

THE SEQUOIA SEEDLING



Volume I

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America, the Beautiful

By: Valerie Cassity, Programs Director

While manning the Sequoia ForestKeeper information booth at a recent community event, a greasy-haired, beer guzzling man told me that “You people are what’s wrong with this country.” I never did find out who was implied in “You people,” but I am assuming that he meant “Environmentalists.” This brings up the question of how to define an environmentalist, because that term encompasses a wide array of individuals. Is an environmentalist the neighbor who recycles cans and bottles, or is it the person who sits in a dinghy with a Greenpeace group to keep the whaling boats and oil tankers from getting to their destination? For most of us, being an environmentalist falls somewhere in between.

To me, environmentalism is synonymous with patriotism; for what could be more patriotic than assuring that this land, and the people it sustains, remain healthy and able to contribute to the good of the whole now and in the future? By going through the legal channels to affect forest management policy, for example, we are taking part in the democratic process that makes this nation great. We are exercising our uniquely American freedom of speech and we are ensuring that our government acts according to the laws of this land.

Unfortunately, the current administration has simply avoided, ignored, or re-written the environmental laws that protect this land. President Bush has been conducting an undeclared war - not against Iran or North Korea, but against our nation’s waterways, forests, air, and the citizens of this nation who care about the environment. Bush’s “Clear Skies” initiative will do

nothing to clear the air; it will increase the amount of pollutants we breathe by allowing corporations to buy the right to spew dangerous waste into the atmosphere. The “Healthy Forest Restoration Act,” drafted at the request of the Bush administration, will decimate thousands of acres of old growth forest in the name of fire protection, while doing little to protect homes and communities from wildfire and potentially increasing future fire risk. It will also take away our democratic right to take part in the planning process on public lands. This is a right that belongs to every American, not just the timber interests as this Administration would have you believe. Bush’s most recent battle is being waged in our own back yard; he is severely weakening the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment to allow more logging of large trees, despite the years of scientific analysis that went into drafting this plan. And no one can forget our President’s fight to drill for oil in the Alaskan wilderness, which is one of the last pristine refuges we possess.

To some citizens, the Bush administration’s anti-environmental agenda is a reasonable response to what those “enviro wackos” have done for the past 35 years. But to those of us willing to look at the big picture and to speculate about what this country will look like 20 years in the future, President Bush appears to be leaving a frightening legacy, indeed. America is certainly beautiful now, but what America will our grandchildren inherit?



Forest Service Regional Plan Would Almost Triple Sierra Logging

By: Ara Marderosian, Executive Director

Pursuant to the mandates of the Bush Administration, the Forest Service just published a draft supplemental environmental impact statement (“DSEIS”) proposing severe revisions to the current Sierra Nevada forest management plan (“Sierra Nevada Framework” or “Framework”) which governs the eleven Sierra Nevada National Forests. The proposed revisions would nearly triple logging within these National Forests.

The Sierra Nevada Framework is a result of 14 years of planning, research, conservation efforts, and political negotiation. The current Framework management plan provides the minimum level of habitat protection necessary to protect sensitive species like the California Spotted owl and the Pacific Fisher, whose populations are in precipitous decline and approaching extinction, while putting in place focused efforts for community fire protection, including guidelines to allow the removal of brush and small trees near communities to reduce the risk of forest fires.

The administration is now proposing to jettison the results of those 14 years of hard work; the results of years of scientific study; the tens of millions of dollars expended in study, analysis, drafting and public meetings; the delicate political compromises achieved; and the over 35,000 public comments requesting increased protections. It proposes to jettison the Framework to go back to business as usual – increased logging (including the cutting of old growth trees up to 29 inches in diameter, deep within the forest), increased grazing, increased off-road vehicle use, and severely weakened habitat protections.

The Forest Service argues that this revised plan, which was drafted in just over a year, is a wildfire management plan that would save taxpayers money, create jobs, and generate revenues in rural areas. The Forest Service provides no support for these claims. The proposed revisions to the carefully analyzed and drafted Framework management plan lack scientific evidence to support its logging increases, its claims of fire risk reduction, and its conclusions about the benefits of the plan to species at risk of extinction.

The DEIS Is More Likely to Increase Fire Risk than Reduce It

The scientific consensus is that logging of large trees will not reduce fire risk. The SNEP Report and the National Fire Plan indicate that removal of large trees will increase fire severity. Research shows that logging or thinning increases wildfire intensity and severity more than any other human activity. Logging of large trees removes the tree canopy, which is what keeps the forest moist and cool. Removing the canopy causes the sun to shine on the forest floor, causes brush to grow where trees once stood, and causes the surface winds to increase in the forest, which all increase fire hazard. The brush fields that replace these logged trees are more flammable than the trees they replace. If logging is paid for in trees or in dollars, logging fails to reduce the fire risk.

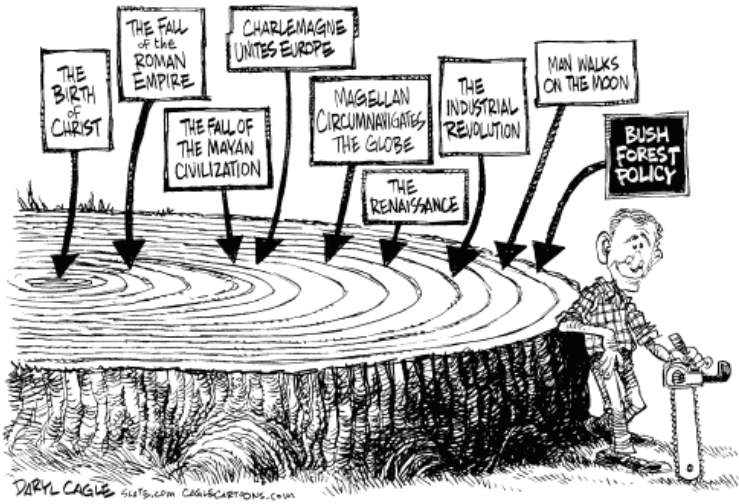
Other studies have demonstrated that manual reduction of very small diameter undergrowth, including thickets of saplings (typically under 8 or 9 inches in diameter) and brush can reduce the incidence of large severe fires. See Omi and Martinson (2002). Given that such undergrowth treatments are effective, why is the Forest Service proposing the scientifically unsupportable plan to remove trees as large as 29 inches in diameter in the forest?

Logging To Pay for Appropriate Fuels Reduction Will Not Work

Logging of large trees is justified by the Forest Service as a means of paying for necessary thinning of small fuels. While this may sound persuasive, history demonstrates that it will not work. As reported by the federal General Accounting Office (GAO) in 1997, logging costs taxpayers over \$1.2 billion per year. While individual forest regions do receive limited funds from timber sales, the costs to the National Treasury far outweigh those receipts. Timber sales have been and will continue to be a drain on the National treasury. It would be far less costly to this nation to pay the costs of small fuels reduction directly, rather than through a highly subsidized timber sale scheme.

Moreover, the proposal to sell off our healthy, old-growth forests to pay for fuel reductions is a false and unconscionable tradeoff. Barbara Boyle of the Sierra Club said of the proposal to pay for fuels reduction by selling old-growth trees, "It's like telling someone who is on the operating table, 'I'm sorry, but you'll have to give up a





kidney in order to pay for your heart bypass.' The only clear winner here is the timber companies." We should not be forced to trade our healthy forests and ecosystems for fire protection. We do not sell off body parts to finance our health care, nor do we auction off our garages to pay for fire protection for our homes. Equally unacceptable is the proposal that we pay for fuels reduction with logging projects of large and healthy trees, especially when logging of such trees will, in the long term, increase future fire risk and decimate our wildlife habitat.

Decimation of Wildlife

The proposed revision of the Framework will harm wildlife by reducing the current minimum levels of habitat protection necessary to retain ecosystems. The DSEIS proposes to reduce canopy cover in the forest to 40%. The spotted owl and the pacific fisher require areas with approximately 75% or greater canopy cover for nesting so they can hide from their predators. The significantly reduced canopy cover proposed in the DSEIS is inadequate for the owl and the fisher to nest, leading inexorably to the extirpation of the owl and fisher from these forests.

The proposed revision also advocates logging 448 million board-feet from the 11 Sierra Nevada National Forests. This proposal is made despite the Framework's conclusions, based on long-term studies of biological experts, that the owl and fisher can be sustained only if less than 191 million board-feet of trees are removed from these forests. This proposal to log at levels more than twice that at which these species can be sustained is unacceptable.

Incredibly, the Forest Service contends that in 20 years, habitat will recover from the proposed logging increases. Even if such an optimistic prediction was true, the obvious flaw in this analysis is that species are likely to go extinct during the 20 year eriod recovery given current downward population trends of at-

risk species combined with the severe habitat reductions proposed in the DSEIS. A death sentence today, in exchange for a promise of improved habitat in the future, is a poor trade-off, indeed.

True Fire Risk Reduction

Rather than re-writing and weakening the carefully crafted Framework Management Plan, this Administration and the Forest Service should focus their energies on decreasing fire risk by taking direct action within the community to protect property from fire. The government's own National Fire Sciences Laboratory has demonstrated that we can protect our homes from both flames and firebrands by installing flame resistant roofing and siding and by removing the concentration and distribution of flammable materials, including the excess growth of brush and small trees, within 200 feet of structures. Because this work is labor intensive and not profitable for logging companies, the administration has ignored these simple and effective measures.

True Job Creation

The Forest Service claims that this plan would employ 1,900 people. Rather than spending more taxpayer dollars on logging, which will only increase wildfire intensity, we propose using some of the \$1.57 billion scheduled for the Healthy Forests Initiative budget for 2004 to pay for flame resistant roofing and siding material and the 100 to 200 foot clearing around structures in or adjacent to forests. Many more than 1900 persons could be employed to perform these essential tasks that will actually protect communities. Other monies saved by not logging could be used to increase recreational pleasure and safety with improved trails, campsites, and restroom facilities. The budget for these activities has been severely reduced in recent years and could be reduced further to implement Bush's logging scheme.

Please take the time to write your personal letter to the Forest Service and tell them to not implement an increase in logging, grazing, or OHV uses in the Sierra Nevada.



State of the Forest

By: Valerie Cassity, Programs Director

On a hot July Wednesday, SFK board member Charlene Little and I spent a day viewing past logging and clearcuts in the Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument. I had gone expecting to see giant patches of dirt, but what Charlene and I viewed was even worse.

Sequoia ForestKeeper's stance is that logging changes the natural conditions of the forest, even when trees are re-planted. Logging opens up the forest canopy and allows the sun to shine directly on the soil, which dries it out and allows underbrush to grow unchecked, causing flammable conditions that cannot be controlled. Never have I regretted being right about something so much.

The areas that were clearcut in the eighties and nineties are covered in new growth, but the only thing that thrives in those areas now is not trees; but thick, dense, flammable brush. The Forest Service did attempt to plant trees after each cut, but without much success in many places. Yes, there are a few ponderosa pines scattered here and there, but they are surrounded by brush that reaches five feet high in some places.

In the areas where the Forest Service "successfully" planted after a cut, there are even-aged, same-species plantations, which pose almost as large a fire threat as the brush. To the people who truly believe that the forest has to be logged to be saved from destructive fire, I say go take a look at the areas logged ten to twenty years ago, then re-think your stance on "protective" logging.

Nearby the horrendous crimes against nature they call clearcuts, lay the natural forest. Ah, the natural forest, where it is cool and shaded and there is virtually no brush to be seen. I spotted various species of trees that grew tall and strong, a testament to the effectiveness of Mother Nature.

I discovered, on this day of many truths, that the Forest Service's statement that sequoia seedlings require full sunlight to grow, their main argument for proposing two acre patches to be cut in the sequoia groves, is a complete fallacy. I personally witnessed sequoias growing at various stages in the natural, shaded forest, but very few could be found in the logged areas where the sun blazed onto the soil.



Picture of Sequoia after a logging operation that took place two decades ago.

The Healthy Forest Restoration Act, set to be voted upon by the Senate at the end of this summer, will give the timber industry free reign to log millions of acres of forest across the country in the name of "Hazardous Fuels Reduction." The only thing that this Act will accomplish is to create more hazardous fuels.

Please write to your senators and congressmen, and let them know that you do not approve of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act. Tell them that the most effective way to reduce the fire hazard in our forests is to thin saplings and get rid of the brush that is given free reign in logged areas. The trees will thank you for it.

To find out how to reach the representatives in your area, go to our website: www.sequoiaforestkeeper.org, to the useful links page.



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