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# Warning to Weyerhaeuser: Please don't feed the bears

■ Problems concerning the survival of young trees led Weyerhaeuser Co. to handle the bear problem on its own

Melynda Coble  
for the Emerald

Many people think of trees when they hear the words "Earth Day," and most people would agree that planting more trees is a good idea. But in western Oregon there is a conflict between tree planting by timber corporations and wildlife.

Wildlife biologist Bill Castillo said the South Willamette District of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) "fielded 67 complaints about black bears in 1999. Of those complaints, 25 were from timber companies and all of those bears were killed."

Castillo said, "Young trees are a desired food source for a hungry bear in the spring. Black bears peel back the bark layers of trees and feed on the cambial layer. This can kill or slow the growth of the tree, which is bad news for timber companies."

According to Oregon's Black Bear Management Plan, published by ODFW, timber companies report an immediate loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars and a potential loss of harvest of millions of dollars. Plantations in western Oregon are usually a monoculture of Douglas Firs. The plan also explains that when a bear finds a place it likes, it tends to keep coming back. Females teach their cubs where to feed, increasing the population in a given plantation.


"Timber companies are aggressive and effective at controlling bears in their plantations," Castillo said. They

set snares to kill individuals they think are responsible for tree damage.


Trapping and killing bears isn't the only approach timber companies use to control bear damage. Steve Cafferata, a forester with Weyerhaeuser Co., says there is another approach — feeding the bears. Ralph Flowers at the University of Washington recommended feeding bears food pellets scattered over a wide area in the spring. He suggested this would divert bears from the trees and keep them fed until other food sources became available.

Timber companies in Oregon and Washington, like Weyerhaeuser, took Flower's advice, but instead of scattering the pellets — forcing bears to roam and forage — they attached large drums filled with food pellets to trees. Castillo said the tubs of food at-

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