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Bureau of Land Management
Western Oregon Plan Revisions Office
233 SW 1st Avenue
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Responsible Officer,

For eighteen years, I've lived and worked in the western Oregon forests: twelve years in the old growth as a spotted owl research assistant collecting data for a population demography study and six years in young stands as a member of a vegetation crew collecting data for several studies designed to compare different management treatments over the long term. The contrast of both landscape conditions has given me an appreciation of each that I would not otherwise have. That appreciation stems from the following truism I learned in an introductory cultural anthropology course: "No contrast, no information." Simply put, it means any crazy notion will seem quite sensible if it is not balanced by a contrasting awareness. The contrast of old growth to young stands, in particular, has helped me see the immense gulf in quality that exists between them. Old growth is truly, as Jack Ward Thomas said of Nature in general, "not only more complex than we think, but more complex than we can think," and thus deserving of our utmost respect. Parker J. Palmer defines the sacred as "that which is worthy of respect." So, for me, old growth, being beyond true comprehension, reduction and artificial duplication, is sacred.

Young managed stands, on the other hand, have been reduced to fit within the limits of our current mode of thinking. And our current mode of thinking, though it is now changing, has, over a span of the last few millennia, been reduced to a near-singularity. Jeremy Hayward in his essay Unlearning to See the Sacred, sums up our near-singularity when he writes ". . . the guiding vision by which we grow up in this culture gives us two choices: materialism or materialism with transcendental theism (belief in one God as creator and supreme ruler of the universe) added on." Put another way, our choice is secular materialism or holy materialism. And that is really no choice at all, as it leaves no room for the kind of sacredness exemplified by old growth, to name but one of a whole host of omissions that includes, but is not limited to, almost all other life forms and cultures on Earth.

To rediscover such sacredness, we must do no less than question our guiding materialist vision. The difficulty in this, particularly at the institutional level, is the lack of recognized contrasts in which such questioning might find solid footing. And so we come full circle and discover the trap we have built around ourselves. From inside, it doesn't look like a trap. Actions like the WOPR make perfect sense. Opposition seems incomprehensible, naïve, idealistic and entirely at odds with reality, particularly political/economic reality. But what if the whole of reality as it appears through the lens of materialism is but part of a greater whole, or many greater wholes in which it must remain meaningfully integrated if it is to remain viable?

What if, as Arthur Koestler suggests, reality is not singular but holonic (made up of wholes that are at the same time nested parts of greater wholes etc. like the layers of an onion)? Then it becomes clear that political/economic reality is firmly nested in ecological reality and so must conform to ecological rules if it is to be viable. I think we

can safely say both secular and holy materialism fail to respect ecological rules. I'm not suggesting they violate natural law, but rather the rules (which vary from one holonic level to the next) that all life forms must follow to remain viable *over the long term*. Over the short term, almost any crazy notion can find footing for a time. And the synergy of holonic interactions (the global web of life) that has evolved over millions of years is amazingly resilient in the face of such anomalies, but there are limits. Our guiding vision's fatal flaw is that it does not accept the fundamental fact of those limits. Again, for a short time (and a few millennia represents a short time relative to the age of the Earth), most any form of (ecological) insanity can have its moment. But the true test of success is longevity.

The forestry tradition in which the WOPR is firmly imbedded has failed the test of longevity in spectacular fashion again and again. As evidence I offer the book, *A Forest Journey* by John Perlin, that traces the whole sad multi-millennia history of the timber practices in which we now engage with industrial efficiency on a global scale. He shows how civilization after civilization has gone the way of its forests, which they mined just as we do. Only fresh, untapped sources have allowed that tradition to continue, and, for the first time in six millennia, those sources are running out. We have bought a little time by deforesting the past through the exploitation of so-called fossil fuels, the forests of ancient times. But it can't last, not in a spherical and thus limited world. Being the first culture to operate at the planetary scale, we are understandably slow to realize that what worked for six millennia will no longer work. But by now, over five centuries after Columbus provided undeniable proof of global roundness and its implications, the need for sweeping cultural changes should be painfully obvious. The question is, what are those changes going to be?

Will we carry on with living as if the Earth is flat (singularly material and limitless) or will we mature into a spherically viable social order with a long term, holonic, guiding vision? That is no less than the imperative before you as you decide whether to serve your agency (an institution of the materialist singularity) and unquestioningly play your part as it proceeds with the WOPR despite the outcry of opposition that may derive not from naivete, but from a truly different, and likely broader, awareness of reality than that of your agency.

Unless you are skeptical by nature and open to criticism, I expect your internal filters, your fire-walls built up over the years to create an insulating cushion around the materialist guiding vision with which you will rationalize and justify going forward with the WOPR in good conscience, are already working to discredit the opinion offered here. Any doubts that manage to get through will likely be dispelled by your coworkers as, rallied together, you will pick this letter apart bit by bit, until, surprise, all that remains is your original materialist guiding vision . . . Got to get the cut out. Salary, budget, revenue, personal, professional and societal senses of identity, purpose and self-worth within the dominant guiding vision all demand rejection of these words. So why do I offer them?

The hope of inspiring not just a change of mind but a change of heart is only a small part of my reason for writing this letter. After all, the materialist armor is too thoroughly constructed, its institutions too firmly entrenched, to expect one short letter to make even a dent. The main reason I write the letter is to have the viewpoint it offers put on record. Responsibility for failing to consider it is thus, not in my hands. As one who has spent

years questioning the guiding vision, found contrasts and believes in healthier alternatives, I have, by sharing the essentials with you, done my part. Now it is your turn, as the officer whose decisions have the chance to make the difference in the land itself. It is up to you whether millions more acres of Oregon's forests will reflect a continuing flat, reductionist, monotypic guiding vision or whether they will reflect a cultural shift toward a broadened sense of the sacred. Will we as individuals and as a society continue to favor clear-cut hearts, or old growth? We make that choice one tree at a time, one acre, one stand, one watershed, one forest, one region, one continent, one world, one spirit. And Many.

This represents a daunting transformation of consciousness. The failure to question the materialist guiding vision can hardly be faulted. It is perhaps the hardest questioning in which anyone or any society has been called to engage in six thousand years. Unfortunately, the singular focus promoted by the prevailing materialist vision makes it very difficult to also see the world's current challenges as the greatest opportunities for genuine, healthy change that have arisen in six thousand years. Consider how, in so many places across the globe, things could not get much worse, usually in direct proportion to the prevalence of the flawed materialist vision. This means, with a different vision, vast improvements are possible. Of course, the risk is great. What we face is largely unprecedented. But if we don't face it now, when and where we can while there is still time to cultivate deliberate viable alternatives, a far nastier future awaits when we have no options left but desperate, reactionary survivalism. Ask yourself which condition the WOPR would, over the long term, help bring closer to reality? If I've presented a compelling contrast to the guiding vision in which I too grew up but learned to doubt, perhaps we now agree on the answer. Then, it will be time for the really hard questions, the questions that will take us deeper into ourselves toward a broadened, inclusive, guiding vision, and its practical expressions, more in keeping with the imperatives of current times and circumstances than the prevailing singularity of materialism.

Respectfully,



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