

Just news

Ancient Forest Awareness Week

The U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and the timber industry advocate liquidating the ancient forests and replacing them with industrial-type tree farms

BY BRUCE AMSBARY

A great deal of attention has been given recently to the issue of protecting Oregon's "ancient forests." At issue is the fate of the remnants of the greatest coniferous forest on earth. This ancient forest once blanketed 51,000 square miles of the Pacific Northwest. Today over 90% of this vast forest has been logged!

Oregon is at a crossroad. One path leads to a bright future where all of our remaining ancient forests are passed on fully intact to future generations. It is a future with a diverse state economy, less vulnerable to the periodic swings faced by any single industry. We see an economy where we have learned that the ancient forests best serve our long-term economic needs by remaining standing than reduced to board footage, pulp and chips.

Following the other path we see a future in which the big, old trees remaining will be in isolated and ecologically indefensible stands, subject to threats from fire, wind and disease, without the prospect of mature timber stands evolving into old growth stands to replace them! The forests and forest industry we will be leaving to future generations will bear absolutely no resemblance to what we know today. The vast majority of big, old trees will be forever gone, the ecosystem within which these trees evolved utterly destroyed. The timber industry will employ far fewer people than it does now, and the potential economic gains to the state from intact ancient forest ecosystems will be forever destroyed.

Why should you, as a member of the lesbian and gay community, care about the fate of the remaining ancient forest? Oregon has not developed its sizable lesbian and gay community because of the great urban amenities and active night life it offers, a key draw to many of the lesbian and gay meccas of this country. Many of us in the gay and lesbian community choose to live in Oregon because of the area's high quality natural environment and the opportunities it provides for recreational and spiritual pursuits.

These attributes, which brought many of us to Oregon, are facing a dire threat. In 1986 the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Division noted that within 20 years the available opportunities for backcountry recreation opportunities would be dramatically reduced. The Wilderness Society noted in a study released last fall that within 15 years nearly half of the unprotected roadless areas in Oregon and Washington will be opened by roads constructed for logging purposes!

In some national forests the loss is even more rapid and dramatic. In the Umpqua National Forest 87% of the unprotected roadless areas will be lost within 15 years. In the Siskiyou National Forest (an area being proposed for conversion to national park status) 96% of these areas will be lost within 15 years.

The U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the timber industry advocate the "liquidation" of the remaining ancient forests, replacing them with industrial-type tree farms. Even the Forest Service's own researchers and scientists question the value of this management strategy as a viable long-term approach to forestry. This approach is referred to as "multiple use," where forest is managed to meet the needs of the entire range of forest users. Unfortunately "multiple use" has become a euphemism for clear-cutting.

Timber industry spokespeople claim that when logging is excluded from an area that the area is reduced to a single use. This ignores the fact that protected areas meet ALL of the needs of multiple use except logging. Logging causes damage, often irreparable, to wildlife and fish habitat, plant diversity, clean water and air, soil conservation, recreation and sightseeing.

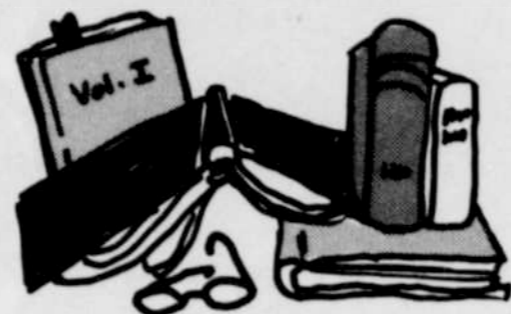
Those who support the "liquidation" of the ancient forest call the conservation community radical for its "hard-line" stand on ancient forest protection. One of the largest contributing factors to the global problems we are facing is the destruction of forest ecosystems. With the planetary ecosystem under enormous stress is it really such a radical notion to protect the remnant 10% of the Pacific Northwest's ancient forests?

Many people in the Northwest tend to point with indignation at the extinction of species and the destruction of tropical rain forests in third world countries. Many of these same people defend the destruction of the temperate rain forest and extinction of the spotted owl (and the other species dependent on ancient forest habitat, whose health the owl indicates) in our own back yard. How we treat the forests under our care will give us some indication of the fate of other forest ecosystems around the globe.

During September the Oregon Ancient Forest Alliance will sponsor events to help the public better understand the conservation community's vision of Oregon's ecologic and economic future. For more information or to volunteer, contact the Ancient Forest Awareness Week office at 223-9012.

SEPTEMBER USED BOOK DRIVE AND SALE

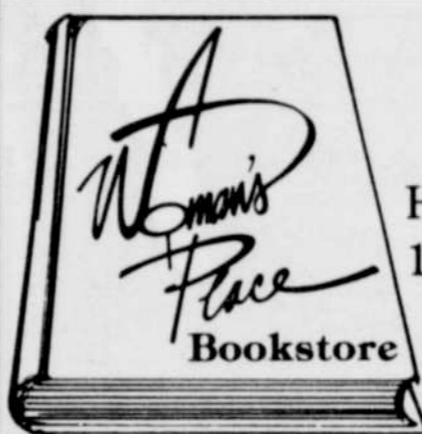
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