

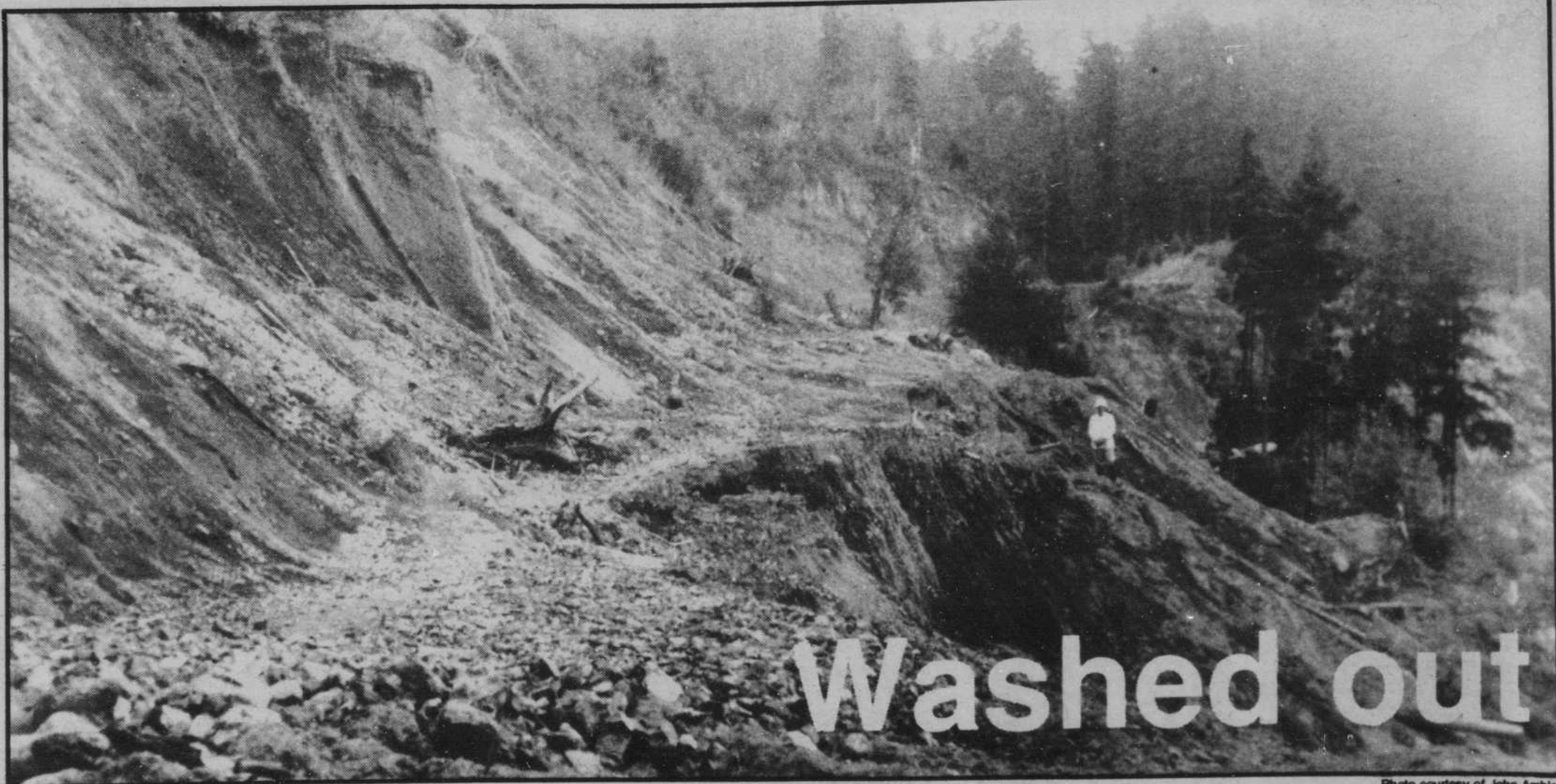


Photo courtesy of John Ambler

When the U.S. Forest Service put a road in the Middle Santiam roadless area, Mother Earth objected. The road slumped because drainage was poor and a 200-foot section of

the road washed away. Some environmentalists feel the Forest Service is too careless, too often and would like to toughen standards of forest management.

Washed out

Forest Service land proposals spark debate

By JACK DESMOND
Of the Emerald

The controversy over allocation of wilderness areas has been put on the back burner until the first of the year, but timber industry and environmental groups are squaring off again over proposed rules for Forest Service land management planning.

Although the proposals have so far generated little public interest, they will affect all national forests.

In 1976, Congress passed the National Forest Management Act, which directed the Forest Service to issue specific regulations re-

garding management of its lands. The Forest Service commissioned a committee to comply with the mandate, and after two years of work, the draft regulations were published in the Federal Register, along with amendments offered by the timber industry and environmentalists.

The draft regulations attempt to define "commercial timber," and tries to insure soil and watershed protection through better forest management practices.

Randal O'Toole of the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group says the proposed regulations should be strengthened.

"You should consider economics when considering marginal timber lands," he says. "The Forest Service doesn't even mention economics, and that is one of my biggest complaints."

An amendment offered by environmentalists suggests forest land is not capable of producing at least 50 cubic feet of timber per acre per year should be withdrawn from timber harvest. A 50 cubic feet limitation would in essence, protect over half the roadless areas in Eastern Oregon.

O'Toole does not agree with the 50 cubic feet figure.

"I've talked with executives of Boise Cascade, Weyerhaeuser and others, and they say that the land must produce 70 to 90 cubic feet to log economically," he says.

Other environmentalists are wondering whether the new rules will prevent past logging abuses

by the Forest Service.

Andy Kerr of the Middle Santiam Wilderness Committee says the Forest Service built an unsafe logging road into the Middle Santiam roadless area.

"The Forest Service had intended to connect the last 1 1/2 miles, but they were afraid to do it," Kerr recalls. "Much of the road had washed out. A graduate student at OSU had studied the area and found it to be the most unstable piece of ground in Oregon."

"While the soil is very deep, it has a tremendous capacity to hold water," he adds. "It becomes so saturated and because it's very steep, it is vulnerable to slumping."

Kerr says the road washed out several years ago, and Pres. Carter is now including the area in a 47,000 acre wilderness proposal.

O'Toole notes another example

of poor Forest Service practices he feels would not have occurred if the agency had properly studied the area.

"They clearcut a small area in the Bull Run protected watershed (near Portland). The wind blew down the surrounding trees and the Forest Service logged the salvage area and then the winds blew again."

O'Toole says the small clearcut became a 500-acre clearcut after a few years.

"The logging done in Bull Run has been patently illegal, although Congress finally okayed it last year," he says. "Unfortunately, logging is innocent until proven guilty. It is one of the biggest bugaboos that environmentalists have."

"The new regulations would have prevented Bull Run," O'Toole maintains.

"It's premature to speculate on the proposed rules," says Jerry Patchen, assistant supervisor for planning and programming for the Willamette National Forest. "They are just in the draft stage. When the final regs are issued, then it will be possible to comment."

O'Toole hopes people will read the regulations and respond in writing.

"I think if we get two or three times as many letters urging strong regulations promoting economic analysis and public input, then that will force the Forest Service to consider stronger regulations," he says.

Patchen, however, cautions against merely writing a letter in support of either timber industry or environmentalist proposals.

"It's not a voting contest," he says. "The letters should make specific suggestions."

The Forest Service has extended the deadline for public comment until Nov. 29. Copies of the proposed regulations may be picked up at the OSPIRG office in Suite 1 of the EMU. Comments should be sent to the Chief of Forestry, U.S. Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 2417, Washington, D.C., 20013.

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