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Stopping herbicides

A group of Lorane residents have stopped the federal government from spraying herbicides on a 30-acre tract of timberland near their homes.

With volunteers from Eugene, Cottage Grove and surrounding areas, the residents have worked 10 days in the rain and mud removing grass from young Douglas fir trees, then applying layers of newspaper as a mulch to prevent the grass from resprouting. The Bureau of Land Management had planned to treat the area with a grass-killing chemical called atrazine.

The deadline for the hand-clearing project was Monday, but the BLM extended that until workers can finish. Jean Palzinski, one of the residents who persuaded the BLM to approve the project, says the work almost is completed.

"I hope this particular incident can set an example for others who are concerned about herbicides," Palzinski says. "Only 3 to 5 acres really needed spraying, but they were going to spray the whole thing."

Palzinski says she was concerned mostly that the chemical would be sprayed into a nearby creek where some residents get their water. Representatives from the BLM visited the site to see how many families would be affected.

"They say these chemicals aren't dangerous, yet they still set up buffer zones," she says. "The fact that they're afraid to let the spray fall in the water negates their

claims that they're safe."

Opponents of herbicides say the chemicals can cause cancer, birth defects and other mutations. Forest use of 2,4,5-T was banned last spring when its application in the Siuslaw National Forest was linked to a high incidence of miscarriages among women in the area.

Foresters say herbicides are essential in fighting vegetation that threatens the growth of young seedlings. And they use only those chemicals registered with the Environmental Protection Agency.

This spring, the U.S. Forest Service and the BLM are applying 2,4-D, atrazine and other herbicides on about 28,000 acres throughout Oregon. BLM already has completed its spraying program of some 425 acres in Lane County.

Save Our ecoSystems, a Eugene-based anti-herbicide group, filed an appeal challenging both the Forest Service and the BLM spray programs. They also requested the programs be delayed until the appeals could be heard. Both requesters were rejected.

"Our motions to stay asked them to stop the spraying long enough to review our arguments," says Barbara Kelley, a member of SOS. "But by the time they review our arguments, they will already have sprayed."

Joseph Cavan, a Eugene radiologist, also appealed BLM's plans to spray a 27-acre tract near his Lorane farm to kill scotch

broom. The area was sprayed last Friday after Cavan and eight other Lorane area residents issued a statement to the BLM spray crew requesting:

"Please consider the harmful medical effects on the Cavan family, the other families in the Lorane valley and anyone else exposed to potential air and water contamination."

Congressman Jim Weaver, D-Ore., has tried to stop spraying programs in both Oregon and Washington.

"Jim has on numerous occasions asked both (Max) Peterson, the chief of the Forest Service, and (William) Leavell, director of BLM, to stop spraying phenoxy herbicides and move to manual methods that would employ lots of people and still get the job done," says Dave Fidanque, an aide to Weaver.

Fidanque says Weaver plans to announce sometime next week plans for anti-herbicide legislation and hearings on the issue.

Fidanque says the legislation was prompted partly "because of unanswered questions about tests done on many chemicals before they were registered with the EPA."

"The staff is working on legislation that would address those concerns," Fidanque says.

Story by Leslie Farris

Graphics by Sioux Anderson



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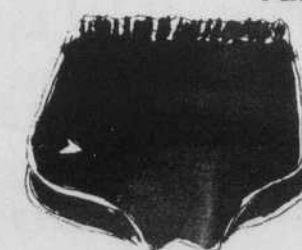
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