dollars on new sawing technology, some owners chose not to make the transition to small logs. But many more did make the investment in anticipation of the government's shift from old-growth liquidation to thinning and harvesting regimes that favored late-succession species. But the shift never came, and so many of these mills are gone too.

Using federal or private grant monies to fund start-up businesses is fine, but it will be years before these inexperienced businesses can make their own way without subsidy. We don't have time to wait for them to succeed or fail on their own merits. But existing businesses, with years of experience and knowledge, provide the government with an unparalleled

opportunity to succeed immediately, while forest restoration is still very much in the public spotlight.

There is still sufficient processing and marketing capacity to begin the rescue work tomorrow in western Montana, northern Idaho, South Dakota's Black Hills, eastern Washington, southern and eastern Oregon and Northern California. These mills, which are mostly family owned, lie within some of the sickest forests in the entire national forest system. If existing infrastructure can't be put to work here tomorrow, it doesn't say much for the future or for the credibility of the rest of the process.

Fourth, replicate success. Of all the forest restoration projects I've seen, the most successful by far is the Clearwater Stewardship Project near Seeley Lake, Mont. There are six reasons for its extraordinary success, and not surprisingly all the reasons are people: a competent and enlightened district ranger; a very supportive forest supervisor;



Foreign cargo ships loading U.S. timber for export in 1991. Now we are importing Canadian and other foreign timber, even though our own national forests are growing billions of board feet of timber each year. Instead of being used, it's taken by bugs or fire.

a family-owned milling business willing to invest its capital in the venture; a very supportive community; conservation groups that see the value in the project; and a first-rate monitoring committee hand-picked by the district ranger. These human resources are available all over the West. It is the government's job to nurture political and investment climates in which they can blossom. Begin by learning from and building on Seeley Lake's stellar success.

Fifth, the government needs a prospectus, just like any other suitor looking for investment capital: a series of reports that quantify and qualify the restoration work to be done over the next few decades on a forest-by-forest basis. No such documents exist. I tried for three years—unsuccessfully—to find funding for a comprehensive biomass study for Montana. The last such report was completed in



Mule deer feeds in burn area in Grand Teton National Park. Note new growth, fall 1988.

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history to support the claim that forest restoration will only make things worse than they already are. The court-sanctioned destruction of public and private assets to fulfill the misguided ambitions of a few is wrong. Nowhere else in our society is such a callous disregard for humanity's needs tolerated: not in crime prevention, national defense, homeland security or health care. Why are we tolerating it in forests so vital to all of us?

Last, I want to beat the drum for the only place in the entire government where you can

1988. It is too old to be of any value to anyone considering a power plant or high-speed sawmill. You cannot fund such sophisticated operations on 16-year-old information. No lender will talk to you.

Sixth, it is long past time for our government to get serious about managing risks in forests. There is no evidence in science or

get answers to questions concerning small-wood processing, utilization or marketing; the Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory at Madison, Wis. *Evergreen* magazine devoted a special issue to the lab's impressive scientists, engineers and marketing specialists. We called it, "Giant Minds, Giant Ideas."

Even if the federal government never again sells a stick of timber to a private enterprise, it will still be necessary to actively manage the public's forests—to thin and harvest trees periodically in ways that replicate nature's rhythms, thereby controlling the limits of natural disturbance, the crippling influences of insect and disease infestations and the devastating impacts of unnatural wildfires.

In these endeavors, we would do well to heed the wisdom of an old Tennessee forester friend. He said: "When we leave forests to nature, as so many seem to want to do, we get whatever nature serves up, which can be pretty devastating at times. But with forestry we have options, and a degree of predictability not found in nature." ■

Jim Petersen is working on a book covering the post-World War II history of the West's independent sawmill owners.

For more than 20 years since Jack Mahon left his 15-year job with the Forest Service, he has risked his reputation and his jobs as an independent forester to appeal for some sanity in U.S. federal policy.

He saw Bill Clinton and Al Gore campaigning in the Northwest with empty promises to forest workers and their families concerned about their jobs and income. He was a witness as Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt simply absorbed the Forest Service from the Department of Agriculture and without virtue of law or policy placed his own man, Michael Dombeck, at the head of a department he meant to use to close the forests down.

Mahon loved the Forest Service; he considered it his home. But he saw Dombeck and Babbitt, with Clinton's cover, "create havoc in those western communities that have always depended upon the national forestlands for their recreation, jobs, and tax base."

Writing from a sometimes-lonely place in his own home near Helena, Mont., with only a small local paper to print his words, Mahon appealed again and again for people to understand that "Dombeck's programs are contrived in the name of protecting wildlife and fish when in actuality the goal is to close down the forest."

Few listened, even as Mahon revealed the infiltration of the Forest Service by environmentalists with a goal of "reinventing" the federal department. Babbitt wanted ranchers who grazed livestock on federally managed land punished; Dombeck wanted source

control of water in the West. The people didn't really matter. No loggers would be necessary in a utopian wilderness sold to the Clinton gang, and no visitors would be welcome either as

Dombeck set out to close the roads.

"The Forest Service," Mahon forecast in 1999, "has become a rogue agency bent on locking us out of our national forests."

Mahon today finds the wounds so deep that they are unlikely to heal without a major reassessment of Interior and Forest Service policies. As a forester, he knows it is not trees that are lacking, but the human integrity to manage them as a renewable resource. It will require courage not shown in the Bush administration, he says, to confront the entrenched environmentalists, but America needs to know the truth.

Writing to professor Donald W. Floyd at the State University of New York in 2004, Mahon offered this: "Two great injustices during the last 20 years have been the character assassination of professional foresters and the logging industry by the elitist environmentalists and the brainwashed public. Tragically, the Forest Service, the Society of American Foresters, and the forestry professors in academia have watched this happen with no word of protest and no strong public vote of confidence." —*Tim Findley*



PHOTO COURTESY U.S. FOREST SERVICE

CAMP 32

Fire and fuel treatment works. By Ron Hvizdak, USFS Ret.

The Camp 32 wildfire that burned approximately 800 acres on Aug. 7, 2005, illustrates the fuel problem existing across the lower-elevation ponderosa pine ecosystems across the western United States.

The fire started in the lower elevations of the Pinkham Creek drainage in the Kootenai National Forest, in close proximity to residences and private land. Residents in the immediate vicinity were evacuated, and those north of the fire were put on evacuation notice. While no homes were lost, one garage and a small shed did burn. If it weren't for a fuel-treatment project that was implemented by the Rexford Ranger Dis-

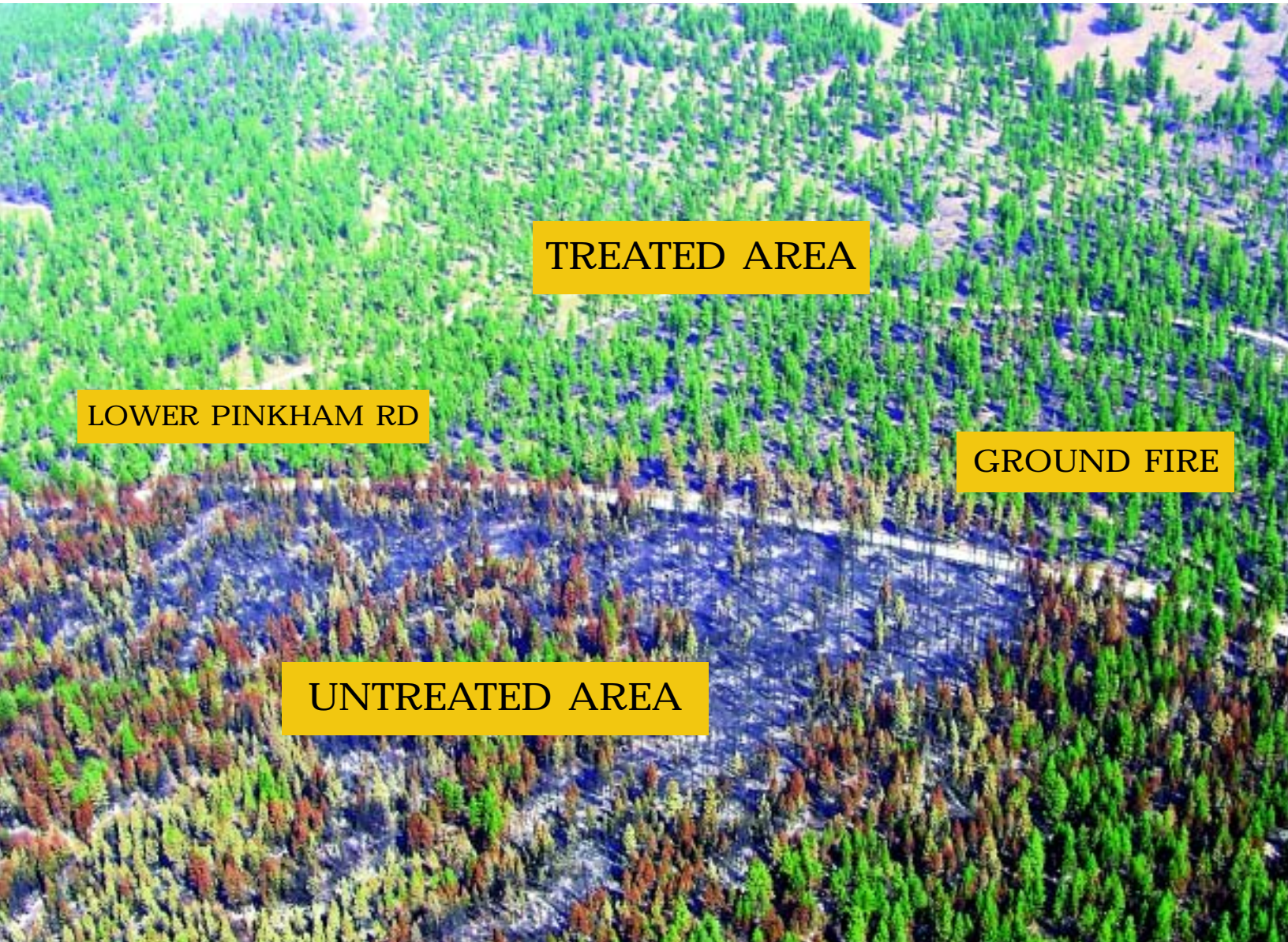
trict personnel, the result would have been infinitely more serious. The Rexford District had implemented fuel-treatment projects on national forestlands within the urban interface for over two decades in anticipation of events such as the Camp 32 fire. The ecosystems have changed substantially due to the influx of people moving into these areas. The threat of severe fire is enhanced.

Before man started suppressing fires in the early 1900s, many of the dry ponderosa pine stands burned naturally with light ground fires every five to 20 years. This kept the ground fuels and stand densities low and effectively pruned the lower limbs of larger trees. Since man has stopped most of the fires for nearly a century, ground fuels have built up and dense stands have devel-

oped which are just fuel for the fire. Since man created the problem, we also need human intervention to resolve it. Nature will not fix this problem.

The objective of fuel-treatment projects is to manage a stand so that if a fire enters it, the fire will stay on the ground and not develop into a crown fire. The use of prescribed fire, while often helpful, can't do it alone. We have to cut trees prior to the prescribed fire. In many cases, this means logging. By logging the dense understory, these stands can be thinned to a level at which crown fires will have a hard time sustaining themselves, even if a single tree were to torch out. The leftover debris from the logging can either be piled and burned or the area can be burned with a prescribed light ground fire.

This is exactly the type of treatment that was done prior to the Camp 32 fire. A timber sale thinned the treated area in 2001. The plan called for leaving all the larger trees on-site. Much of the material to be removed was of



TREATED AREA

LOWER PINKHAM RD

GROUND FIRE

UNTREATED AREA

commercial value, thus the use of a timber sale made perfect sense. Rather than using taxpayers' dollars to do the work, much of it was funded by the sale of material that needed to be removed. Once the logging was completed, the rest of the unwanted material was cut and piled, with the piles being burned in the fall of 2002. In the spring of 2003, the Rexford District conducted a prescribed burn over the entire fuel-treatment area, thus completing the job.

When the Camp 32 fire started, it quickly developed into a crown fire in untreated stands of timber that couldn't be stopped.

While some action could be taken along the flanks of the fire, safety concerns prohibited any action at its leading edge. When the fire entered the area where the fuels had been treated, it dropped from a crown fire to a much slower burning ground fire. This made it safer for suppression crews to attack the head of the fire and also helped reduce the costs of the overall suppression efforts. The 800 burned acres cost taxpayers nearly \$2 million to suppress. Had fuel treatment and stand management not already been done, these numbers could easily have been doubled or tripled—or worse. ■

Ron Hvizdak is a retired fire management officer, Rexford District, Kootenai National Forest. "This fuel-treatment project, as well as almost all our fuel-treatment projects, was challenged by several environmental groups that don't think we should be managing national forestlands. Getting these projects through the system has cost the taxpayers a lot of money because of these challenges. But the money, lives, and property saved by the fuel treatment that was done make it all worthwhile. Much more work is needed, and in fact the untreated area that burned with extreme crown fire was slated for treatment as well." Ironically, and nearly tragically, it too was challenged by environmental groups.

TREES ARE THE ANSWER

A world without forests is as unthinkable as a day without wood.

By Patrick Moore, Ph.D.

Without a doubt, wood is the most renewable material used to build and maintain our civilization. Forestry is the most sustainable of all the primary industries. This should give wood a lot of green eco-points in the environmental movement's ledger.

Unfortunately, this doesn't seem to be the case. Greenpeace has gone before the United

Nations Inter-Governmental Panel on Forests, calling on countries to reduce the amount of wood they use and to adopt "environmentally appropriate substitutes" instead. No list of substitutes is provided. The Sierra Club is calling for "zero cut" and an end to all commercial forestry on federal public lands in the United States. The Rainforest Action Network wants a 75-percent reduction in wood

use in North America by the year 2015. I think it is fair to summarize this approach as "cut fewer trees, use less wood."

It is my firm belief, as a lifelong environmentalist and ecologist, that this is an anti-environmental policy. Putting aside, for a moment, the importance of forestry for our economy and communities, on purely environmental grounds the policy of use less wood is anti-environmental.

Why is this the case?

Twenty-five percent of all the wood used in the world is for building things such as houses and furniture. Every available substitute is nonrenewable and requires a great deal more energy consumption to produce. That is because wood is produced in a factory called the forest by renewable solar energy. Wood is essentially the material embodiment of solar energy. Nonrenewable building materials such as steel, cement, and plastic must be produced in real factories such as steel mills, cement works, and oil refineries. This usually

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LEFT: Clear-cut logging, Whatcom County, Wash. ABOVE: New growth on clear-cut, southern Oregon.

requires large inputs of fossil fuels inevitably resulting in high carbon-dioxide emissions. So, for 70 percent of the wood used each year for energy and building, switching to substitutes nearly always results in increased carbon-dioxide emissions, contrary to climate-change policy.

Fifteen percent of the wood harvested is used to manufacture pulp and paper mainly for printing, packaging, and sanitary purposes. Fully half of this wood is derived from the wastes from sawmills, which produce the solid wood products for building. Most of the remaining supply is from tree plantations, many of which are established on land that was previously cleared for agriculture. So even if we did stop using wood to make pulp and paper, it would not have the effect of "saving" many forests.

I have spent the last 15 years trying to understand the relationship between forestry and the environment, to separate fact from fiction, myth from reality. Since 1991 I have chaired the Sustainable Forestry Committee of the Forest Alliance of British Columbia. The general public is being given the impression, by supposedly reputable sources such as *The New York Times* and *National Geographic*, that forestry is a major cause of species extinction when there is actually no evidence to support that position.

Forestry seldom, if ever, causes species to become extinct. We tend to think that forests need our help to recover after destruction, whether by fire or logging. This is not the case. Forests have been recovering by themselves, without any assistance, from fires, volcanoes, landslides, floods and ice ages, ever since forests began more than 350 million years ago.

Consider the fact that 10,000 years ago all of Canada and Russia were covered by a huge sheet of ice, under which nothing lived, certainly not trees. Today, Canada and Russia account for 30 percent of all the forests on earth, grown back from bare rock. Go to Alaska where the glaciers are retreating due to the present warming trend, and you will see that from the moment the rocks are laid bare to the sun, it is only 80 years until a thriving new ecosystem is growing there, including young trees.

Fire has always been the main cause of forest destruction, or "disturbance" as ecologists



ABOVE: Little remains in the devastating aftermath of the 500,000-acre Biscuit Fire on southern Oregon's Siskiyou National Forest. Less than one percent of the commercial timber killed by the 2002 fire has been salvaged. The rest has been tied up in litigation or declared off-limits to salvage.
BELOW: Planted Douglas fir seedlings, Port Gamble, Wash.

like to call it in order to use a more neutral term. But fire is natural, we are told, and does not destroy the forest ecosystem like logging, which is unnatural. Nature never comes with logging trucks and takes the trees away. All kinds of rhetoric are used to give the



impression that logging is somehow fundamentally different from other forms of forest disturbance. There is no truth to this. It is true that logging is different from fire, but fire is also very different from a volcano, which in turn is very different from an ice age. In fact, no two fires are ever the same. These are differences of degree, however, not kind. Forests are just as capable of recovering from destruc-

tion by logging as they are from any other form of disturbance. All that is necessary for renewal is that the disturbance is ended: the fire is out, the volcano stops erupting, the ice retreats, or the loggers go back down the road and allow the forest to begin growing back, which it will begin to do almost immediately.

In the context of my experience I say: "Give me an acre of land anywhere on earth, tell me to grow something there with which I can make paper, which would also be best for biodiversity, and I will plant trees every single time, without exception." It is a fact that even the simplest monoculture pine plantation is better for wildlife, birds, and insects than any annual farm crop. It is ridiculous for environmental groups that say their main concern is biodiversity conservation to be advocating the establishment of massive monocultures of annual exotic farm crops where we could be growing trees.

I believe that trees are the answer to many questions about our future on earth. These include: How can we best advance to a more sustainable economy based on renewable fuels and materials?

How can we improve literacy and sanitation in developing countries while reversing deforestation and protecting wildlife at the same time? How can we reduce the amount of greenhouse gases emitted to the atmosphere, carbon dioxide in particular? How can we increase the amount of land that will support a greater diversity of species? How can we help prevent soil erosion and provide clean air and water? How can we make this world more beautiful and green?

The answer is: by growing more trees and using more wood as a substitute for nonrenewable fossil fuels and materials such as steel, concrete, and plastic, and as paper products for printing, packaging, and sanitation.

The fact is a world without forests is as unthinkable as a day without wood. And it's time that politicians, environmentalists, foresters, teachers, journalists, and the general public got that balance right. Because we must get it right if we are going to achieve sustainability in the 21st century.

May the forest be with you. ■

Patrick Moore is a co-founder of Greenpeace and chairman and chief scientist of Greenspirit Strategies Ltd. He holds a Ph.D. in ecology and a B.S. in forest biology.

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A LEADER'S LEGACY

The outcome of environmental conflict. By Bruce Vincent

The news blasted all over the local and regional papers in April 2005. It even made it into *USA Today*. The Owens and Hurst sawmill is closing. For good. In four months. Appropriate people expressed appropriate dismay—U.S. senators and representatives, state and local leaders. The Montana Wilderness Association and the Ecology



JIM HURST © JIM PETERSEN

Center pointed the finger at anyone but themselves. The Forest Service did the now age-old hand-wringing.

No one can fault Jim Hurst for this decision. Anyone who knows what is happening to our public forests is left marveling at how long he avoided having to make it. Anyone who knows what is happening to our public forests knows that the last several years of operation at the plant were last-gasp efforts by Hurst to keep employing people so he could walk down the main street of his never-say-die town with his head up.

IN THE BEGINNING

In May of 1988 a meeting was held in Eureka, Mont., to discuss the critical role of public involvement in the forest-planning process. The meeting was attended by 1,150 of the town's posted population of 1,152. They showed up in force because a man they respected, Jim Hurst, had spread the word that they needed to attend.

This meeting spawned the idea for the Great Northwest Log Haul. Ten days later, 304 loaded logging trucks were on the national news bringing our country the first major news story on what was to become the continuing plight of timber communities throughout the Northwest. This event

would not have occurred if it were not for Jim Hurst's willingness to commit his physical, emotional, managerial and financial resources to it.

In the 17 years following the Great Northwest Log Haul, Jim never wavered in his support of timber families. He helped form Communities for a Great Northwest to help bring new voices into the dialogue over our forests. They collaborated in helping to find solutions to our problems. He and his company joined with local governments and grassroots groups in lawsuits that helped to set national precedence for proof-of-harm claims concerning federal-land management decisions.

GOING NATIONAL

During the last several years, Jim's tireless passion and unquestioned credibility extended outside Montana and outside timber issues. It was Jim who helped collect 10,000 shovels and paid for them to be trucked to thousands of timber, ranching, mining, farming and recreationist families in Jarbidge, Nev., in an effort to fight the Forest Service and drive home the common-ground issue of access to resources (*RANGE*, Winter '01). His efforts caught the attention of news media nationwide.

Knowing of the sawmill's daily struggle to access raw logs, in May of 2001, Jim Hurst's friends decided to bring 100-inch logs to the workers at his sawmill. The Eureka Log Haul once again caught the attention of the national media—this time because of the positive, simple theme of "giving back to those who have given so much."

It was an incredible sight. Small logs from private landowners were delivered to the isolated community of Eureka in vehicles with license plates from South Dakota, Nevada, Oregon, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington and Ohio. These logs arrived in vehicles with mining, ranching, farming, banking, gasoline, school-district and law-enforcement logos on their sides. The logs were loaded in pickups, on logging trucks, in station wagons, on top of Toyotas, strapped to motorcycles, and

chained to the landing gears of airplanes. All arrived with one simple message for a man, his mill workers, and a timber town that rural America has raised to heroic stature. That message was a heartfelt thank you. In 2002 Jim was named National Timber Industry Activist of the Year.

LEGACY RUNS ON, SAWMILL WON'T

The battle to save the Owens and Hurst sawmill ended in August 2005. The 2.5-million-acre Kootenai National Forest grows 492 million board feet per year but the 30 million board feet of small, dead or green timber needed for Jim Hurst to keep employing his Eureka friends couldn't be found. The analysis paralysis that has abdicated management of our forests to professional litigants in court claimed another victim. Hurst's was the last modern stud mill in Lincoln County.

The families of Eureka witnessed the dismantling of the Owens and Hurst sawmill. The trees unavailable to the mill will indeed be managed over time—by fire. We will all be left to wonder why.

Most of us do not believe that forest management is gone for good. But the business and cultural infrastructure necessary to accomplish the task of management doesn't just materialize; it takes generations to develop. Those who have spent their careers in the constantly changing business of the practical application of academic forest management theory (logging) and the entrepreneurial application of wood technology production processes (sawmilling) are being trumped by lawyers and bureaucratic constipation. When we've tired of spending billions of tax dollars fighting fire, we'll be faced with spending billions trying to resurrect the rapidly disappearing knowledge base of how to do environmentally sensitive forest management on the ground, and billions more encouraging the capital investments necessary to process the materials removed from the forest.

IT'S NOT OVER

The Hurst family's leadership offered during their years of operation in Eureka helped numerous other businesses flourish with the Owens and Hurst sawmill as an economic centerpiece. When the mill closed, Jim Hurst told the press that the environmental-conflict industry had not heard the last of him. It's not over yet. ■

"The Great Lie" is a special report published by RANGE magazine.

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