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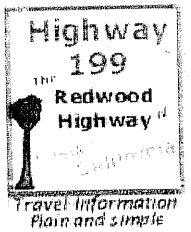

Comment on the WOPR *(The Bureau of Land Management's Western Oregon Plan Revision)*

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WOPR: A step toward timber industry lawsuits

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A dog that bites its tail and runs as fast as it can only runs in circles at great expenditure of energy producing nothing but a sore tail.

It's a comical portrayal of the problem the Western Oregon Plan Revision (WOPR) is causing tax payers and it stops being funny when we get dragged into this nonsensical merry-go-round.

Actually the WOPR stopped being funny when it was first initiated in a closed door agreement between the BLM and corporate timber industry, with no other stakeholders allowed to participate. The corporate timber industry had threatened to sue the government (that's us tax payers) based on an *estimate* made in the 1990's about possible future timber output on public lands. The corporate timber industry argued that this *estimate* was a *promise* that the BLM had made to them for a *guaranteed* timber output. Since the BLM had not cut as much timber as they *estimated*, the corporate timber industry declared the *promise* to them had been broken and they were going to sue.

This is a thin argument and even thinner considering that a court case (*Portland Audubon v. BLM, 1993*) already decided that the O&C Act does not oblige the BLM to produce a required timber volume for the timber industry.

Nevertheless, suffice it to say that the corporate timber industry has shown their colors and willingness to drag us into twaddle-based lawsuits. In this light, it would be wise for the BLM not to give them any ammo. But this isn't what the BLM has done. Instead, the BLM has created the timber industries lawsuit dream come true by publishing a whole swath of estimates in a document called the WOPR. These estimates include predictions for timber jobs that will be created and volumes of timber that will be produced for the timber industry.

The BLM will never be able to keep these "promises" so lawsuits from the corporate timber industry are imminent.

Here are four reasons why we will see massive lawsuits from the timber industry in the future.

1) Advances in technology and mechanization will reduce the number of jobs necessary to manage plantations. One person can do the jobs of hundreds. The BLM will fail to produce the estimated timber jobs. The corporate timber industry is in a position to sue.

2) Lawsuits will be inevitable as Oregonians fight for their lives and the lives of their children against corporate domination of our resources and obliteration of our heritage. Lawsuits will stall or prevent harvesting of our precious forest heritage. The BLM will fail to produce estimated jobs and timber. The corporate timber industry will be in a position to sue. Ironically, the cost of these lawsuits will be done at the expense of taxpayers, the stakeholders who were excluded from the private deal cut between the corporate timber industry and the BLM.

3) Fire will become an increasing concern because the WOPR will create an extremely hazardous fire landscape that is susceptible to large fires capable of obliterating square miles of plantations. Projections based on the impacts of climate change to the forest indicate the future forest will be dryer and the fire season longer. Fires will reduce timber productivity and will cause the BLM to fail achievement of its estimated timber output. The corporate timber industry is in a position to sue.

4) Disease becomes a concern in tightly packed, monocultural stands of Douglas fir. Here are some examples:

   Swiss needle-cast is at epidemic levels in the coastal region of Oregon and is more effectively spread in locations where trees are tightly packed. It doesn't kill the trees but reduces the growth rate causing up to 50% volume growth loss, enough to significantly reduce the WOPR's projected production estimates.

   Phytopthora, the plant disease that caused the Irish potato famine, a hallmark example of problems caused by monocultural agricultural practices, is also an active tree pathogen. Port Orford root rot is the most common victim of this disease in southwest Oregon. More important is the variety of Phytopthora that causes sudden oak death, which is also known to attack Douglas fir. Monocultural stands of Douglas fir will facilitate the spread of the disease and risk wiping out the entire timber industry in Oregon (the Oregon version of the potato blight).

   Dwarf mistletoe, a parasitic plant that is easily spread in dense stands of Douglas fir, is well known to cause growth reduction, loss of wood quality, poor tree form, predisposition to insect infestation and diseases, and premature death. Once a tree is infested with this parasite, it begins a long, and drawnout decline in growth and eventual death.

   Bark beetle is also going to become a concern because of projections that climate change is going to cause longer and dryer summers. Trees that are water stressed are more susceptible to attack by bark beetle, setting the stage for a bark beetle epidemic in dense stands of trees where they can easliy move from tree to tree.

   The WOPR will launch a forest management strategy that will facilitate the spread of plant disease, parasites, and insects. This raises the probability of massive plantation failure resulting in failure to achieve its estimated timber output and jobs. The corporate timber industry is in a position to sue.

The WOPR is a corporate timber industry litigation dream come true. This is a document that goes full circle from litigation back into litigation. Nothing solved at great expenditure of energy. The dog is running in a circle but, as a tax payer who lives in O&C country, the whole mess has dragged me into the merry-go-round and has become a pain in my tail and the tail of millions of other Oregonians and Americans. What a mess.

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