

Congress chases Northwest's green activists right up a tree

■ **FORESTS:** Environmentalists try to buy trees in a desperate attempt to save old growth timber

BELLINGHAM, Wash. (AP) It was a bargain Mitch Friedman says he couldn't pass up — trees from the government for just 60 cents each.

When a stand of fire-damaged timber in Washington's Okanogan National Forest went to auction Dec. 20, Friedman's outfit outbid three timber companies.

Business as usual — except that Friedman is an environmental activist, not a logger, and he wants to leave the trees in place, not cut them down. All of which means he's more likely to spot Bigfoot than get the timber contract.

The Forest Service says you can't buy its trees without cutting them down, but Friedman, director of the Bellingham-based Northwest Ecosystem Alliance, figured it was worth a try.

Northwest environmentalists have few other options these days.

A measure passed by Congress and signed reluctantly last July by President Clinton suspends environmental laws across thousands of acres of the Northwest's old-growth forest.

Of all the rollbacks in environmental regulation promised by congressional Republicans, this is one of the few that has stuck. The Wilderness Society calls it "the worst blot" on this Congress' environmental record.

Friedman calls it the bad old days. Loggers have returned to the Northwest woods, clearing large swaths of centuries-old trees next to streams and on steep, easily eroded slopes.

No longer able to challenge timber sales through legal channels, environmentalists have gotten creative — if not effective.

"This is an act of desperation," Friedman said of his purchase. "Congress has slammed shut the courtroom doors."

Civil disobedience is the order of the day as slogan-chanting college students replace briefcase-toting lawyers at the front lines of the Northwest's timber battles.

Protesters trying to stop a 55-acre clear-cut in the Olympic National Forest this month set up a mock living room on a forest road, locking themselves onto a couch embedded in concrete.

Forest Service officials took some of the protesters' clothes and boots, forcing the chilled activists out, but one activist snuck back a few nights later, climbing 100 feet up a tree. A Feb. 17 rally near the site drew at least 250 protesters, 100 of whom were arrested for trespassing after crossing into a closed area.

Two days later, the tree-sitter had climbed down, the protesters had gone home, and the chainsaws were roaring.

Loggers are savoring a rare victory in their quest for timber.

"What this legislation did was basically restrict some groups from obstructionist lawsuits," said Chris West, spokesman for the Northwest Forestry Association, a timber-industry group.

"Environmentalists have been able to totally shut down the federal timber program in the Pacific Northwest," West said.

"That has put dozens and dozens of mills out of business and tens of thousands of people out of work."

All the rhetoric must sound distressingly familiar to Clinton, who at a March 1993 forest conference in Portland, devised a forest plan that promised Northwest loggers about 1 billion board feet of federal timber each year — one-fifth the level of logging during the booming 1980s.

The plan drew legal challenges from both sides, further slowing timber harvest. But another phenomenon — the sprouting of small, local forest-watch groups — may have slowed things even more.

Last summer's salvage rider was promoted as a way to give those timber-starved loggers a quick source of wood while ridding the forest of fire- and insect-damaged trees.

"The timber industry is constantly accusing environmentalists of filing frivolous lawsuits," Friedman said. "They're not frivolous. We win our lawsuits. Our forest agencies had free run for decades, and they really made a mess out there."

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Yale medical student pursues legend, finds basement of brains

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (AP) — With so many great minds at Yale University, the last place Christopher Wahl expected to find 600 of them was in dusty old jars beneath his dormitory.

As a first-year medical student, he listened keenly as upper-classmen told him the eerie legend of a cache of bottled brains located deep within the sub-basement of Edward S. Harkness Hall.

Then, his curiosity got the better of him.

Sometime after midnight — and after a few drinks — he and four other students descended to the former bomb shelter. Their voices hushed so as not to be detected, they picked the lock using a piece of wire. They passed a dimly lit collection of boxes, old furniture, a gurney and other flotsam long since forgotten.

Then they found them: On dirty shelves, rows and rows of brains. Each floated in a gallon jar of formaldehyde, yellow, brown and gray.

Wahl had no idea that they had found a meticulously gathered collection that chronicled the scientific beginnings of neurosurgery. He was just worried about getting caught.

"I could just see telling my parents I got thrown out of medical school for this," said the 28-year-old Wahl, who graduates in May.

Wahl made his discovery in 1991. For a year, he kept it secret but remained haunted by the photographic negatives that accompanied the specimens: the faraway look in the eyes of a little girl in agony, a bony woman with a massive brain tumor seeping out of her skull.

"This is not like finding canned fruit in the basement," he said. "It was almost harrowing finding them because you realize

STRANGER
THAN FICTION

these were people. The photos are riveting, compelling, very emotional."

Through some research, Wahl learned that the specimens were collected by Dr. Harvey Cushing, a pioneer in brain surgery and, at his death in 1939, Yale's Sterling Professor of Neurology.

When Wahl finally approached faculty with the discovery, he did not face expulsion. The discovery was hailed as a momentous historical find.

"I thought this was a wonderful thing," said Dr. Dennis Spencer, Yale's chief of neurosurgery. "Many of the faculty knew they were there, but the outside world really forgot."

Wahl said he was relieved that "no one really asked, 'What were you doing skulking around the bottom of the dorm?'"

Cushing's brain tumor registry contains more than 2,000 case studies, including whole brain specimens and tumors, more than 50,000 pages of records, notes, journal excerpts and some 15,000 photographic negatives. The material dates from the late 1800s to 1936.

Cushing was responsible for transforming brain surgery from a bizarre novelty to a legitimate science, even as some of his grossly disfigured patients were relegated to freak shows and institutions.

When he began performing surgery before the turn of the century, Cushing's mortality rate was more than 90 percent. By the time he last used a scalpel in the 1930s, the rate was down to 10 percent because of innovations, many of which he developed.

His use of equipment to monitor a patient under anesthesia and surgical tools that he invented to stop bleeding during operations were considered revolutionary.

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