

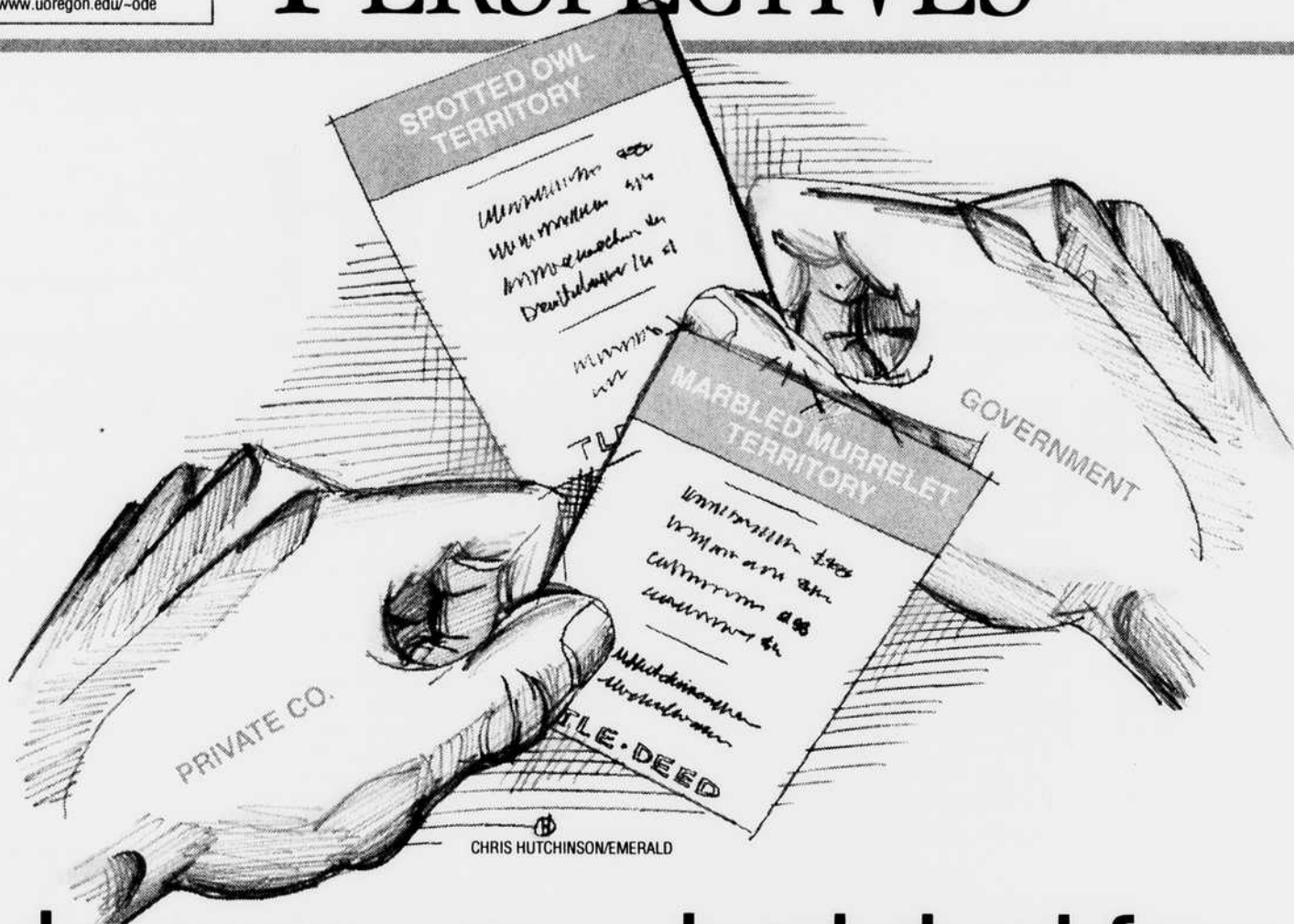
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# PERSPECTIVES

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## Land swaps are a bad deal for all

*Swapping federal land for privately owned or contracted land is a phenomenon that has begun to hit Oregon*

Old-fashioned capitalism seems to be finding a new industry in which to operate.

Before electronic transfers of funds, before credit cards and stocks and bonds, even before currency, there was barter. Now, a new sort of swapping is the latest way resource consumption-based companies are taking the government and the taxpayers for a ride.

In several recent "environmental" deals, the government has decided to offer land of supposedly equal value in exchange for newly protected property. For example, when it created the Escalante National Monument in Utah, the White House may have offered valuable mining land to several of the companies that had claims in the area, according to The Nation.

If that wasn't enough, some of the companies with Escalante claims have been given permission to conduct exploratory drilling, such as the Conoco company. By giving up known resources for vague

claims and then abdicating effective protection of the region, the U.S. government isn't doing much to protect the environment.

Similarly, when efforts were underway to protect the Headwaters redwood stand in northern California, some plans included swapping the sensitive and unlogged watershed for vast swaths of timber elsewhere. The eventual plan, at least as reported by CNN, relied upon a more traditional swap — \$380 million for minimal protection of a small area.

More recently, the technique of swapping federal land for valuable, privately owned or contracted land has hit Oregon. On Feb. 5, Eugene Weekly noted that Warner Creek was once again in danger of being logged.

The watershed had been slated for logging when sold in 1995, but the original sale was eventually canceled after extensive protests. Now the site, which consists of spotted owl habitat, has been given to a company for logging in exchange for a canceled sale in marbled murrelet territory along the coast.

In addition to the pure insult this sale represents, eliminating as it does months

of hard work and protesting by Cascadia Forest Defenders and others, it's also troublesome because of some fundamental flaws with the concept of such land swaps.

Some of these problems are illustrated by a Register-Guard story from Feb. 11 about another set of proposed swaps. One plan, in particular, has raised concerns.

The plan in question would exchange roughly equal-sized patches of pine forest in central Oregon. Unfortunately, while the company will get prime forest, including old growth, the federal government will get many areas that have already been logged. Such a deal is hardly an equal exchange.

This inequality is one of the big problems with such swaps. Because the government is often desperate to save face by protecting some small slice of the forest, the companies usually get great deals by taking other valuable but less well-known patches of land. In the end, of course, it is nature who gets the worst deal.

There is another, more fundamental problem as well. While exchanges of public for private land aren't as troublesome, there is something wrong with the concept that government cannot restrict the use of

public lands, even if it costs industry money.

After all, timber companies have for decades profited from road building, low fees and basement pricing. So too have mining companies, which, like logging firms, never have to pay for the environmental cost of resource extraction.

In exchange for all these great deals, it seems fair to impose reasonable environmental restrictions on land. Such limits are necessary to protect society and the planet. A timber company should not be able to recoup the price of not cutting trees that provide species habitat any more than a drug dealer can regain the cost of lost merchandise.

Monetary compensation for land restrictions was troublesome enough, but at least such deals maintained some piece of nature. By exchanging land for land, the government ends up circumventing its environmental goals.

Of course, government-supported resource extraction is probably even older than capitalism. Why should things change just because we know better?

*This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.*

**AN EMERALD EDITORIAL**

**READERS' VOICES**

*"What is the region's biggest environmental problem?"*



"The pollution of the Willamette River and the clearcutting."

**Michelle Fisher**  
French  
Senior



"El Nino is an example of the problems that are a result of how we've lived our lives."

**Lori Schmall**  
Business  
Graduate  
student



"The lack of reporting for our right to know about pesticides and other toxic chemicals."

**W. Douglas Serrill**  
Environmental  
Studies  
Junior



"The issue surrounding pesticide use and our right to know about pesticides and their usage."

**Michael Olson**  
Political Science  
Senior



"Pesticides, specifically Atrazine, which is linked to breast cancer."

**Geneva Wortman**  
Sociology  
Junior

**FYI**

**CORRECTION**

In the story, "Professor to head feminist journal" (ODE, Feb. 12), it should have said, "It will be funded by the College of Arts and Sciences, the Center for the Study of Women and Society, The Oregon Humanities Center and the philosophy and English departments. The Emerald regrets the error."

**LETTERS POLICY**

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