

COMMENTARY

Thursday, October 10, 2002

Debate heats up over Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative

Forest thinning not the solution

President George W. Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative has come under fire recently, and rightfully so.

Bush's plan for "wildfire prevention and stronger communities" is nothing more than a logging company's dream come true, disguised in language that suggests it might actually protect what's left of the forests in this country. The president is using the devastating wildfires of this summer to fuel his proposal, scapegoating environmentalists the whole way.

It's no secret that wildfires are destructive—they wreck habitat, taint water supplies and endanger houses and communities. And it's clear that decades of mismanagement have left the forests with dangerous buildup of highly flammable undergrowth, thanks to a firm policy of fire suppression.

HFI, however, tries to convince us that because "the forests and rangelands of the West have become unnaturally dense," we must thin the trees in an effort to "ensure the sustainable forest management and appropriate timber production."

The initiative's background tells us that in studies done on wildfires in Oregon, the thinned areas were unharmed by the fire, while fires in unthinned areas wreaked havoc on the environment, including "the habitat of threatened spotted owls."

Looks like Bush is hoping to win the support of those "Oregon environmentalists," who apparently are still concerned with nothing but the plight of the spotted owl—more than a decade-old controversy.

At the same time, of course, he blames the environmentalists for such disasters, saying their appeals of logging decisions over the years have kept the forests densely packed and waiting to burn wildly.

Bush obviously didn't get the memo on this one—mature forests, however densely packed, do not cause raging fires. It's the buildup of undergrowth that burns so fast and so furious. Wildfire studies have, in fact, shown that mature trees are quite fire-resistant—when the undergrowth is allowed to burn naturally, the trees' canopy remains intact and new vegetation is able to grow.

Of course, it is possible that younger, smaller trees, planted en masse in the past few decades to revive clear-cut woodlands, may be growing quite densely—and because they're not yet mature and therefore not fire-resistant, they pose a greater risk. Loggers are more responsible for these problems than people who try to stop the

logging.

Tree thinning is not the answer. What's needed is regulated burns, which are crucial to controlling the buildup of dense undergrowth—fire is part of nature, and one that forests are inherently prepared to withstand. People who build their houses in the middle of the forests, on the other hand, deserve what they get. Much of the time and money spent this summer on fire control was in creating fire lines around people's houses.

The single purpose of this initiative should be to reduce the threat of dangerous fires, not help the logging companies make a buck on the side. It's downright deceptive to propose legislation under the auspices of sustaining "healthy forests," all the while planning to clear them out.

By "reducing unnecessary regulatory obstacles that hinder active forest management," as the proposal states, Bush is clearly looking to let his friends in the big-business logging companies have their go at it—unhindered.

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Jessica Richelderfer
The Merry Pessimist

Voice Off



Salena De La Cruz
Say it loud

I come from small-town America, where everyone knows

everyone else and where cowboys ride the rodeo at the Buckaroo every year. Even more well-known are the saw mills that littered the landscape, making my hometown a timber town.

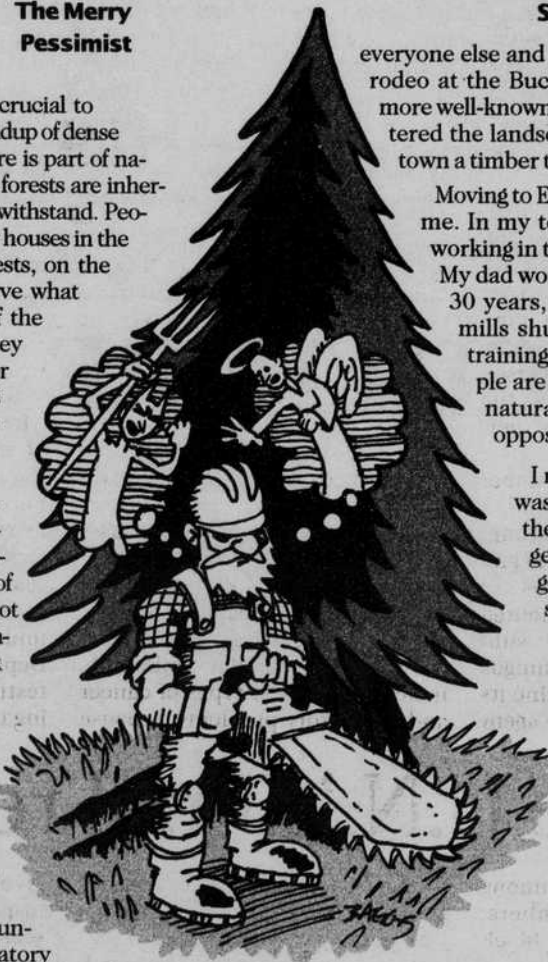
Moving to Eugene was a big shock for me. In my town, being a logger and working in the mills was a way of life.

My dad worked there for more than 30 years, until one of the largest mills shut down and started retraining people. In Eugene, people are all about conserving our natural resources and are opposed to logging.

I remember one year there was a big controversy over the spotted owl. People were getting laid off and many good people found themselves scraping to stay alive, and it was all because one endangered animal came in and decided to rest itself on old-growth trees.

The environmentalists are taking us right back to the spotted owl controversy by opposing the Healthy Forests Initiative, which is designed to protect woodlands

from wildfires by thinning the trees and removing the underbrush that pose such a high fire risk. It's just another way for them to try to take claim of the forests and keep anyone from using them. Endless appeals of logging decisions by the environmentalists over the years have prevented the much-needed tree thinning, creating a



Steve Baggs Emerald

HFI good for timber harvest

haven for fierce wildfires.

They wish to return our public lands to pre-settlement conditions. I wonder, can that really be done? After thousands of years of stripping, ripping and building, I don't think so.

I may not always agree with the big paper mills that want to rip every last tree off the face of this Earth. I look forward to my hikes in the woods on the outskirts of my town. I want a place for my children to thrive, and a place where future generations can still breathe and hike in the same woods I did growing up.

But I have to admit, it's a way of life for so many that it's hard to deny what it brings to us. You are sitting on a desk made of wood from a tree. You probably live in a house made from trees. You are reading this paper, which is also made from trees.

Environmentalists also wish to remove the incentive to cut mature, fire-resistant timber. The more mature the tree, the more incentive I see for them to be cut. More mature trees make better houses and better paper.

I know there are other things that can be used for paper, such as hemp, which is a form of *cannabis sativa*—also known as the plant marijuana comes from. I know the Declaration of Independence was written on it. So some may argue there are alternatives, but the only healthy forest is one used for its resources. That's why God put them on this Earth.

At least the government precludes the harvesting of trees on government land. Of course, if endangered species are inhabiting that land, then the trees don't get cut. That damn spotted owl just keeps popping up in the way of itself—or at least as a symbolic version of itself to help thwart the cutting of trees.

Now that the president is trying to reduce the risk of wildfires, we should stand behind him—and if logging of the forests happens to bring in extra funds needed to fight fires, then good.

Contact the editorial editor at salenadelacruz@dailyemerald.com. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

U.N. past suffers from conflicted interests

Guest commentary

I would like to take issue with the tortured logic presented in the editorial "U.S. must give Iraq time, option to comply with U.N. resolutions" (ODE, Oct. 8).

The editorial argues that the United States should accept the compromise proffered by France of two new U.N. Security Council resolutions, the first of which "would demand complete (Iraqi) disarmament and inspections to force compliance."

How is this new? The Security Council has renewed its demand for the Iraqi regime to disarm and fully cooperate with weapons inspectors no less than 12 times to date without results: Twice in 1991 within months of the cease-fire, once in 1994, twice in 1996, three times in 1997, three more times in 1998, and again in 1999.

Not one of these demands from the Security Council has ever included the threat of swift military action in the event of non-compliance, and this new French compromise doesn't either, it appears. According to the editorial, that minor bit of awkwardness is perhaps left to a "second resolution that would enumerate the

consequences of renewed stonewalling." This is merely a dodge and amounts to nothing more than first-degree political cowardice.

The editorial states that U.S. enforcement of U.N. resolutions would (somehow) undermine the U.N.'s authority. Isn't that backwards? Wouldn't U.S. enforcement of U.N. resolutions restore U.N. authority?

The editorial states that if Saddam Hussein disarms to the satisfaction of the United Nations, that "everyone would win—the world could avoid war, Hussein's power would be preserved, and the sanctions would end."

How is Saddam remaining in power in any way even remotely a win for anybody except Saddam? What is it about the notion of regime-change in Iraq that is so distasteful to the editorial board?

And what is it about the United Nations that makes the editorial board get misty? The group has no claim to altruism. It is utterly wrong to think that the United Nations is where the nations of the world come together, put aside their petty self interests and do what is best for humanity.

Russia and France are each cravenly eager to profit from Iraqi oil. And the

United Nations itself is holding some \$21 billion in profits from the oil for food program in U.N.-administered bank accounts—a conflict of interest if ever there was one. No wonder these entities are eager to preserve the status-quo in Baghdad.

Meanwhile, Kofi Annan lost his credibility long ago. Recall February 1998 when Saddam's intransigence over weapons inspections nearly precipitated an international crisis: Kofi Annan aided and abetted the Iraqi dictator in thwarting UNSCOM inspections when he promised that "U.N. arms inspectors should in the future be more respectful," that UNSCOM would quit "embarrassing the Iraqi government in front of its own people," and arranged for diplomatic babysitters for the inspectors.

By what reason in morality or justice must a government which has pursued Jeffersonian democracy for over 200 years need a permission slip from the United Nations to preemptively attack a murderous tyrant in order to prevent the brutal slaughter of its own citizens? After all, nobody elected the United Nations.

Sean Walston is a graduate teaching fellow in physics.

Letter to the editor

Responsible drinking applies to all students

While I agree with Dan Occhipinti that President Frohnmayer infringed on individual rights by forcing University fraternities to go dry ("Frohnmayer's dry frat policy is a riot," ODE, Oct. 8), I found his claim that the decision directly influenced last month's riot disconcerting.

Occhipinti argues that fraternity members' "accountability forces these men to take personal responsibility" for their parties while non-greek parties have "little control and almost no personal liability."

The notion that greeks exhibit responsibility beyond the capacity of non-greeks is, I think, insulting to the majority of the student body. Students from this same greek community argued last spring that frats should stay dry because their members would inevitably contribute to a rise in DUI when forced to drink at off-campus residences.

Furthermore, the last two highly publicized, alcohol-related deaths at major universities in this state both occurred during greek functions at Oregon State University. These are hallmarks of neither responsibility nor accountability.

If Occhipinti's notion that former frat partygoers simply flock to house parties is correct, who's to say that the same riot would not have occurred during a greek function? At a wet fraternity, these same students would still have been loaded with booze, and I doubt that a fraternity's president or "risk management officer" could have prevented them from spilling into the street. There may not be a bonfire-ready traffic circle outside the Lambda Chi house, but that's the only difference I see between drunken public assembly at greek and non-greek residences.

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