

# EVERGREEN

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## **Siskiyou Showdown**

The politics of hope and destruction  
collide in southern Oregon

# In This ISSUE

In this issue, Montana writer and photographer Dave Skinner journeys to our southern Oregon roots to tell a heartbreaking story about the fiery death of one of America's most enchanting national forests: the Siskiyou.

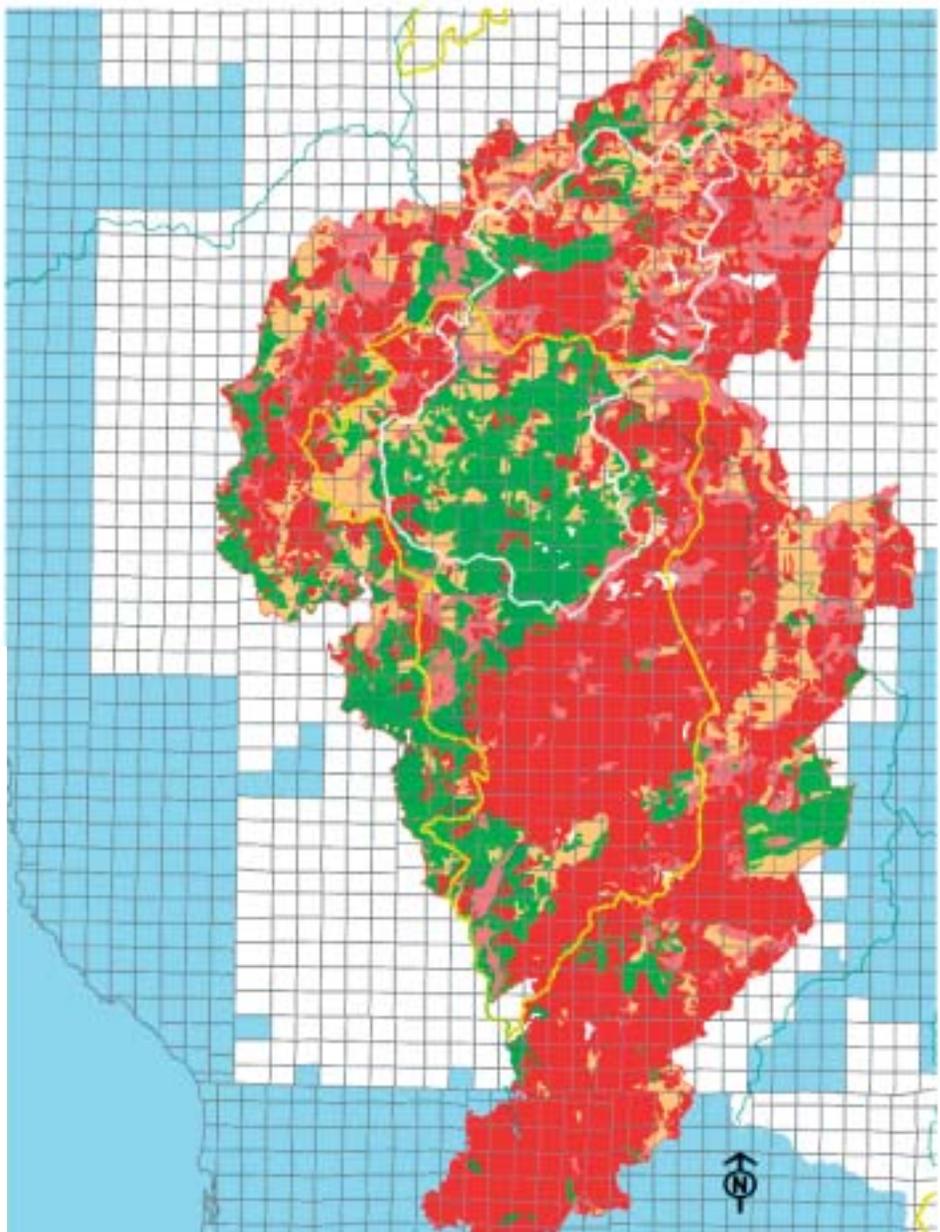
*Evergreen* was founded in southern Oregon in 1985. Back then almost every community had at least one family owned sawmill. Virtually all of them were dependent on the federal timber sale program that sprang up in the West after World War II; but most perished a decade ago, victims of the program's litigation-driven collapse.

Our mission was to encourage citizen participation in the rewrite of federal forest plans that occurred in the mid-1980s. It was a huge job. Forest plans are very complex, often running well over 1,000 pages. We translated seven of them into words ordinary people could understand; then helped build a supporting network of grass roots groups.

By the tens of thousands southern Oregon citizens publicly endorsed science based forestry in the belief that strong local support for rational decision making would keep their forests and communities healthy. In retrospect, they never had a chance, as you will learn in Mr. Skinner's story about the take-no-prisoners war that radical leftists are waging against science and the public. Blame it on an outdated Endangered Species Act, strife inside federal forest management agencies and a 30-year legacy of conflicting laws and regulations that Mr. Skinner and others have likened to the fabled Gordian knot: all the ammunition needed to topple the West's timber-dependent communities.

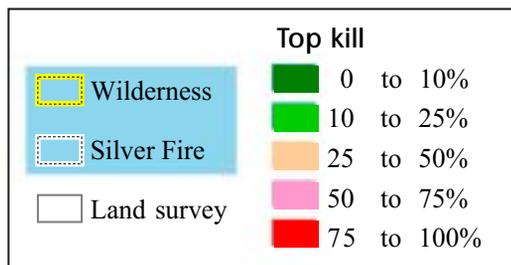
The Biscuit Fire dispute, which is the focal point of this story, is only a symptom of the need for more regulatory reform. The publicly popular Healthy Forests Restoration Act, crafted by a bi-partisan congressional coalition and signed into law by President Bush last December, was a step in the right direction, but the lesson in "Siskiyou Showdown" is that we still have a long way to go.

—Jim Petersen, Publisher



Canopy mortality based on aerial-photo interpretations. Note the low mortality inside the wilderness where the Silver Fire burned in 1987, and the scale of variation in the northeast sector.

## Legend



This map illustrates the horrific and widespread damage the 2002 Biscuit Fire inflicted on southern Oregon Siskiyou National Forest. The map is taken from the Forest Service's recently completed Final Environmental Impact Statement.

**Cover photo:** Stripped of their needles by searing heat these standing dead giants on Burnt Ridge near Sugarloaf Mountain bear witness to the awesome killing power of the Biscuit Fire. Dave Skinner photo

# SISKIYOU SHOWDOWN:

## Will anyone sever the Gordian knot?

By Dave Skinner

**T**ucked into the corrugated folds of far Southwest Oregon, the Siskiyou National Forest has been ground zero in the national forest policy wars for 25 years.

The Kalmiopsis, one of America's original 1964 wilderness areas, is here. Many environmental groups, including Earth First and Oregon Natural Resources Council, cut their teeth on this forest. The Forest Service has developed innovative land management strategies here, and been forced to defend them before the United States Supreme Court. And the Silver Fire Roundup, the largest logger protest rally ever staged, took place in nearby Grants Pass.

In 2002, the Biscuit Fire—the largest and most expensive wildfire in Oregon history—also burned here. President George W. Bush visited while the Siskiyou burned, urging public support for his Healthy Forest Restoration Act. When he signed the bill into law last December, it became the first major piece of forestry legislation passed by Congress since the Clarke-McNary Act was ratified in 1924.

Now, two years later, another national policy battle looms: will what the Biscuit Fire destroyed be restored by man, or left to nature?

### The Ground

The 1.1 million-acre Siskiyou National Forest (SNF) is mostly (85%) Douglas-fir forest that includes many other tree species with limited ranges, such as redwood, Port Orford cedar and sugar pine.

Despite the preponderance of Douglas-fir, the Siskiyou is one of the most biologically diverse and unique forests in North America, for climatic and geological reasons.



Dave Skinner

Writer Dave Skinner stands amid the ruin between Burnt Ridge and Sugarloaf Mountain on the headwater ridge of Indigo Creek. Because this area lies inside the Northwest Forest Plan matrix, some of these trees have been marked for harvest, and, barring litigation they probably will be salvaged ahead of replanting crews. Southwest of here lies a large Late Successional Reserve that won't be salvaged or replanted, so long after this stand has grown again, the "protected" LSR's will still be what the Forest Service is currently calling "nonfunctional" owl habitat.

Siskiyou Country sits at the transition between the Pacific Northwest maritime weather regime (soggy winters, and mild, moist summers), and California's so-called Mediterranean climate of soggy winters and dry, hot summers. Elevations range from nearly sea level to over 4000 feet, all of it steep, with heavily mineralized rock just inches below the surface. Rainfall ranges from a wringing 160 inches per year on the coast side to a dusty 20 inches inland.

All these factors combine to create one of the most productive, most complicated, most studied, and most interesting national forests, as well as one of the most fought-over.

According to the Siskiyou Forest Plan, a bit less than half the forest is classified as "tentatively suitable" for timber production. But since the 1993 imposition of former President Clinton's notorious Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP), almost all of the Siskiyou, 93%, is either set aside as designated wilderness, research areas, wild and scenic areas, or other non-timber classifications, or in Late Successional Reserves (LSR's) and Riparian Reserves.

Only seven percent of the Siskiyou is

"matrix" land available for sustained commercial timber harvest. But even that tiny percentage is not consistently available, thanks to litigation spawned by the "survey and manage" requirements imposed over the framework of the NWFP. As a result, the Siskiyou has almost never cut its allowed 24 million board feet—a level vastly reduced from the forest plan's 164 million board feet, and puny compared to annual growth of over 500 million board feet a year. The reduction in harvest has, of course, resulted in an equally drastic reduction in associated jobs and revenue sharing for local governments.

### The Fire

The Biscuit Fire began on July 13, 2002 after a series of dry lightning strikes started numerous small fires, a common summer phenomenon in the region. The two largest fires, the Sour Biscuit in the south, and the Florence fire in the north, blew up and burned together a couple of weeks later. When the fire was declared controlled on November 9 (it kept smoldering until the rains came in December) 499,965 acres lay inside 405 miles of fire line, after expenditures of \$153 million and the efforts of 7,000 firefighters.

Like any forest fire, not every acre burned. What burned did so with varying intensity. Roughly 20% of the burn was light, with less than 25% of vegetation killed. Another 50% of the area, mostly in the southern half and in the 180,000-acre Kalmiopsis Wilderness, burned very hot, with more than 75% of all vegetation killed.

Almost a third of the Siskiyou's LSR lands were involved. More than a fifth of the entire Siskiyou burned at high severity. In classic understatement, the Forest Service reported, "Many acres of critical habitat for

wildlife burned, and the late seral and old growth stands that remain are very precious." By their estimate, 80,000 acres of spotted owl habitat were deemed "nonfunctional."

## The Salvage Proposal

While no one can say for sure, credible estimates are that over four *billion* (that's a B) billion board feet of biomass (not necessarily commercial timber) burned, was killed outright, or stressed so badly by the fire that it is expected to die as a result. Of that total, two-and-a-half billion board feet (worth \$825 million on the stump) was within feasible helicopter and/or cable logging range of roads and landings, and therefore salvageable.

Politically, the Biscuit aftermath is another story. While reasonable people would assume that much of that wood has already been harvested, and the revenues plowed back into restoration and replanting for the future needs of the owls (and of society), that hasn't been the case. Only about 29 million board feet has actually been picked up, mostly from road-hazard clearance projects, and to some it must seem that most of that wood went into making copies of the two-volume, three-inch-thick, eight-hundred-something-page Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

The Forest Service initially proposed salvaging a miniscule 96 million board feet from 5,170 acres of "matrix" lands. But after the July 2003 release of the Sessions Report, and a considerable outcry from local government and citizens, USFS teams drafted a proposal to salvage 512 billion board feet of timber. That proposal, in turn, brought screams from environmental groups and their political allies in Oregon's urban areas.

The FEIS now proposes 370 million board feet of salvage, leaving 96% of the fire area untouched by either salvage or restoration. Josephine County Commissioner Harold Haugen, a burly fellow who looks like the private investigator he was before entering politics two decades ago, gruffly sums up the proposal as "Too little, too late." Sue Kupillas, Jackson County Commissioner since 1988, is somewhat more diplomatic: "From the Forest Service standpoint, I think it's the best they could do. But from a community



Jim Petersen

Sixteen years ago this August, more than 10,000 people gathered at the Silver Fire Roundup in Grants Pass, Oregon to voice their support for salvaging timber killed in the 1987 Silver Fire. The Roundup drew national press coverage jolting Congress into passing compromise legislation that resulted in the harvest of about half the accessible timber killed in the fire.

standpoint, just salvaging from four percent of the land seems just criminal to me. It is a huge waste."

Additionally, in a move broadly seen as "skillful political maneuvering" between Oregon governor Ted Kulongoski's office staff and Agriculture Undersecretary Mark Rey, a proposal for 64,000 acres of new wilderness was tacked on. But environmentalists long intent on 343,000 acres of new wilderness took the news badly. Kulongoski's office then backpedaled, declaring he was "disappointed that the Forest Service has only recommended the inclusion of 64,000 acres of land" in the proposal.

Even worse, it is likely that nothing at all will be salvaged. Don Johnson, a Grants Pass forester with 46 years of Oregon experience, warns: "It's been over two years, and that was with the agency *wanting* to get it done. Any mill that bids on this has to take into consideration that there might be litigation and that any lumber might not be harvested until NEXT year...at which point there might not be any value left at all."

Mr. Johnson appears to be correct. The

Timbered Rock fire was ignited by the very same dry lightning storm as the Biscuit complex, burning around 27,000 acres of mixed federal and private forestlands in the Elk Creek watershed.

The Bureau of Land Management's Medford District sold around 17 million board feet in two sales (Smoked Gobbler and Flaming Rock) covering 789 acres of 9,762 BLM acres. Even though 95% of all the trees, dead and live, will be left, environmentalists sued two days after the sales were announced May 19, 2004.

Federal Judge Ann Aiken, a Clinton appointee, enjoined the sales June 15, with no formal explanation. A spokesman for plaintiff Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Alliance told the Medford Mail Tribune "We intend to do everything we can to stop this reserve from getting logged."

Flaming Rock was bought by the family-owned Swanson Group in Glendale. Litigation is nothing new for the company and its president, Steve Swanson: "We have probably 90 million feet of sales that are tied up in one form or another. Thirty to 40 million feet are not."

His third generation family company, with five mills and 800 employees, also owns 1,500 acres in the Timbered Rock fire area. "We actually went in and did our initial salvage operations when the ground was literally smoking, but we already had significant degradation from bugs."

## The Forest Service

By many accounts, the Forest Service did the best it could, trapped as it was between the rock of environmental law and the hard reality of the destruction of what the agency is paid to protect. The fact is that Siskiyou personnel have been trying to implement innovative, pragmatic forestry ideas on the ground for many years. In 1989, they proposed the Shasta Costa project, a landscape-scale project in the Shasta Costa Creek basin reaching east of Agness. The project was to be a big jump in the direction of integrated landscape management, over long periods of time both backward and forward, to mimic natural processes: the rubric of "New Perspectives," the Forest Service's adaptation of the "New Forestry" mantra of University of Washington forest ecologist



Dave Skinner

Writer Dave Skinner joined several foresters on a hike to Babyfoot Lake, just inside the Kalmiopsis Wilderness 17 miles west of the Illinois Valley town of Selma. They walked about two miles through Late Successional Reserves that contained no live trees. Only about five percent ground cover was present two years after the fire. Mr. Skinner's hiking companions found two conifer seedlings, prompting one to declare, "Next time I go hike in the wilderness, I'm going to one that's green, not black."

Jerry Franklin. In Dr. Franklin's own nutshell, it was about practicing a "kinder and gentler forestry."

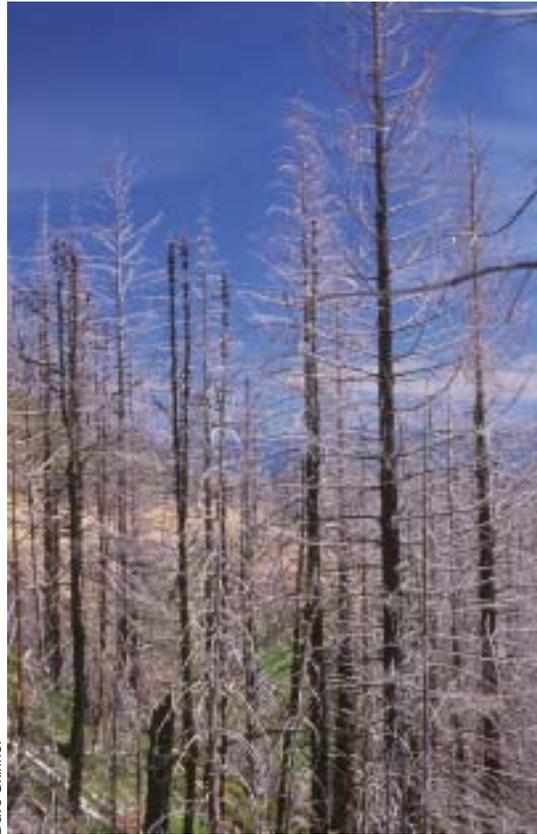
Mike Lunn, retired to Prineville, Oregon after 32 years in the Forest Service, inherited Shasta Costa in 1991 when he took over as Siskiyou supervisor. Mr. Lunn viewed the project as a chance to "reinvest in the forest, to ask what is the appropriate treatment for this landscape."

But Shasta Costa may have pioneered too much. The agency involved industry, environmentalists, and the general public in a new collaborative process at the same time it was trying to implement major new forestry concepts. Lunn remarks correctly, "I don't know how you could possibly have done one without the other." But Shasta Costa was also caught up in the 1988 listing of the northern spotted owl under the Endangered Species Act. The project died, lost in acrimony and the far larger maelstrom of the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP).

Looking back, Mr. Lunn emphasizes a fundamental truth that others brought up time and time again in discussions about the Northwest Forest Plan, in nearly identical terms: "In a larger context, policies and decisions have to fully consider and balance the social, economic, and environmental impacts together. If you ignore any of the three, you fail."

To make his point, Mr. Lunn grabs a sheet of paper and scribes three intersecting circles, then jabs his pen where all three circles meet: "You have to be here. It may not be everything everybody wants. It may not even be perfect for the environment. But that is where you have to be for policy to be a success, where you can do the right thing."

The SNF team kept trying to do just that "right thing," with a Congressionally authorized "Section 318 sale" in the Grayback Mountain area that became known as Sugarloaf. Congress exempted the sale from NWFP reserve requirements, but the sale was then hung up on consultation with the spotted owl. Environmentalist lawyers challenged the 10.5-million-board-foot/670-acre sale all the way to the Supreme Court and lost. The extreme controversy led to a decision to set up a 35-square-mile law-enforcement cordon surrounding the sale. Thirty protesters were arrested for trespass during the harvest in late 1995.



Dave Skinner



Dave Skinner

On south-facing slopes of Fiddler Gulch [top], burn mortality was nearly 100%. This area is slated for salvage and replanting, as road access is good while at the same time, the public safety risk of a re-burn is astronomical. With restoration, hopefully in 70 years this forest will look as good as the recently thinned stand [bottom] looked when *Evergreen* publisher Jim Petersen photographed it in 1994

Sugarloaf was one of the last timber sales ever on NWFP "reserved" land, not only on the Siskiyou, but also in the entire Pacific Northwest. It should have been the first of many, for Sugarloaf was a success.

The following year, a spotted owl pair that had resided in the sale area since 1990 returned and fledged their first-ever offspring. Furthermore, in much of the stand, grand firs and Douglas firs were competing for water, putting the entire area at risk of disease and fire. Also in the stand were some enormous (48-inch plus) ponderosa pines. Most of those big ones were left and are healthier today, but a few were cut—which of course led to the lawsuits, protests and arrests.

Tom Atzet, the long-time SNF ecologist tasked with convincing Supervisor Lunn that thinning those big trees was a good idea, says today he would tell Lunn the same thing. Lunn says today, "I wish I could have changed some things before the harvest, particularly with some of the large trees we harvested. There were places where we should have taken a lot more smaller trees than we did, instead taking some of the large ones that were probably best adapted to fire and other stress. So it wasn't perfect, but it was better than not doing anything." When asked if he is proud of his involvement with Sugarloaf, Tom Link, Biscuit Salvage project leader, simply answers: "Yes."

As for the Biscuit salvage plan itself, Mr. Link explains, "There was a lot of owl habitat lost in the fire. Our last estimate was that 80,000 acres or so were burned and are no longer considered habitat. [So] one of our objectives is to grow that back as soon as possible."

"It was also an objective [to prevent] areas that weren't burned this time from being lost in future fires." So, part of the salvage volume will come from 305 miles of 400-foot-wide Fuel Management Zones, basically permanent firebreaks.

Mr. Link believes he and others learned much from the Biscuit Fire and salvage: "We have some conditions in our forests that are really ripe for this kind of large scale fire. The lesson is that it can happen to you, in your backyard, even if you don't think it will. Many of us here for a long time [had] been on other fires, other places, but felt it wouldn't happen here."

"Well, it did happen here, and one

of the lessons for other people is that it can happen anywhere in the West under these conditions we have now. That's something we need to be confronting head on, where we have the opportunity to manage our fuels, take some preventive actions."

## The Greens

Southern Oregon harbors an increasing population of leftist activists, a trend that began in the late 1960s with a first wave of refugees from San Francisco's Haight-Asbury district. Seeking an endless Summer of Love, they migrated to the wild and rugged Siskiyou Country of remote southern Oregon. Because of its benevolent climate and surprising remoteness, the Siskiyous, like much of North Coast California, was a perfect place for these migrants to grow marijuana undetected. Plenty still do.

Trouble was, the Siskiyous aren't just a great place to grow pot. Other folks—namely private landowners and later federal agencies—had discovered nearly a hundred years earlier they were a great place to grow trees.

Today, the Summer of Love is part of local culture. Public access television in Grants Pass features programs on legalizing marijuana plus Earth First! "documentaries" produced by Ashland college students. Dreadlocked hitchhikers are a daily sight. The Rogue Community College Student Pagan Alliance has a roadside cleanup area on Highway 199.

But it's not all peace and love. By 1971, confrontations between loggers and dropouts were commonplace in the Illinois Valley towns of Takilma and Cave Junction as well as in the surrounding mountains and river canyons. At one point, armed guards rode in logging trucks. Some foresters still carry guns when they cruise timber in these remote mountains. But over time, the nature of the confrontation changed significantly.

Many Sixties dropouts, not just those who came to the Siskiyous, came from middle- and upper-class urban, gray-flannel-suit postwar America, from very good colleges where they were very well-indoctrinated by a radical, anti-Establishment university environment. These "dropouts" didn't drop everything. They kept their degrees, their social connections and, especially, their politicization. Some, of course, kept



Jim Petersen



Dave Skinner

Environmentalists object to harvesting large trees. But many others dislike wasting them. The Sessions Report estimates that 2.5 billion board feet of killed and damaged trees [worth \$825 million on the stump] could have been salvaged—a sum sufficient to cover the \$150 million firefighting bill and apply Sessions restoration techniques on about 1.7 million acres, an area three times the size of the Biscuit.

their family financial support, too. And they, like others of their generation in other places, began building political power.

By 1987, when the Silver Fire incinerated 110,000 acres of old growth timber, enough court precedents had been set that Andy Kerr, then with the Oregon Natural Resources Council, confidently declared that fire salvage was "like mugging a burn victim" and that "not one black stick" of timber would be salvaged from the Silver. While Kerr was, and will always be wrong about the first point, he missed being right on the second by only a couple of years.

Southern Oregon residents disagreed with Mr. Kerr. In August of 1988, while Congress debated, with the Forest Service wavering in the political heat, *Evergreen* publisher Jim Petersen led the organization of what became the largest forest community rally ever staged. The Silver Fire Roundup brought 10,000 pro-forestry protestors and 1,556 logging trucks from five states to the 105-degree heat of Grants Pass. The Roundup drew national press coverage and jolted Congress into passing compromise legislation that instructed the Forest Service to harvest half the timber volume destroyed in the 1987 fire.

Sadly, that victory for common sense was one of the last. A year later the northern spotted owl was listed as a threatened species. The federal timber sale program began its death spiral, eventually taking the jobs of thousands of Oregonians with it.

Since 1990, most of southern Oregon's family owned sawmills have closed. None remain in Grants Pass, although the old Spalding mill site stands as a silent reminder of what once was. And in Medford, the old Burrill Lumber Company mill site, which is still held by the family, is now home to several commercial businesses, part of Southern Oregon's "new economy." So too the old Kogap mill site, just south of downtown Medford, now part of a golf course developed by the Lausmann family, majority owners in the now long gone Kogap woods and milling operation.

## The Industry

There is general agreement that, no matter how much salvage comes off the Biscuit, the Siskiyou won't produce significant wood for a lifetime

and longer. In a resigned tone of voice, Don Johnson concludes: "That fire has destroyed an immense amount of timber, and I don't see how they can ethically cut on a sustained basis without a long hiatus."

Those southern Oregon businesses, communities and workers that survived the Northwest Forest Plan's failure (so far) feel they can survive the Biscuit, too. Dave Hill, the soon to retire executive director of the Southern Oregon Timber Industry Association, feels the industry is "at a fairly stable level infrastructure-wise, and I don't see that changing much one way or another."

But future Biscuits? Maybe not.

The industry has already transitioned

from federal timber to other sources. Roseburg Forest Products, based at Dillard, just south of Roseburg, has gone from 75-85% dependence on Oregon federal forests to a like dependence on other sources. So has Rough and Ready Lumber Company, a third-generation Illinois Valley operation, which once bought 90% of its timber from the Siskiyou, but now buys mainly from private, state-owned and out of state sources.

Bob Ragon, who began his forestry career in the Forest Service in 1965, then went to the private sector and now runs local industry association Douglas Timber Operators based in Roseburg, explains how Douglas County and many other Oregon mills have been able to hang on in the wake of the Northwest Forest Plan. Of thirteen primary mills near Roseburg, only two corporate mills closed their doors. Furthermore, when the Interna-

tional Paper, the Medford Corporation, Champion International and Gilchrist Lumber Company shut down their Oregon operations, their timberlands were snapped up by smaller operations, many of which went deep into debt to acquire a future supply base.

Mr. Ragon points out that the reason for making such a risky investment in uncertain times is at least partly because the remaining mills are family owned and "committed to the community." When asked about that commitment, Steve Swanson of the Swanson Group explains: "I'm a third generation saw miller; it's what we do as a family; we're committed to these communities. I grew up here. My parents lived here in Glendale, I went off to college and came back to Glendale, raised my family here, my son graduated from Glendale High School—we live in these communities. You can walk out in the mill and find third generation millers whose fathers and grandfathers worked for this company. These are sustainable, family wage jobs here."

Mills in west-central Oregon have also been able to import raw logs from a jobs-friendly British Columbia, California and Washington state. A combination of effects



from the Northwest Forest Plan plus Washington Department of Natural Resources harvest reductions under the administration of Jennifer Belcher combined to gut western Washington's milling infrastructure, leaving a "surplus" for Oregon. But under new director Doug Sutherland, Washington DNR is harvesting more timber, allowing Oregon mills to import the surplus of roughly 600 million board feet a year in Washington raw logs, via barge, rail, and truck.

The log yard superintendent at Douglas County Forest Products in Winchester, just north of Roseburg, told *Evergreen* his employer currently brings down 14 rail cars (three trucks worth each) every day from Washington, plus trucks when rail delivery is slow (often).

But that will change, says Ray Jones, resource vice president for Roseburg Forest Products. "There's more and more milling capacity being added up there every day. If you isolate southern Oregon, and you look at all of the consumption of wood for the mills, and you look at the availability, there's a net shortage of wood."

And the "net," so to speak, is tightening with each massive, un-salvaged wildfire.

As for the prospect of Biscuit salvage

logs this summer, Mr. Jones observes, "At the end of the day, *any* wood flow in the Northwest is important for us because it helps build our supply chain. All these 'wood baskets,' or log supply areas, overlap with each other. So Biscuit is important to us and to everyone in southwestern Oregon."

But mill managers aren't holding their breath. This from Linc Phillipi, who runs Rough and Ready Lumber with wife Jennifer, whose grandfather founded the Cave Junction company in 1922: "We'll certainly look at the sales, but we'll have to fit them into our schedule. We plan our year in the fall. Timing is a big issue. Helicopters get scarce in fire season. We have room, but it's a little risky to bid on fire-killed wood." As for the long term, Mr. Phillipi says the family will just have to be "creative."

It is the same for the Swanson Group. "We can't leave our plans up to salvage on the Biscuit," declares Mr. Swanson. "We have wood scheduled to run our facility. If wood comes to market in a timely manner that has salvage value, then we will buy those sales and postpone other logging of green timber. But we're not gonna shut down without it."

## The Sessions Report

While the Biscuit Fire and others were still burning, local officials were already looking to the future. Twenty-four-year Douglas County Commissioner Doug Robertson recalls: "We asked the Forest Service, what's gonna happen, and their answer was, 'we don't know.' What we were beginning to focus on was the nothing side, which in most people's mind is a bad thing."

"Frankly, it was a discussion with the Undersecretary of Agriculture [Mark Rey] that prompted us in that direction. If you talk about an emergency, with insects, brush, re-burn, and erosion, we've got it. When we made the pitch [for an emergency National Environmental Policy Act waiver] to the Forest Service, the response was 'we don't disagree there's an emergency, but we'll get killed in court because we don't have any scientific data, it's all anecdotal.' So, we said we'd get the science."

With that decision, the Douglas County Commissioners commissioned the Sessions Report, named for Oregon State University forest economist Dr. John Sessions, the report's principal author.

The Board of Commissioners of Douglas County then

The photo on the left looks across from the Wild Horse ridge across Lawson Creek to the Game Lake road. The one on the right is outside the fire perimeter in the Lookout Gap area near Hayes Hill. Where would you want to take your grandkids to show them a forest? More importantly, where do you think your grandkids will take their grandkids to show them a forest?



***“In a larger context, policies and decisions have to fully consider and balance the social, economic, and environmental impacts together. If you ignore any of the three, you fail.”***

**Mike Lunn**

Retired Siskiyou National Forest supervisor

approached Dean Hal Salwasser at the Oregon State University College of Forestry and University Distinguished Professor of Forest Engineering John Sessions about summarizing “the science.” At first, explains Mr. Robertson, “we wanted to do this report on the Tiller Fire [which began the same day as the Biscuit, burning 68,775 acres in Douglas County, costing \$48 million], not the Biscuit, but Salwasser and Sessions said no, Tiller did not have sufficient data for the study. The most readily available information was from the Biscuit Fire, and most of the information generated from the Biscuit will be transferable to the Tiller. It won’t cost as much and can be done more quickly.” The commissioners then gave the go-ahead.

Sessions team member Dr. Robert Buckman, the affable former U.S. Forest Service Deputy Chief of Research who “retired” to 18 more years of professorship and research at Oregon State, tells *Evergreen* that in his view, the Sessions Report was intended to ask: “What were the consequences of doing something; what were the consequences of doing nothing? One of the things we had to be very careful about is that everything we do here at the university has to be defensible and has to be reproducible. That was a requirement for everything we said. We had to be prepared to defend it, and we still are.”

The report (or more accurately, its authors) was roundly attacked by environmentalists and their political and academic



Jim Petersen



Dave Skinner

A decade ago, the annual allowable harvest on the Siskiyou National Forest was 164 million board feet. Some larger trees were still being harvested then, as well as smaller ones [top]. Not anymore. Now the annual allowable harvest is just 24 million board feet, and the trees about the size of those you see in the bottom photo. Meanwhile, the Siskiyou is still growing the equivalent of 739 million board feet of biomass every year, meaning that 715 million feet are added to the fuel buildup every year. If the public doesn’t harvest it, nature will.

allies. Dr. Buckman recalls, “You can imagine that when the report came out there was a lot of hostility [which] in my estimation came from the fact that we raised questions that people didn’t want raised.”

“But nobody questions what the study says,” notes Mr. Robertson. “Nobody says, ‘Oh no, it’s not all going to come back in brush, no, there aren’t four point two billion feet’—there’s no question about that.”

So what does the science in the 57-page Sessions Report say?

A large part of the intellectual guts of the Sessions Report comes from research done under the Forestry Intensified Research Program (FIR), jointly initiated by Oregon State University and the Forest Service’s Pacific Northwest Research Station.

Sessions Report Team member Dr. Mike Newton, an OSU Emeritus Professor of Forest Ecology, has been involved in the FIR program since its inception. FIR experimental monitoring (including in the old Silver Fire area) has gone on for 23 years, demonstrating that rapid conifer replanting after fire can enjoy over 90% success. Controlling competing vegetation can double growth rates, which, as Sessions testified before Congress, can “substantially reduce the time necessary to re-grow a conifer-dominated forest with large tree characteristics, which is precisely the forest conditions called for in the Northwest Forest Plan.” As Dr. Sessions points out to *Evergreen*, “The ‘science’ of conifer regeneration in

southwest Oregon was developed on the back of a lot of researchers over a long time and Mike Newton certainly developed a good part of it.”

“The science is not ambiguous on this,”



***“I like to get people to keep thinking ‘and then what’ to the next step, ‘and then what?’ People are just not doing that.”***

**Dr. Tom Atzet, Ph.D.**  
Retired Siskiyou National Forest ecologist

Dr. Salwasser adds. “There are some people in the ‘leave it alone to nature’ camp who think that the science isn’t clear. But the science is absolutely clear in southwest Oregon. If you don’t intervene after a major transformation like the Biscuit, it’s not going to come back as structurally complex conifers for a very long time.”

Furthermore, says Dr. Salwasser, there is a wild card. “These forests that Biscuit burned were established under the conditions of the latter Little Ice Age,” which ended in roughly 1850. And, whatever the cause of current warming trends, the “historic range of variation as a model for the future just got thrown in the garbage can by climate change. Climate change also changes competitive advantages to among plant and animal species, changes water cycles, and so on.”

Regarding competitive advantage, the now retired Dr. Atzet warns: “Possession is nine tenths of the law in ecology, too. [Hardwoods and shrubs that sprout from unburned roots] have built up [carbohydrate] energy in their root systems because of fire exclusion. Fires took some of the carbohydrate reserves out when the understory burned, giving conifers some competitive help.” Fire-adapted species like knob cone pine will come back without help, too, but in many areas, “the seed sources are gone,” especially for once-prevalent Douglas fir.

The Sessions Report states “Aggressive forest regeneration could accelerate the



Dave Skinner



Dave Skinner

Bear grass is plentiful on the Siskiyou National Forest, as it is all across the West. The bear grass in the top photo is growing in a harvested and replanted cut that was moderately burned by the Biscuit fire. About 200 hundred yards away is the scene at the bottom: a partially burnt cutting unit that was sold and marked before the Biscuit burned. We’re not saying where these trees are, or who bought them, because this sale is now hung up in court. The problem? The Forest Service didn’t consider the effects of timber harvest on bear grass!

return to large-conifer-dominant forest ecosystems by 50 years or more and hasten return of forests to old-growth characteristics and values.”

But even with aggressive action, the

Sessions team explains that on “many sites, it will take 50 years or more to supplement the surviving large trees, even with prompt regeneration, and up to 100 years to approach pre-fire conditions [for big trees]. Without aggressive action, shrub fields are “the likely future vegetation in many, or even most cases where conifer forests occurred before the fire,” and “it could take more than 100 years to create future forests that are anything like the pre-fire forests.”

In short, the public has a choice to make.

With the Northwest Forest Plan, the public made a choice to “save” old trees and spotted owls, at the cost of thousands of jobs and massive social dislocations in rural Pacific Northwest timber communities. Now those trees in many areas are burnt, the owl habitat gone for a long time, raising both the question of whether the Northwest Forest Plan has accomplished its purposes in dry, fire-prone forests, whether Americans want these forests actively brought back after fire, and—if our grandkids will wish we had.

Dr. Salwasser points out: “So you’ve got this area of Late Successional Reserves in the NWFP that was designed to perpetuate late-successional forests, but now they’re not going to have late-successional forest because fire has transformed more habitat than logging. So it really calls into question the whole purpose of LSR’s in the Forest Plan.”

Others also note the irony: “It’s funny,



**“Restoration doesn’t come free; it comes with a price. Commercial timber harvesting offers a way to help pay for restoration.”**

**Linc Phillippi**  
President, Rough & Ready Lumber

we talk about wilderness and roadless areas as areas we all want to protect,” observes Linc Phillippi. “That’s fine, but the way they’re protecting it is now you have a half million acres of burned forest out there. What the heck you gonna do with all that’s burned dead now? So what are we trying to protect? How are we going to get them back?”

With a hard edge to her voice, Sue Kupillas comments: “If we’ve got the habitat of the old conifer trees, which is what I *thought* we were aiming for through the Northwest Forest Plan, then everything follows.”

The zealous environmentalist opposition to restoration amazes Commissioner Robertson. “Sixty-five years ago, the Tillamook State Forest looked just like the Biscuit. This November, there will be a ballot measure in Oregon to set aside half of it as wilderness! The same people trying to prevent anything meaningful from happening on the Biscuit will be voting for it...and they just burned up 180,000 acres of wilderness down here! It’s just nuts.”

### The Northwest Forest Plan

The Sessions Report singles out the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) “and

associated laws, regulations and current agency policies” for failing to “adequately address the natural dynamics of fire-prone ecosystems or the consequences of large, intense disturbances on desired future conditions of the forests.”

Implemented by former President Bill Clinton, the NWFP was the creature of environmentalist litigation over the northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet that led to Endangered Species Act listings for both. It was a jackpot for environmentalists...as Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund’s Andy Stahl crowed at a 1988 environmental law conference: “Thank goodness the spotted owl evolved in the Pacific Northwest, for if it hadn’t, we’d have to genetically engineer it.”

The wide range of the owl, its rarity and its preference for big trees combined to create a perfect land-management storm in the Northwest. In 1991, Dr. Atzet, who was then the Siskiyou’s lead ecologist, warned *Evergreen* readers: “When we take the forester’s right and ability to replicate natural processes we are headed for trouble.” Thirteen-plus years, hundreds of thousands of acres of wildfire, thousands of jobs, and billions of dollars worth of trouble later, how right he is.

However, the NWFP was never intended

## Unless the laws and regulations are reformed...

- by Jack Ward Thomas,

“The answer is a bit more complex than simply “appeals and litigation.” The laws, each of which seems quite rational when considered individually, sum up to a complex mish-mash that fits together poorly. Then, after the courts have “defined” the meanings (often variously in different judicial districts) of these laws, the interactions become increasingly difficult for managers to deal with.

Many of these laws are backed up “regulations” written by the administering agencies to carry out the intent of these laws. These regulations have the force of law. The agency charged with carrying out (enforcing in some cases) each law writes the regulations to maximize the power and authority of the agency in question and assure the ability to attain the intent of the legislation independent of all other applicable legislation.

Regulations were derived under the concept of “adaptive management” in that they could be changed by the agency without changing the authorizing legislation. The idea was to make adjustments when needed based on experience. In practice, these changes have proven

difficult, if not impossible, to make. Each interest group, but particularly those of the environmental persuasion, has learned to use the regulations (and court interpretations of the regulations) to prevent revisions.

It takes about 3.5 years to prepare new regulations. Then, adoption has been routinely delayed until after the Presidential election. If incumbent loses, the new guy starts over. In the Clinton years, I had a new set ready to go that I had pushed through to completion by sheer will power. The environmentalists didn’t like them and delayed approval until after I retired. They started over with a “committee of scientists” doing the job.

Gore had them delayed until after the election—and he lost. They started over to satisfy the Bush Administration, and are ready to go with a new set. The environmentalists can’t dissuade Bush not to adopt before the election, so there is action in Congress to hold on those revisions and to start over with a new Committee of Scientists to revise the regulations. We will see.

Under current regulations there are three levels of appeal for the FS (one for



***“The real story is that 50 million acres have burned across the West over the last ten years, and the Forest Service is presiding over this mass deforestation and not doing anything about it.”***

**Bob Ragon**

Douglas Timber Operators

to be a disaster. The plan designated Late Successional Reserves (LSRs), streamside buffer zones, and Adaptive Management Areas (AMAs)... the concepts of “new forestry” and Shasta Costa writ large. Other lands were left as multiple-use “matrix” lands. Old-growth stands occurring in the “matrix” between reserves were available for the cutting of timber except for 80-acre patches around existing owl nests.

Dr. Salwasser explains that the purpose of LSR’s “is to perpetuate a network of connected late successional cores so that the plants and animals typical [of LSRs] can move about across the landscape over time. [Then] you can have places that blow down in a windstorm or burn, and you’ll have enough redundancy in the system that you don’t lose the functional integrity of a late successional forest.”

But when considering fires, Dr. Salwasser recalls, planners were thinking in terms of “hundreds to thousands of acres. They didn’t say tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of acres, they said ‘hundreds to thousands’—so the question is, what happens when you get a couple hundred thousand acres of fire, and parts of Biscuit were an uncharacteristic transformation of the landscape?”

Ray Jones: “The Northwest Forest Plan was never implemented. [It] will work if it’s given a chance to work. [But] many groups do not want to see another tree cut, and one of the first things that comes out of [environmentalist] mouths is fire suppression over the past 100 years. They don’t talk about the lack of management over the past 15 years. What was dead 15 years ago is standing dead or down, there’s been no thinning, you’ve got all that 15 years of growth on the forest, increased density, drought stress, more mortality, it’s not hard to understand why our forests are a tinderbox today. The question is how do we get out of it?”

Forest Service Chief Emeritus Jack Ward Thomas, who directed the team that crafted NWFP, doesn’t agree that it contributed much to the scale of the Biscuit Fire: “The Biscuit Fire didn’t occur because of the plan — there would not have been enough action in the ten years to have changed much. The idea of if we had logged it there would have been no fire is B.S. The NWFP really hasn’t been effect long enough to have made much ecological difference.”

However, Dr. Thomas is critical of the plan’s implementation. In a June 2003 analysis for the Forest Service, “Sustainability of the Northwest Forest Plan —

other land management agencies). Plus, the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service gets a crack if the action involves a threatened or endangered species. Then come the lawsuits. This means that, say in the case of salvage, it takes 1.5 years to get all the paper work done (including EIS and dealing with regulatory agencies) for any operation. Then, the three levels of appeal can take up to a year. 2.5 years have now expired.

Then comes the lawsuit with injunctions until the case can be heard (likely one year) running the clock to 3 to 3.5 years. If plaintiffs lose, the decision is appealed to the Circuit Court. This can add, even if the agency wins, another six months to a year.

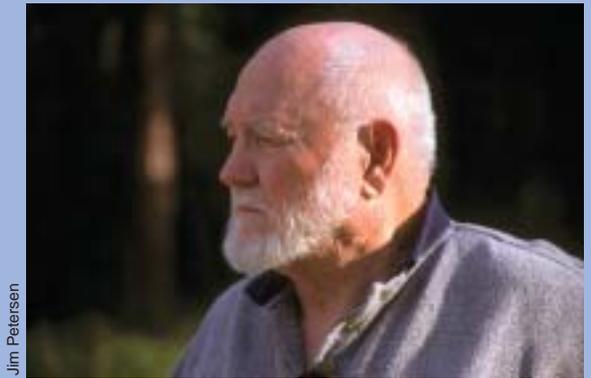
The total is now 3.5 to 4 years. Even with a “victory” for the agency, it has now taken 2 to 4 years and there is no value left in the timber — AND the operation is now hugely “below cost.”

Finally, if environmentalists win, the government covers their costs through the Equal Access to Justice Act. Even if they lose, there is NO liability for the litigants. Some of these litigants work for

organizations that have the clearly stated objective of bringing an end to any commercial operations on the federal lands.

Unless the laws and regulations are reformed to be more compatible and it is made clear that the mission of the land management agencies includes the timber, grazing, mineral extraction aspects of “multiple use,” any likelihood of money-making commercial operations is essentially nil.

Next, unless the capability to sue the government is altered to include a provision for “loser pay” for litigation costs and damages (just like the private sector) it will be very difficult to undertake “above cost” activities. For example, a loss in the case of a salvage sale would include costs of litigation and loss in the value of the timber due to delay.”



Jim Petersen

***“Survey and manage was added to the Northwest Forest Plan after my team had completed its work. It was, and is, an incredibly screwed-up mess.”***

**Jack Ward Thomas**

Chief Emeritus, US Forest Service retired; now Boone & Crockett Chair, School of Forestry, University of Montana



***“It is too little, too late.”***

**Harold Haugen**

Commissioner,  
Josephine County



***“If everybody lives in a high rise in Portland, who’s going to do the farming, ranching, logging and milling needed to feed, clothe and shelter our growing population?”***

**Steve Swanson**

President, Swanson Group

Dynamic vs. Static Management,” he reminded readers that the Forest Ecosystem Management Assessment Team “delivered ten options to former President Clinton. He selected Option 9, which was a dynamic plan formulated around active management.” Among other things, “LSRs in fire-prone forests east of the Cascade crest and in southern Oregon and northern California were to be aggressively managed to reduce risk of stand-replacement fire.” They were not, obviously.

“The bottom line,” Dr. Thomas concludes, “is that the NWFP in practice is but a pale imitation of what was advertised in relation to dynamic management. If the [plan] cannot be followed it should be revised so that the consequences of the status quo can be examined, explained, and considered.”

Dr. Atzet, whom Dr. Salwasser says “calls ‘em as he sees ‘em,” explains the thinking of those involved in creating NWFP: “We felt our greatest strength in the NWFP was we had a closed circle, we had the LSRs, but you could work in the matrix anyway you wanted, yet for the majority of species, the whole thing would work.”

“The real killer was that Option 9 came, a lot of specialists didn’t feel they had an 80% chance of species viability on [species about which little was known] So they imposed the “survey and manage” fine filter [site-specific] over the NWFP coarse filter [landscape-scale] and pretty much screwed it. If we didn’t know anything about a species, we were screwed. They mixed up lack of information with risk.”

“Survey and Manage” required site surveys for about 400 rare and little-known (not necessarily endangered) species. As an example of the concept, Dr. Atzet overlays the NWFP template on the Siuslaw National Forest: “90% of the area is now in LSRs, riparian reserves, key watersheds – when you think about it, how is there less than an 80% chance that you have viability when 90% is set aside?” Region-wide, the NWFP sets aside 84% of public land. The other 16% were supposed to be in “matrix” lands, but the Survey and Manage protocols made management impossible.

“Everybody knew when the NWFP came out, and it wasn’t really Option 9 at all, but where we had to survey for all these things with no survey protocols, that it was a train wreck,” says Dr. Atzet. “We knew it wasn’t gonna work. So, for all the work we did trying to establish a credible coarse filter, to put S&M on the end of that was crazy.”

As an example of crazy, the Forest Service states that after spending “hundreds of millions” surveying for S&M species, “no new sites have been found for over 100 of these species.”

After a long battle of litigation, settlement, regulatory rewrite, counter litigation, in January of 2004, USFS and BLM placed most of nearly 300 current S&M species under a Special Status Species Program that identifies “species that could be at risk and provide[s] for management to reduce the risk of the species being listed under the Endangered Species Act.”

In April, the Western Environmental Law Center sued to stop the changes. On June 16, Earth First! spin-off Center for Biological Diversity, along with Oregon Natural Resources Council, sued to list the Siskiyou Mountains salamander and 105 other former S&M species as endangered species.

## And Then What?

With the passage of time, the window of opportunity for implementing the sort of self-financing, timely fire restoration options that

the Sessions Report presents has mostly passed on the Siskiyou. Restoration costs money, lots of money, and many of the trees that could have been salvaged to pay for the work are now bug-ridden junk.

The Forest Service’s Biscuit Fire proposal is a mere shadow of what the Sessions Report shows is possible, even falling short of what the agency proposed and accomplished (with no measurable impacts to soil or water resources) following the Silver Fire. Even so, environmentalists are fighting the Forest Service tooth and nail. Those 80,000 acres of owl habitat won’t be coming back in anyone’s lifetime, possibly never.

Two lessons have been learned according to Dr. Salwasser: “[Biscuit] already taught us what happens when you don’t take action to keep forests resilient to fire. The second lesson it’s going to teach us in the next year or two is the futility of trying to do anything on federal forest lands following large events like the Biscuit given existing laws and policy.”

It may seem that the money and effort put into the Biscuit fire and salvage were just a symbolic run through the motions that accomplished little. But what the Sessions Report proposes, creation of areas in which different restoration treatments could be tested over time, using burned areas as living, learning laboratories, is an idea that makes great sense—not only in southern Oregon, but anywhere wildfires burn. But will it ever happen? Anywhere?

## The Gordian knot

While environmentalists once enjoyed the support of the public in their campaign to “save” public lands, public opinion has reversed since 1988. There is now wide public support for restoring the West’s diseased and dying national forests. There is equally strong support in southern Oregon for salvaging what can still be salvaged from the Biscuit.

Josephine County commissioner Haugen showed *Evergreen* a petition headed “We the undersigned believe that salvage logging should be done in the area burned by the ‘Biscuit Fire’ on the Siskiyou National Forest and that salvage logging should be done quickly while there is still enough economic value left in the timber to help our local economy.” Approximately 300 residents of the Illinois Valley, which according to USDA has a poverty rate of 30.2%, signed it.

Haugen also gave *Evergreen* a copy of a 2003 survey of 406 Josephine County residents conducted by the Eugene, OR-based Oregon Survey Research Laboratory, asking:

“Is it acceptable to harvest damaged trees inside the burned areas, taking into



Jim Petersen

*“Where is this going to leave us? It is going to leave us with forests that people find relatively unattractive.”*

**Robert E. Buckman, PhD**  
Professor, OSU College of Forestry  
Deputy Chief of Research, USFS  
(Retired)

### ***“This absolutism can only perpetuate conflict, not resolve it.”***

Despite the fact that a condensed version of the Sessions Report has passed peer review and was published in the Society of American Foresters’ prestigious *Journal of Forestry*, certain academics as well as environmentalists and politicians continue to criticize the report. *Evergreen* asked Dr. Robert Buckman for some perspective on whether the controversy was truly academic, or something else. His response:

“In many respects, the debates are not about science, but about value questions. Advocates try to find a technical or scientific tripwire—in this case the adverse consequences of salvage logging—to support their values or point of view. As soon as that matter is resolved another proxy issue is found.

“In the end it is not the technical issue that is central to the debate, but the deeply-held values that underlie them. For some advocacy groups these values take on almost spiritual or religious qualities that allow no compromise, no yielding, regardless of the facts, or of the science. This absolutism can only perpetuate conflict, not resolve it.

“Scientists, including academics, have their own values and beliefs. I have them too. But we try as best we can to not let values override facts. In so far as we are able, science findings must be repeatable, verifiable and defensible, or it is not science. This is the standard the authors adopted for the Biscuit Fire report. My concern is that if scientists including academics depart from these standards, the science loses its value.”

account sound forestry practices?” 85.5% said yes.

“Should salvage logging of damaged trees be allowed if it would reduce future fire hazards and improve forest health?” 89.7% responded yes.

Polling and focus group data gathered by Project Protect, a national grass roots group based in Oregon, reveals widespread support for forest restoration, particularly the Bush Administration’s Healthy Forests Restoration Act, which garnered significant bi-partisan support in both the House and Senate. In the organization’s most recent national poll, 74% of those asked said they support a more effective and timely process for protecting forests from catastrophic wildfires and a stunning 82% said they favored thinning and brush removal programs aimed at reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. This after a long winter: a time of year in which wildfires generally fall off the public’s radar screen.

Even environmentalists now realize the American public doesn’t support huge wildfires and then leaving it all to rot. World Wildlife Fund’s latest point-and-click letter to Congress opposing Biscuit restoration contains a Freudian slip of sorts, acknowledging, “Nearly everyone looks at a burned forest as a catastrophe.”

And who is at fault for the long series of catastrophes that have swept the West? Rough and Ready’s Mr. Phillippi boils it down to a single sentence: “You can blame the agencies, you can blame environmentalists, but ultimately it’s Congress that sets the laws under which these lands are managed.”

Yet, despite growing public discontent, it took fatalities in California to spur final passage of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act. Steve Swanson remarks, “Politicians are going to follow the path of least resistance. And regular people are busy working, running a business. They’re not going to spend the summer in a camp.”

In a recent telephone interview, Dr. Thomas compared public lands policy to the fabled Gordian knot. In mythology, whoever could unravel the impossible mess of the Knot would become King of Gordia. For years, people came by

and picked at it around the edges, accomplishing nothing. There it sat, intractable, insoluble—just like today’s federal policy mess.

Then one day, Alexander the Great showed up in Gordia, looked at the Knot for a bit, whipped out his sword and chopped the Knot clean in two.

America doesn’t need a king. What America needs are leaders—with enough backbone to pick up the sword, face up to the knot—and take one hell of a swing.

### **Postscript:**

*On July 6 the Ashland-based Siskiyou Project sent a threatening letter to Paul Beck, forester for the family-owned Herbert Lumber Company based at Riddle, just south of Roseburg. “As a potential bidder, we feel it is important for you to know that if your company is involved, directly or indirectly, with the proposed timber sales in the Biscuit fire area, that citizens and organizations will educate the public, media and your customers of your involvement in one of the most controversial public lands logging projects in U.S. history.”*

*“We had not planned to bid on the Siskiyou salvage sales,” company manager Lynn Herbert said after reading the letter. “Now I think we will.”*

*On July 9, the Forest Service issued its Record of Decision on Biscuit Fire salvage and rehabilitation. Predictably, environmentalist Don Smith announced that his group, the Siskiyou Regional Education Project, would appeal and “possibly” sue. In an interview with the Medford Mail Tribune, Mr. Smith complained that, “This is an unnecessary conflict. If the Forest Service had taken a more moderate stance, we could have avoided all this.”*

*At press time, just two days after the Forest Service issued its Record of Decision, the Biscuit salvage plan landed in federal court. But this time it was the industry that sued first. The Portland-based American Forest Resource Council was joined by Rough & Ready Lumber Company, the Swanson Group, South Coast Lumber Co., Jim Nolan, an O’Brien resident whose home lies within a mile of the Biscuit fire line, Jim Frick, a Cave Junction realtor, Oak Flat LLC, a company that lost timber in the fire and Indian Hill LLC, another landowner that owns property adjacent to the fire. Declared AFRC president Tom Partin, “If we’re really serious about habitat restoration, we need to get busy and that is what this lawsuit is about.”*

Stay tuned.

## In Our Opinion

*Editor's Note: Normally, this space is reserved for a description of the Evergreen Foundation, its mission and funding sources. But in light of the horrific controversy surrounding the Forest Service's Biscuit Fire Record of Decision we are yielding the space to Tom Partin, President of the American Forest Resource Council, an association that represents the interests of most of the West's smaller, family-owned sawmilling companies.*

After much discussion the American Forest Resource Council Board of Directors has decided to sue the federal government in the hope of forcing it to

do what is both legally and morally right on lands savaged by the 2002 Biscuit Fire.

The Forest Service's failure to assess the environmental impacts of not restoring more than 90 percent of the area destroyed by this wildfire is inexcusable. So too was their back-door decision to create a new wilderness area without allowing for public comment on the proposal.

Obviously, whatever timber is salvaged—if any—will help family owned sawmills in southern Oregon. Steve Swanson, president of the Swanson Group spoke for all of us recently when he said, "These blackened trees will replace green ones cut somewhere else to meet demand, so salvage makes both environmental and economical common sense."

But the larger issue for AFRC members, and the people that live, work and recreate in southern Oregon, is our desire to see a new forest growing in place of the one the Biscuit Fire destroyed. And this fire destroyed much more than a productive forest and a playland. It also destroyed more than a hundred thousand acres of legally designated critical habitat for spotted

owls, marbled murrelets, salmon, steelhead and trout.

The science here is very clear. Burned areas that are not salvaged and replanted will become brush fields, possibly for hundreds of years. Shade intolerant Douglas-fir, the dominant tree species on the Siskiyou National Forest, cannot re-sprout naturally in brush. Moreover, these brush fields will only add fuel to the dead-tree fuel load left behind by the fire. Minus a serious restoration effort, much of the area that burned will probably burn again, further damaging critical habitat and watersheds important to both aquatic life and communities.

Ultimately, Congress will settle this issue. But we rather like the idea that, at least momentarily, we have replaced the "sue & obstruct" strategy radical environmentalists favor with our own "sue and accomplish" strategy. At the very least, we hope to inject some common sense in this debate. Should we fail the real loser will be a very special southern Oregon forest that so-called environmentalists claim to care about.

- Tom Partin

Looking east across the Lawson Creek Valley to Game Lake Ridge. According to the Biscuit Fire Environmental Impact Statement the forest in the foreground is scheduled for prescription burns, while about a third of the facing mountainside is slated for salvage and replanting.