

Agency makes 12,000-acre 'mistake'

By KATHLEEN MONJE
Of the Emerald

Twelve thousand acres of Willamette National Forest were overlooked in an environmental impact statement on leasing for geothermal exploration, according to Forest Service officials in Eugene.

John Alcock, Willamette Forest Supervisor, has approved 27,000 acres for lease to geothermal researchers, but 12,000 acres in the Breitenbush area near Salem were left out through an inter-agency slip-up.

The additional acreage was part of an

original 25 lease-application package sent to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). When the BLM sent the applications to the Forest Service prior to writing of the environmental impact statement, five applications didn't make it out of the BLM office.

The slip-up wasn't discovered until recently. Al Prigge, energy development officer for the Willamette Forest, says the mistake was discovered when a Forest Service official noticed the lease applications in a BLM file in Portland.

"When we found them there, they had the Mount Hood National Forest label on them," Prigge says. Some of the acreage is

in the Mount Hood area.

A new impact statement will have to be made before the five leases can be considered. Environmentalists and the city of Detroit, Ore., are appealing the leasing decision.

"We haven't decided just how to handle it yet," says Sam Frear, director of communications for the Willamette National Forest. "We have the option of a supplemental or a full new statement."

At the BLM office in Portland, Fred Crafts, chief of the minerals adjudication section, says he did not know exactly how the mix-up occurred.

"I believe the leases were sent to the wrong national forest," he says. "It was just a small mixup in paperwork. I guess you could blame it on government bureaucracy."

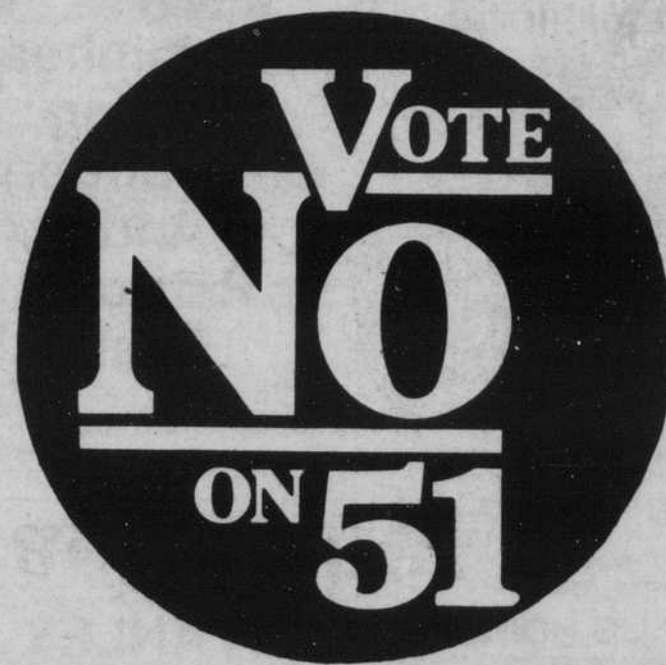
Prigge says the Willamette Forest officials were charged with making a recommendation on all the applications because most of the area is in the Willamette National Forest.

In addition to four public hearings and work by a draftsman and several administrators, costs for the Breitenbush study included \$12,000 for printing two environmental reports.

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