

Lingo-learning builds environmental savvy

By E.G. WHITE-SWIFT
Of the Emerald

In Oregon, CATS do not meow, they say "No spray." And Mazamas are not Polish gurus, they are mountain climbers.

Deciphering Oregon's environmental slang is the first step in understanding environmental issues. Since you cannot tell the players without a program, herewith is a beginner's guide to environmental issues and groups.

HERBICIDES: The number one issue in Lane County for the last year has been the use of herbicides in forests and along roadsides. Herbicides are part of the chemical compounds created to eliminate modern pests such as insects, plants and wildlife.

The timber industry and U.S. Forest Service use herbicides, or plant eliminators, to free commercial tree species from competition from blackberries and non-commercial tree species. Herbicides are sprayed either by hand or from helicopters.

Aerial spraying on forest lands adjacent to rural farms led to the formation of Citizens Against Toxic Sprays (CATS). They claim herbicides drift into water supplies and over farm crops, allegedly creating health problems for rural Lane County farmers and defoliating gardens and private timber lands.

A by-product of the manufacturing process of the herbicide 2,4,5-T is dioxin, which CATS members say is toxic and an unnecessary cancer-causing (carcinogenic) element introduced into Oregon's environment. They say

labor-intensive hand or mechanical clearing is an economically prudent alternative to polluting the environment with carcinogenic herbicides.

The timber industry counters that the dioxin is not harmful in small doses. They claim Oregon's forests cannot produce enough timber to meet local mills' needs without a steady diet of herbicides.

In the last two years, CATS members have forced the forest service to rewrite its environmental impact statement (EIS) covering herbicide usage in Pacific Northwest national forests. Although they asked politely at first, they eventually had to take the forest service to court before the government officials would change the EIS.

CATS also convinced the Lane County Commissioners to ban the use of 2,4,5-T along county-maintained roads. The county's transportation department had used it to clear roadside vegetation in both rural and urban areas.

Another herbicide group, the Alliance for Better Land Management (ABLM) stalled a plan to spray herbicides by another federal agency with timber lands in Lane County, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The ABLM appealed a decision by the BLM to spray the herbicide Silvex, a chemical cousin of 2,4,5-T. The Department of Interior is reviewing its subordinate agency's (the BLM) plans for spraying, so the BLM postponed its chemical treatments.

WILDERNESS: The fate of Oregon's remaining wild areas is currently under evaluation by the

U.S. Forest Service and BLM. The timber industry would like to open all roadless areas for harvest, while conservation groups want the remaining "de facto" wilderness to be formally recognized and preserved by Congress.

The Oregon Wilderness Coalition, Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society claim that the timber industry would be healthier if pristine forests were not cut. Instead, they request that the money which would be spent on building roads be used for reforestation in accessible areas.

Timber industry officials claim they cannot live happily ever after unless they are allowed to cut the old-growth timber stands on federal lands. They have few old-growth stands left on their own lands.

Government officials will probably decide what areas will be set aside, and those that will be cut, within the next two years. Areas that are not preserved will probably never again have a chance to reach wilderness status.

WHALES: You cannot expect to find whales swimming in the Willamette River, but if you did, a recent Lane County ordinance makes it illegal to hunt them. Oregonians Cooperating to Protect Whales, a Eugene group, is working to save whales from the harpoon.

They have little opposition, and hope to place the whale issue on the ballot next spring. They propose banning the purchase by state agencies of products manufactured in whaling nations.

NUCLEAR: Although a nuclear initiative to ban nuclear plants in

Oregon failed to gain a majority last November, energy groups throughout the state are working to oppose further development. Private utilities and labor groups oppose nuclear foes. The Trojan nuclear plant, jointly owned by the Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB), Portland General Electric (PGE) and Pacific Power and Light, is providing electricity to the regional power grid. The grid is operated by the Bonneville Power Administration and is largely based on hydro-electric power generated by dams built on the region's major rivers by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Oregonians for Nuclear Safeguards, the Trojan Decommissioning Alliance and the Energy Conservation Organization have requested that the Trojan facility be put out of service permanently. They also oppose two nuclear plants proposed by PGE to be built near Pebble Springs in northeastern Oregon. The Oregon Department of Energy and Energy Facility Siting Council, who regulate energy plants, are considering PGE's plans.

CONSERVATION: There are many environmental groups in addition to the preceding local and regional groups. They are monitoring environmental issues as diverse as land use planning, wildlife, recycling, recreational hiking and biking and forestry.

A few groups to know about are:

• Oregon Environmental Council: A coordinating group for more than 80 member environmental

organizations statewide, the OEC has fought in almost every environmental battle in the last six years.

• Western Environmental Trade Association: Providing the industry and labor viewpoint on environmental issues, WETA is the OEC's counterpart on most issues.

• Obsidian: Recreational hiking and back packing groups based in Eugene.

• Mazamas: Mountain climbing, trail and river trip specialists.

• Emerald Mycological Society: Field trips in search of mushrooms, monthly meetings at the Eugene City Library.

• Southern Willamette Ornithological Club: Research, education, birding recreation and the publisher of Oregon Birds magazine. Meets first Monday of the month in Science III.

• Lane County Audubon Society: Local chapter of the nationwide bird and conservation interest group. Monthly meeting and a local newsletter about birds and environmental issues.

• Eugene Natural History Society: Field trips and monthly meetings concerning plants, birds and all facets of natural history.

• Native Plants Society of Oregon: Identifying and conserving wildflowers is the goal of the Portland-based NPSO.

• Oregon High Desert Study Group: If you like the desert country of eastern Oregon, you will want to hook up with the OHDSG, based in St. Paul, Oregon.

• Eugene Canoe and Kayak Club: For a taste of the wild and scenic rivers, ECKC is an outdoor specialist.

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