

Cutting coastal forests slashes state's future

OUR OPINION: Ruling permits Forest Service, BLM to clear-cut and opens door to disaster

As soon as the weather clears up and the roads get a little safer to travel, grab some friends; jump in a car; put it on Highway 126, and head west.

Oregon's wintry, storm-tossed coastal waters surrounding the Florence area are a sight to behold. You will not be disappointed by the breathtaking display of awesome winds and waves.

During your drive to the beach, make sure and pay attention to the remaining forest canopy and the hundreds of majestic and serene, um, stumps?

Yeah, stumps.

Last Friday in Eugene, U.S. District Judge Michael Hogan again ruled in favor of the timber industry in a lawsuit that allows the government to clear-cut up to 6,300 acres of old growth forests on the Oregon and Washington coasts.

This is exactly what our environment and ever-diminishing tree population does not need — more forest bald spots.

Clear-cutting may be the best example of natural resource destruction and mismanagement of our day.

Clear-cutting results in soil erosion, destruction of wildlife habitation, loss of oxygen-generation, and also contributes to ozone depletion.

"We are glad that Judge Hogan has finally ruled, and these sales can go ahead as Congress had intended," said Jim Geisinger, president of the Northwest Forestry Association (*Register-Guard*, Jan. 20). "These

timber sales are critical to the region's forest products companies."

The short-sighted timber industry wants to make sure its mills stay running so it can continue to turn a profit. The industry refuses to face the fact that the high costs of clear-cutting far outweigh any short-term economic gains.

The industry may argue that it practices reforestation, but reforestation doesn't come close to replacing all the environmental damage associated with a clear-cut.

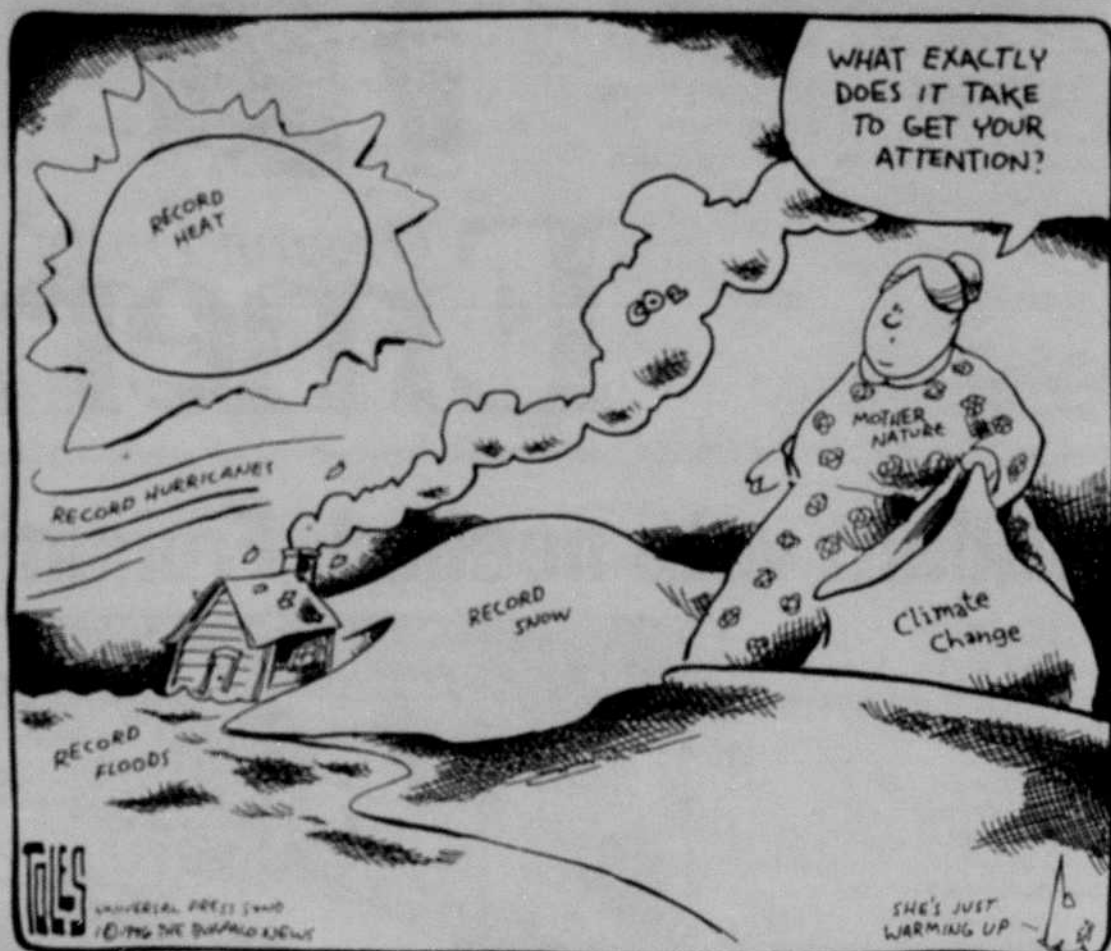
Planting tiny tree seedlings and saplings doesn't keep soil erosion in check. For that matter, saplings often fall victim to the very thing they are planted to prevent; they get washed out by rainfall. If saplings do happen to survive the elements, many of them turn into tasty snacks for hungry deer and elk.

It's time for the timber industry to let go of the fairy-tale notion that Oregon's trees will be here forever. They won't. It's time for the industry to quit romanticizing Paul Bunyan imagery and begin facing reality.

Without healthy, full forests, Oregon will cease to be the beautiful, green state that it is. Tourists won't flock here to see saplings and stumps.

It's time to move forward and out of our unhealthy dependency on timber. It's time to stop clear-cutting.

The state's shift toward industry diversification will prove to be the key to our economic and environmental survival. Oregon's forests can no longer carry the weight of our future on their fragile branches.



Smith and Wyden: cocked and loaded

In the wake of the recent Tyson/King fiascoes, many boxing fans have been upset that they haven't been able to catch a good brawl on the tube. Here in lovely Oregon, however, we have no such problem because we have been able to watch Gordon Smith and Ron Wyden beat up each other for months.

This campaign, which is now in its final stages, has been dirty from the start. The lowest moment (at least up to this point) was a pro-Wyden radio ad, made not by Wyden's campaign but by his supporters, that blamed the accidental death of a young Smith Foods employee on Smith himself.

This gruesome usage of a tragedy for political gain is unacceptable, and those responsible for it should be ashamed of themselves.

Smith has also hit below the belt, most blatantly by claiming in a television ad that Wyden has spent his career in Washington trying to "cut" Medicare. This ludicrous claim could not be further from the truth. Wyden has spent his career riding the senior entitlement wave from reelection to reelection.

One tactic that both candidates have used, and is a national political trend, is changing this from a statewide contest to a national one.

We have all seen ads in which the Wyden campaign tells us in dour tones that Smith is a follower of "the right catechism of Speaker Newt Gingrich" and Smith ads that link Wyden to President Bill Clinton.

Aside from the fact that neither of these comparisons is true — because Smith is much more moderate than Gingrich and Wyden is certainly more liberal than the president — such tactics allow the candidates to deflect attention from themselves and the issues.

This race is a contest between two men running for the Senate; it is not a statewide poll asking the question: "Whom do you like better, Speaker Gingrich or President Clinton?" For both candidates to treat it as such is a slap in the face of Oregon's voters.

The culmination of all of the negative campaigning has been Wyden's recent "no negative ads" pledge. Although at first it seemed honorable, now we can see that it was a political act. Wyden's campaign won't be running negative ads, but his henchmen still will. This way Wyden can have it both ways. He can look like the adult in the race, but he can also giggle as his buddies tear Smith to shreds.

The *Oregonian* recently ran a cover story about this contest telling readers that this race was good for Oregon because it gave voters two distinct visions of the future. As we should

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know by now, that assessment is far from accurate.

A race that accomplished what *The Oregonian* claimed this campaign does would center around three core questions about the future of government.

The first: What are the roles of the state and federal governments, and how should they relate to each other? The second: Should our leaders be part of a citizen legislature as the founding fathers intended, or should we be led by career politicians, as we are now? The third: In what time frame and in what manner should the federal budget be balanced?

If this race were only about these three issues, *The Oregonian's* claim would ring true because the two candidates are diametrically opposed on them. However, as we all know, the world is not that simple, and a number of unanswered questions in this race may be as important as those above.

Some, quite reasonably, question whether Smith, as the owner of a large-scale business, will be unbiased regarding legislation concerning pollution, business subsidies or workers' rights.

Also, Smith's vague anti-abortion stance (he says that he wants to reduce the number of abortions but hasn't said how he would do that) and the endorsement that he accepted from the Oregon Citizens' Alliance have left even some rightward-leaning voters feeling lukewarm.

As for Wyden, many voters wonder, with some degree of justification, if after 15 years in Washington, D.C., he is such a part of Beltway culture that he is out of touch with the rest of the world.

His inability to find Bosnia on a globe or quote the prices of milk and bread have caused doubt as to whether he is knowledgeable enough to represent this state.

If this race were between two candidates who were regarded as intelligent and held mainstream views on social issues, such as Jack Roberts and Peter DeFazio, voters could concentrate on the three core issues.

As it stands, we are left trying to decide between the lesser of two evils — an unfortunate position indeed.

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