

Speaker explains importance of old growth

Issue goes beyond owls

By Greg Hough
Emerald Reporter

Saving old growth forests in Oregon is an issue that goes far beyond whether to protect the habitat of the endangered spotted owl, a National Audubon Society project director said Tuesday in Eugene.

John Talberth, who directs the Western Oregon office of the society's new "Adopt-A-Forest" program, spoke during a meeting of the Lane County Audubon Society, which drew a crowd of about 50 at the Eugene Garden Club.

Talberth said economic restructuring of the timber industry is needed to insure that the ecological value of old growth forestation is not lost.

"I think it was important that the effort to save the spotted owl drew attention to old growth," Talberth said. "But I think the media has portrayed a lopsided view of the spotted owl issue. A sustainable forest is what we need, not just a suitable home for the spotted owl."

Talberth said the state's old growth timber forestation, sustaining ecosystems as old as 1.5

million years, is "irreplaceable forest land, found nowhere else on the planet."

"There are over 200 vertebrate species that depend on old growth forest or use old growth forest," Talberth said. "And they depend on unique structural characteristics of the forest, which include downed logs and live, large trees."

"What we've done is basically cut down the natural forests, and replaced them with forests that are managed on a short rotation, anywhere from 60 to 300 years old. But unless (the timber) goes beyond 300 years old it doesn't get the kind of structural characteristics that are important to these 200 species," Talberth said.

Talberth also spoke of the "bioeconomic values" of old growth forestation in the area.

"We're replacing diverse, decentralized production of timber with rural communities that are experiencing high rates of unemployment, crime and alcoholism," Talberth said.

"Part of the reason is some of the values that old growth forests and landscape provide to these communities are also be-

ing decreased, in terms of environmental quality, in terms of amenity values and scenic values," he said. "You see property values go down after timber is harvested on natural forest land."

Talberth explained that "Adopt-A-Forest," which began last year, is a four-point program advocating further forest mapping and planning, in addition to "economic transition" within the timber industry.

"What really needs to happen is that we need to get an idea of what (timber is) 600 to 1000 years old, what's 350 to 600 years, what's 200 to 350," Talberth said. "Only then can we have a real good basis of planning."

Talberth said the society is working with the U.S. Forest Service to map the area's old growth forestation, and has finished the Rogue National Forest and much of the Willamette National Forest. Still to be done is "phase two" of the Willamette forest mapping, as well as surveying the Mt. Hood National Forest, he added.

"We're constantly monitoring timber sales and forestry decisions that are coming out, putting them on a computer data base, trying to review and

address as many of them as possible," Talberth said. "Because if we don't file some type of input in the early stages of timber planning, it makes it all the more difficult to stop an old growth timber sale down the line."

Talberth said the program is seeking volunteer help to work with the Forest Service in an "adopted" forest such as the Willamette. Activities range from reviewing maps and reports in the USFS offices to actually taking inventory of trees in the forest, he added.

Talberth handed those in attendance copies of a diagram outlining the "Economic Values of Old Growth Forests in Partially Logged Watersheds." The diagram included benefits such "dispersed recreation," "fire buffering," "ecological research," and "regulation of stream flow."



John Talberth

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"We were moved that they (the students) would risk their lives in demanding a democracy," Mu said. "We felt very strongly that we should do something to support them, although whatever we do will be minor compared to them."

The donation was sent directly to their classmate to avoid government red tape. It will be used for independent publications, flyers, and to aid the hunger strikers, he said.

"The money is not what really matters," Mu said. "It's the moral support."

Mu said some students were reluctant to show their support for the Beijing demonstrators because they were unsure of what was happening in China. But many were angered when the government ordered troops into Tiananman Square and claimed that the peaceful demonstrations were riots, he added.

On May 17, the University Chinese Student Association

issued a statement to the Chinese government in support of the student movement. The statement also encouraged communication between the students and the government.

"The basic demand of the students is very simple: we just want to talk to the government," Mu said.

Mu said he is optimistic that there will eventually be democratic reform in China.

"You have to do as much as you can and see what will happen instead of sitting there trying to figure out if the effort is worthwhile," Mu said.

Although he said understands that the U.S. government has to be cautious in these matters, Mu said he was disappointed that the American government is not sending a clearer message about the inappropriateness of using force to China.

Anyone interested in making a donation to the group's efforts should contact Xingdong Mu at 686-4758.

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