

# Business & Ag

## Bark beetles, dead trees

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And, a dense timber stand full of beetle-killed trees is rife for catastrophic forest fire, explains Andersen.

Bennett and other agricultural land owners rely upon the Dooley Mountain region drainage system.

“We are still paying the penalties for the fires that started clear back to the ‘86 fire. Because that is the reservoir, it’s the timber that holds the water in. That is the expansion of the water storage for the Burnt River system which is the headwaters to the Snake. It flows all the way through. And if every tributary suffers issues then the whole system suffers,” Bennett explained.

“Since 1986, approximately 25-percent or 400,000 acres, of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest has burned,” said Andersen.

As Andersen tours the south side of Dooley Mountain he points to a dying Ponderosa pine tree with a fading crown and other obvious signs of bark beetle infestation.

“As a timber cruiser, that would be one of the first trees I’d mark to be cut down,” Andersen begins. “But, you can see that that tree is bigger than 21-inches, so on federal land that tree can’t be cut.”

At the heart of forest management woes lies a 1994 federal rule prohibiting the cutting of trees on federal lands with a trunk diameter exceeding 21-inches at breast height, explains Andersen. The “21-inch rule” dictates whether a tree on federal land, regardless of the health and condition of a given tree, can be removed or not.

It was this 21-inch rule, enacted during the era of spotted owl protections and increased regulations aimed at environmental conservation, that changed federal agency forest management and shut down the large-scale timber industry in eastern Oregon.

The 21-inch rule, part of what were referred to as “east side screens” were put in place as a temporary, 18-month measure intended to preserve larger trees, and has now been in place for more than two decades. The term “east side screens” comes from the regulations requiring all timber sales on federal



Brian Addison / The Baker County Press

The arrows point to two larvae infecting a dead Ponderosa pine tree along the Dooley Mountain Highway on the south side of the mountain. The white larva is a Mountain Pine Beetle larva.

land in eastern Oregon to be screened to ensure compliance with the environmental regulations.

Andersen looks back to the era before the east side screens were put in place and talks about a local economic base and social culture centered around a vibrant timber industry.

He begins reciting a long list of logging contractors now gone from Baker County and remembers the employment opportunities offered at the local Ellingson Lumber Mills, which at its height employed about 150 employees. He also recalls a time when Baker High School boasted the finest forestry program in the state of Oregon, under the guidance of Mike Monaco.

The eastside screens along with the 21-inch rule and increased environmental regulations were put into action in 1994, Ellingson’s mills closed two years later. Now, more than two decades later and Andersen can only name two logging contractors still operating.

The USFS use of prescribed fire as a forest management tool has led to some of the problems in the timber stands today says both Andersen and timberland owner Lynn Shumway.

“It’s hard to call it management,” said Shumway after witnessing several of the USFS prescribed burning projects. “The Forest Service has burned with a lack of control and that has caused a problem where they’ve weakened the trees.”

This weakening of the

trees leads to opportunity for the bark beetles to invade on a larger and larger scale, according to Andersen and Shumway.

Andersen points to an area of prescribed burn. “See there where the fire crowned out and burned the tops of the trees. When that happened, it weakened the trees and gave the beetles an opportunity,” said Andersen.

Shumway has managed timber on his private land since 1975.

“In the years we’ve managed our land, we’ve really kept the bark beetle under control. The main thing has always been to stay ahead of the bark beetle by thinning enough timber to keep it out,” Shumway explained.

“We’re harvesting right now to get ahead of it.” Thinning is seen by Andersen and Shumway as a method of creating healthier timber stands. Reducing timber density leaves adequate water and nutrient supplies to the remaining trees.

“Trees are starting to die because we’re not culling the bad trees. In timber marking, we leave the healthy trees. You see the dying crowns—those would be the first to go,” said Andersen.

A healthy pine tree produces pitch to counter the attack of the bark beetle, according to Andersen, Shumway, and Bob Parker, Forestry Agent for the Baker County Oregon State University extension program.

Also, the Mountain Pine Bark Beetles, the main culprit infesting eastern

Oregon forests, carries on its body the blue stain fungus. Blue stain fungus spreads from the beetle to the pine tree and lessens the tree’s ability to produce pitch, and impedes the tree’s uptake of water, explains Parker.

“It’s a double whammy on the pine tree,” said Andersen. “The bark beetle and the blue stain working together lessens the tree’s ability to move nutrients and water.”

Currently, USFS has a treatment project underway on 1,500 acres in the Burnt River south fork region, west of Unity and east of Deardorf Mountain near Rail Gulch, to deal with an identified outbreak of Mountain Pine Beetle.

The south fork outbreak has crossed public lands into a neighboring privately owned timber stand. Andersen works for that land owner and estimates a third of those trees have been infected with the Mountain Pine Beetle.

“We think the beetle outbreak near Unity started three years ago in a small group of trees in the Prairie City Ranger District,” said Joe Sciarrino, USFS silviculturist.

USFS timber specialists do not recognize the timber stands on and around Dooley Mountain as being a widespread infestation of the bark beetle. That determination would come from an assessment done by an entomologist from the USFS lab in La Grande, according to Sciarrino. The recommendation for such an assessment will not be made at this time, he added.

“It is seen as an endemic condition with just a normal level of trees affected,” said Sciarrino.

Baker County Commissioner Bennett remains hopeful that legislation currently working its way through congress may loosen the restrictions currently placed on timber projects.

“I’m cautiously optimistic,” Bennett began. “As part of the SRS (Secure Rural Schools) package, the current language is to set aside the ‘21-inch’ rule. It is tied to such an important package. I’m really optimistic that Congress will pass that package for a variety of reasons. It’s important for them to understand that once we’re allowed to start cutting larger trees that we are not talking about clear-cutting but instead removing trees for a healthier forest.”

### — WEEKLY HAY REPORT —

Friday, February 20, 2015 — Eastern Oregon

Prices trended generally steady compared to the same quality last week. Trade activity and demand continue to be slow. The good weather in several areas of Oregon has slowed down demand, as the pasture grasses are growing causing end users to be able to turn animals out on pasture rather than purchase and feed additional hay. Fewer containers available at the shipping ports has slowed down the ability to export hay overseas. Several producers have old all that they plan to sell for this season.

**Alfalfa - Large Square good**  
110 (tons) 180.00 (price)  
**Alfalfa/Orchard Mix - Small square good**  
10 (tons) 180.00 (price)

USDA Market News Service—AMS.USDA.gov

### — CATTLE MARKET REPORT —

Wednesday, February 18, 2015  
Vale, Oregon

Cattle sold through the auction: 759

#### Steer Calves

300-400# Bulk 307.00 - 329.00 Top 337.50  
400-500# Bulk 275.00 - 305.00 Top 323.50  
500-600# Bulk 247.00 - 293.00 Top 298.00

#### Heifer Calves

300-400# Bulk 228.00 - 267.00 Top 274.00  
400-500# Bulk 236.00 - 270.00 Top 274.00  
500-600# Bulk 221.00 - 247.00 Top 256.50

#### Yearling Steers

600-700# Bulk 214.00 - 236.00 Top 242.00  
700-800# Bulk 187.00 - 210.00 Top 215.00  
800-900# Bulk N/A Top N/A  
900-1,000# Bulk N/A Top N/A

#### Yearling Heifers

600-700# Bulk 196.00 - 218.00 Top 223.00  
700-800# Bulk 172.00 - 189.00 Top 202.50  
800-900# Bulk N/A Top N/A  
900-1,000# Bulk N/A Top N/A

Thin Shelly Cows 73.00 - 91.00  
Butcher Cows 93.00 - 109.00  
Butcher Bulls 102.00 - 114.00  
Stock Cows 1175.00 - 1725.00  
Younger Hfrts. 123.00 - 154.00  
Stock Cows Yng. - 1800.00 - 2175.00

ProducersLivestock.com  
541-473-3136

### — LOG PRICE REPORT —

Price per 1,000 board feet: Northeast Oregon

#### Delivered to Elgin

Doug Fir / Larch 6”+ \$370/m  
White Fir/Sp 6”+ \$380/m  
LPP 6”+ \$350/m

#### Delivered to La Grande

P. Pine 6-11” \$290/m  
12-17” \$340/m  
18-23” \$390/m  
24”+ \$420/m

#### Delivered to Pilot Rock

12-17” \$390/m  
18-23” \$440/m  
24”+ \$480/m

#### Delivered pulp

\$28/ton to Elgin  
\$28/ton to La Grande  
Courtesy of Arvid Andersen,  
Andersen Forestry Consulting

### — PRECIOUS METALS REPORT —

Price per ounce, USD

Gold: \$1,197.00  
Silver: \$16.24  
Platinum: \$1,163.00  
Palladium: \$792.50

Bloomberg.com

### — AG COMMODITIES —

Corn: \$389.75/bu/USD  
Wheat: \$508.50/bu/USD  
Soybeans: \$1023.50/bu/USD  
Oats: \$271.00/bu/USD  
Rough Rice: \$10.75/cwt/USD  
Canola: \$472.50 CAD/mwt  
Live Cattle: \$146.05/lb./USD  
Feeder Cattle: \$195.45/lb./USD  
Lean Hogs: \$68.60/lb./USD

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