



## Up Front

*One lightning strike...*

By C.I. Hadley

Jim Hurst still aches from the agony of closing his sawmill in Eureka, Mont., last July. "It took me a year to get back on my feet. We go through the heartache of laying off wonderful people—the innocent victims. The government and environmentalists are burning up jobs and marketable trees through ignorance." (See *RANGE* special report, "The Great Lie," p. 41-56.)

When we started writing about food producers 17 years ago, it was "the Neanderthal chainsaw buckers" cutting timber in national forests who were bearing the brunt of ignorance about natural-resource use. The environmentalists used the spotted owl to close off forests to real use and to destroy western jobs, families, and communities.

"We have to preserve the forests," the propaganda oozes on brightly colored, thick, slick, rarely recycled paper.

"The forests have to be shut down to be protected," moan people with the names of plants and trees.

"We can't let chainsaws spoil our future," wails another jobless activist.

What are they thinking? What happened to truth, fairness, or sustainable use? Or Teddy Roosevelt's orders when he spoke to the Society of American Foresters in Washington, D.C., more than a century ago.

"First and foremost, you can never forget for a moment what is the object of our forest policy," Roosevelt roared. "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.... 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."

President Bush introduced the Healthy Forest Restoration Act in 2003. "We were thrilled because we thought this was going to save us," Jim says. "We were going to aggressively cut small-diameter trees in clogged forests. But what was supposed to be a combination of thinning and fire

turned into management by drip torch. They said they couldn't get their people out on the ground to mark timber so to meet the target they burned it."

There are more trees today than when Columbus arrived in 1492. But the same-age tree is smaller now, its growth stunted. Trees don't have enough moisture to keep them healthy; they are weak; they are attacked, infested and slowly killed until the formerly green western forests that you could drive a buggy through in Teddy's day now glow orange and are dying on the slopes.

When *RANGE* interviewed the deputy of the U.S. Forest Service in 2002, we asked if they were going to log or burn. He said, "We are going to let it burn."

One lightning strike and lives and livelihoods are destroyed by conflagrations too huge for Teddy to imagine, and not easily controlled or stopped. Due to lack of forest management or passivity, and environmental litigation stopping good management, many lives have been lost, property has been destroyed, and animals wild and tame have been burned alive or mutilated.

"It pains me to see what's happening," Jim says. "Rural America has either got to get together or continue to fall apart. The chance for success is about 10 percent. You have competing associations and egos. The common thread is loggers, miners, ranchers and farmers. We have the same problems and issues. It's our own government. Trust-fund babies are killing us. It's amazing that people can still survive out here."

Many retired Forest Service employees believe that their beloved agency has deteriorated to the point that "they have few, and in most cases none, who understand the jobs." One says: "The outfit that we were so proud to be a part of was destroyed by Al Gore/Jim Lyons and no longer exists. Even if by some miracle the gridlocking legislation was repealed and gridlock stopped, the agency would still be hopeless. The expertise that left the Forest Service from 1990 to 2001 would take at least 20 years to replace."

Meanwhile, we watch as sick, dying forests, at-risk fish and wildlife, and air and water continue to deteriorate or disappear.

"All things come from the ground," Jim says quietly. "We are getting into high-tech junk in this country. It's not real. What's real is a tree growing on a hillside, a farmer's crop, a rancher's livestock, or a hole in the ground where you are getting ore. The government and environmentalists should understand that loggers, miners, ranchers and farmers are the only ones who can save this country." ■