

Undercover Forest Animals

For many people the northern spotted owl has become a symbol of the vanishing old growth Douglas fir forests of the Pacific Northwest. But the spotted owl is not the only wildlife threatened with local extinction if old growth forests continue to disappear at the present rate. Many other species of birds, mammals and fish are "old growth specialists," meaning they reach their optimum population densities in old growth forests.

Old growth is generally considered to be stands of trees at least 200 years old. This type of forest offers living conditions (ecological niches) found nowhere else in Oregon. Spotted owls require a stand of trees with a canopy or leaf cover in upper, middle and

lower layers, needed by the owl for adequate cover and protection from predators.

The spotted owl also must have large trees with cavities, broken tops and platforms of large branches to hold accumulated organic matter suitable for nesting. In addition, spotted owl habitat must have standing and fallen dead trees to support a population of flying squirrels and woodrats, animals which are the owl's prey.

These conditions are met only in old growth forests. Newly planted reforestation projects offer too simple an ecosystem for spotted owls and other species adapted to older forests.

The northern flying squirrel, the red tree vole and several species of bat are canopy-

dwelling mammals recognized as old growth-dependant species by the U.S. Forest Service. As with the spotted owl, the survival of these animals depends on the multi-layered leaf cover an old growth forest provides.

Several types of ground-dwelling mammals are best suited in an old-growth environment. Examples of these species include martens, fishers and a few species of moles.

The northern goshawk and the American bald eagle are predatory birds that thrive in old growth forests. These predators maintain hunting territories and therefore require extremely large ranges if they are to have stable populations. Several studies indicate that a single breeding pair of spotted

owls may need 2,500 acres or more of old growth forest in order to carry on their life cycle. Bald eagles, a more gregarious bird, maintain territories of hundreds of acres and prefer nesting sites in tall, dead or dying trees more than 100 feet tall and located close to a stream or lake.

Pileated woodpeckers require dead or dying standing trees to build their nesting cavities. These birds and many others feed on invertebrates attracted to decaying wood commonly found in old growth forests. At least 50 other species of wildlife are dependant for their survival on the cavities made by woodpeckers.

Old growth forests provide the only adequately cool habitat for black tailed deer and Roosevelt elk in this

region. The 70 percent or greater canopy cover found in old growth forests keep the forest temperature cool even in the summer.

The old growth Douglas fir forests of Oregon provide a rich diversity of habitats for many organisms. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that more than 200 species of wildlife use old growth forests for breeding areas. "Wildlife" are those species easily seen and recognized by people. For every one species of wildlife inhabiting old growth, there are hundreds or even thousands of seldom-seen species, such as salamanders and insects in the forest ecosystem.

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ations between timber interests and environmentalists. The confrontations have led to tree spikings, tree-sitting marathons intended to prevent cutting, and gate closures to keep the public out.

The fate of a stand of old growth in the Breitenbush area of the Willamette National Forest, part of the largest chunk of old growth in Oregon, according to Jim Monteith of the Oregon Natural Resources Council, currently hangs in the balance of a U.S. Federal Court battle being waged in Portland.

The ONRC and the Breitenbush Community, near the small town of Detroit, have filed suit in an attempt to block clear cutting on the 63-acre North Roaring Devil timber sale already approved by the U.S. Forest Service.

During court proceedings, geologist Roger A. Redfern of Portland testified clear cutting in the area could cause erosion damage to the Breitenbush River. The Breitenbush River supplies Detroit with water.

Bugaboo Timber Co., which was contracted to harvest the timber, is a defendant in the suit along with the U.S. Forest Service. Bugaboo employs around 450 people.

"We do not believe that we should have to be fighting this battle. The timber sale was legally sold to us by the federal government, and we should have the legal right to harvest that timber sale. We're bound by a legal contract with the U.S. government," says Bugaboo owner Jim Morgan. "I grew up in that area and I've never felt that everything has to be for wilderness. The people that want to hike in a non-disturbed area are a very small minority of this population that owns that national forest." He maintains it is a public forest and is for everybody, not just small special interest groups. Many

people would never get to enjoy that area if it weren't for the logging roads that provide access.

Despite what some environmentalists claim, the future for the industry "looks pretty good," Morgan says.

A 110-acre stand of timber at Bunker Hill has been the center of yet another emotional confrontation between the BLM and the Bunker Hill Task Force of the Upper Mohawk Community Council, a group of residents in the Mohawk area who formed the group to save the old growth. After two years of resistance by area residents, 43 acres of the Bunker Hill patch are being cut now by the Roseboro Lumber Co.

Three other sales in the area are being appealed because they contain Spotted Owl habitat, says Lee Lauritzen, director of the BLM Eugene district. The BLM denied a Lane County Board of Commissioners request that the county be allowed to lease the property for a natural park similar to the Big River Old Growth Preserve, concluding the timber was too valuable to be set aside and would have a severe economic impact.

Cole confirmed \$421,000 in tax revenues will be generated from the 43-acre Bunker Hill sale.

Another reason the BLM denied the request and went ahead with cutting is it did not want to set a precedent with such a small patch of timber. If the BLM saved this grove, it was afraid everyone would petition to save their backyard wood lot, Lauritzen says.

"We were already hearing rumbles from groups down south, mainly in Medford and Roseburg, about petitioning to save other small patches of timber," he says.

"The values the local group were talking about were not

there. They said the area was unique — well old growth is not unique. We kept asking them what was unique about the area and they never did tell us," he says.

People involved in the issue are not concerned with less valuable second-growth timber. The second-growth forests that have grown up since virgin timber was cut do not seem to evoke the same emotional attachment the ancient timber untouched by man does. Also, the second-growth timber is less valuable economically.

Although it is genetically selected to grow faster, thereby making a more productive forest, there is a tradeoff in strength and quality of the wood because the grain is not as fine. This is evidenced by the disparity in prices that old growth and second growth will bring in the market.

The big trees are more economical to harvest because they contain more wood, and leads less individual pieces to handle per thousand board feet of wood. The wood also is much more valuable on the market because is fine grained, stronger and less knotty than younger, smaller second-growth logs.

"Second growth will bring \$40-\$50 per thousand board feet where old growth will go for \$100 per thousand," Lauritzen says.

Second-growth forests are also less genetically diverse, Spies says. Some environmentalists point to this lack of diversity as proof that old growth forests are more than just old trees.

Spies concedes the scientific community is not certain that old growth forests as they now exist can simply be grown back. Old growth forests come about from a combination of factors, he says. These include things such as fire and other natural disaster, as well as weather patterns and climatic