

EDITORIAL

Environmental Extremists or Anti-capitalists?

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Fire season is once again upon Oregon. Only time will tell whether this is another catastrophic season that could have been substantially mitigated by intelligent management of the forests over the last dozen years. The debate continues to rage as to what makes a healthy forest.

Unfortunately, most of that debate takes place outside the realm of common sense or observable reality—namely, in academia and in the United States Congress.

Every year in Oregon, tens of thousands of acres of forest go up in flames, destroying trees, undergrowth and wildlife habitat. Animals are killed by the thousands, and those that survive are displaced for years to come in search of new food sources. Where the fires burn hot enough, the ground is crystallized and remains impermeable for years, defying any attempts by nature to re-vegetate. In other areas, the lack of vegetative cover results in massive erosion, choking pristine waterways and killing fish by the thousands.

From an aesthetic standpoint, the charred remnants of Oregon's annual conflagrations remain blackened sentinels to the stupidity of man who now has the tools and the technology to substantially mitigate the spread of needless wildfires. And yet we continue to bow at the altar of voodoo science/environmentalism, which suggests that killing spotted owls with forest fires is acceptable but displacing them by logging is akin to genocide.

A recent article in the *Oregonian* provides insight into the real rationale of the environmental extremists who demand that Oregon's forests be closed and permitted to burn. The article concerns a Forest Service plan to deal with the dangerous fire conditions enveloping Mount Howard, which towers over Wallowa Lake in northeastern Oregon.

The forest is described as "shaggy with firs and pines." The article described the condition of the forest as related by Forest Service officials:

"Meanwhile, subalpine fir, and lodgepole pines killed by insect pests create huge fuel loads of still-standing dead trees on the mountain, much of which is designated lynx habitat. In some spots, as many as 80 percent of the trees have died, according to Forest Service officials."

We've seen those conditions before, prior to the Biscuit Fire, prior to the B&B Complex Fire, prior to virtually every major forest fire in Oregon over the last 20 years.

In the instance of Mount Howard, however, it is as much the presence of homes along picturesque Wallowa Lake as the dangerous fuel load that drives the Forest Service to pressing ahead with a plan to clear out the dangerous fuel levels while preserving the natural beauty of the forests. The fear is that a fire in the Mount Howard area would quickly engulf the small resort community surrounding the lake.

The Forest Service proposal is to cut 1.4 million board feet of timber. And herein lies the rub. The plan proposes to cut, stack and burn trees less than 10 inches in diameter. That appears

to be okay with the environmental extremists. The plan also proposes to preserve trees in excess of 21 inches in diameter, diseased or not. That also appears to be okay.

But the plan also includes a proposal to cut and haul trees between 10 inches and 21 inches to sawmills using helicopters to avoid the necessity of logging roads. The timber destined for sawmills is what will produce the stream of revenue that will help *pay* for the remaining work to reduce the fuel load and the fire danger. The environmental extremists hit the roof. And in doing so, they have exposed their real objection to the creation of healthy forests.

Larry McLaud, a spokesman for the Hells Canyon Preservation Council, one of the thousands of cookie cutter organizations that are parachuted in whenever there is a Forest Service proposal, said that the plan “looks more like a logging project than a fuel-reduction project.” There it is folks. Cutting trees to be stacked and burned is okay, but cutting trees to be delivered to a saw mill where someone might—*gasp*—make a profit, is *malum prohibitum*.

Forest fires that destroy trees, kill animals, pollute the watershed, threaten homes and lives, and desecrate the scenery are good, but timber cutting that reduces the risk of fires, creates family-wage jobs, produces taxes and fees to the government, and provides building materials for homes is bad.

You have to ask the question, is the issue really eco-preservation or anti-capitalism? Is the concern really the spotted owl, or the fact that someone might make a dollar?

Just weeks ago, Gov. Kulongoski asked a federal court for an injunction to halt plans to conduct salvage logging in Oregon’s Biscuit Fire area. “I believe we can have it both ways—we can protect our wild places, and we can manage our working forests to support our mills, good-paying jobs, our schools and our communities,” the governor said.

But how can mills work without wood? If even the most carefully planned salvage operations in fire-scorched, devastated areas are blocked by a campaigning governor, how are jobs, schools and communities protected?

There are those who are truly concerned about the long-term maintenance of our forests and wildlife. They are appalled by the abuses of the past. They’ve been played and manipulated by extremist factions for the last 30 years. Somewhere between the excesses of the past and the anti-logging extremists in our midst lies a reasonable solution. Virtually every man and woman on the streets in Oregon’s many suburbs and small towns surrounded by forests can describe that reasonable solution.

So why can’t the politicians get it?