

Salvaging logs may reduce fire risk



WASHINGTON (AP) — The Forest Service is trying to shift money away from timber sale preparations for typical commercial logging and toward

salvage logging and thinning to reduce fire risks, an official said Tuesday.

Assistant Agriculture Secretary James Lyons told a joint congressional hearing the agency is preparing an aggressive strategy to remove dead timber, thin dense stands and intentionally light some small fires in Western forests to reduce wood fuel loads that can lead to catastrophic fires.

Lyons promised environmentalists the agency would not abuse the salvage program by using it as an excuse to cut large, live "green" trees, as was done in some cases in the past.

But he added, "We cannot simply step back and wait for nature to take its course."

Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, and several other Western lawmakers pressed Lyons for examples of things Congress could do to expedite the salvage logging.

Rep. Bob Smith, R-Ore., and Sen. Slade Gorton, R-Wash., are among those who have advocated exempting the logging from U.S. environmental laws.

But Lyons indicated the Agriculture Department, overseeing the Forest Service, should be able to make administrative changes in its own budget rules to make more resources available for the efforts.

"One of the things we are trying to do is overcome some cultural barriers within the Forest Service that would ensure that salvage sales, which until very recently were a small part of our program, are as valuable as green (live tree) sales," Lyons said Tuesday.

"Obviously conditions have changed in the West. There are millions of acres of salvage available. It seems to me to be most prudent to make investments in the timber that is down or dying and if we don't harvest it soon will be lost, before we pump additional funds back into the green sale program," he said.

Lyons, assistant secretary for natural resources and the environment, blamed past logging practices and fire-suppression policies for bug infestations and diseases that have increased fire risks in the West.

He acknowledged some conservationists "will question any management effort that

includes cutting trees as a solution to a forest management problem."

"There clearly remains a fear on the part of some that forest health will simply serve as an excuse to go back to the ways of the past when timber targets dominated and performance was measured in board feet rather than multiple-use accomplishments," Lyons said.

"We need to give the public a better understanding and do a better job of overcoming some of the missteps in the past where the salvage program was not properly used for its original intent," he said.

Lyons said he has begun to review a draft report by a special team assigned to study forest health problems in Oregon, Washington, California, Idaho and Montana.

He said he should have more data on short-term and long-term impacts of fire in eastern and western Oregon and Washington by January. Assistant Interior Secretary Bob Armstrong said the Interior Department will present Congress with a comprehensive document on wildland fire late this fall.

Smith and Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., complained that the response was too slow.

"I've been hearing this same litany as long as I've been in Congress," said DeFazio, who was elected in 1986.

Smith calls Kitzhaber's proposal 'deception'

SALEM (AP) — Denny Smith says John Kitzhaber is playing a "shell game" with his budget proposals.

Smith, the Republican candidate for governor, on Tuesday accused his Democratic opponent of a "phony" budget plan on public safety.

Kitzhaber claimed his budget would raise public safety spending by 10 percent, Smith said, but it would just shift juvenile justice programs from the Human Resources Department to the Corrections Department.

Kitzhaber does not propose to raise public safety spending at all, Smith said.

"This shifting of programs accounts for almost 100 percent of the \$80 million 'increase' Kitzhaber claimed," Smith said. "This is exactly the kind of deception that adds to the sense of alienation and distrust Oregonians have for government."

Kitzhaber spokeswoman Rachel Gorlin said if more funds are given to the state corrections agency's budget, it's an increase in corrections spending wherever the funds came from.

She said the shift was recommended by a juvenile justice task force headed by Attorney General Ted Kulon-goski.

Gorlin also said Kitzhaber's plan includes other elements to "spend money throughout the crime and corrections budget smarter. This is not simply a paper shift."

It was ironic, she said, that Smith complained about misrepresentations after his campaign canceled two planned television advertisements.

"Someone who has had to pull two TV ads for inaccuracies in the last week alone probably does not have a good grasp of what is deceptive," Gorlin said.

Smith killed planned commercials saying the former congressman never voted for a tax increase and that Kitzhaber favored early release of double murderer Russell Obrebski.

Postal Service will start taking credit cards

SEATTLE (AP) — The U.S. Postal Service is making changes to deal with new technologies and customer demands, but needs more flexibility to do the best job possible, Postmaster General Marvin Runyon said Tuesday.

"If we're going to reinvent government we have to reinvent some of the rules ... and it's something only Congress, I think, can fix," he said.

Runyon made his comments at a breakfast meeting of local business leaders, where he announced that postal customers in Seattle, Denver and

San Diego will be able to buy stamps and other mail services with credit and debit cards beginning next April.

Runyon said he plans to ask Congress and the Postal Rate Commission for changes to help the Postal Service streamline its operations. The agency wants price-setting procedures shortened "so that we can become as responsive, progressive and quick on our feet as our competitors," Runyon said.

"Right now, it takes up to 10 months and many hours of trial-like proceedings to change

postal rates and service offerings."

The Postal Rate Commission is currently considering a Postal Service request for an overall 10.3 percent increase in prices, including raising the price of a first-class stamp from 29 cents to 31 cents.

The last increase took effect in February 1991, and the new increase could take effect as soon as January, Postal Service spokesman Frank Brennan said.

One audience member, Dolores Alfond of the National Alliance of Families for the

Return of America's Missing Servicemen, complained that the Postal Service hadn't issued a stamp honoring American prisoners of war and soldiers missing in action, despite petitions and a letter signed by 82 U.S. senators.

Runyon said the agency's Citizen Stamp Advisory Committee had not recommended such a stamp.

"We follow the recommendations of that committee, and I think probably you should present your case to them and see if you can convince them to change that," he said.

Environmentalists claim town trying to get rid of them

JOSEPH (AP) — Two leading environmentalists believe local residents are trying to drive them out of their homes in northeastern Oregon because of their outspoken views.

But Andy Kerr and Ric K. Bailey refuse to back down.

The men were hanged in effigy on Friday. In addition, both have accused opponents of denying them the use of local businesses and services.

Kerr, executive director of the Oregon Natural Resources Council, has a home on Wallowa Lake near this rustic logging and cattle town. Bailey, executive director of the Hells Canyon Preservation Council, lives on

the east side of Joseph.

Both men said Monday they were not upset about being hanged in effigy before a weekend land-use conference. But they are bothered by what they claim opponents are telling local business owners if they serve the men.

"Any business that lets us in is boycotted," Kerr said. Both men said they were told it would be weeks before they could get their kitchen ranges fixed, for example.

"The more they try to run me out, the deeper my roots dig in," Bailey said. "I'm not going to be run out of here. This is my home."

The effigy-burning took place one day before the Private Property and Federal Land Rights Symposium here, which drew about

100 people. Republican gubernatorial candidate Denny Smith gave the luncheon address.

The theme of the weekend conference was that environmentalists and federal officials under the Clinton administration are working to end commodities use, including grazing, logging and mining, across the West.

More than half of scenic Wallowa County is under federal control, mostly by the U.S. Forest Service.

Timber harvest reductions on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest cost Joseph, population 1,095, a sawmill this summer. A federal court injunction came close to forcing ranchers to remove large numbers of cattle from national forest allotments.

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