

MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

A botched forest plan

BY CHRIS BRATT

Even before it was approved by the agency, the first legal challenge to the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM’s) proposed Western Oregon Forest Plan Revisions (WOPR) began. Practically everyone with some understanding of BLM’s inane WOPR proposal knows their Revision Plan is doomed from the start. BLM has wasted extensive time, energy and money on a proposal that is defective and going nowhere. It will not pass legal or scientific review in the courts nor the extensive citizen opposition it has already generated.

The main reason BLM’s WOPR Forest Plan is destined for failure is because it relies on a flawed plan for protection and recovery of the Northern Spotted Owl. In 1990 the Northern Spotted Owl was listed as “threatened” by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) under the Endangered Species Act. The owls’ listing as “threatened” in 1990 triggered the Service’s duty to develop a plan that would recover the owl to a point where protections under the Endangered Species Act are no longer necessary.

Eighteen years overdue, a Final Owl Recovery Plan was issued in May 2008 by the Service (ironically, just in time for the BLM to use it in their WOPR Revision Plan). BLM’s WOPR Forest Revisions could not have moved forward without the Service having a Final Owl Recovery Plan in place that analyses how much forest habitat is needed for the owl to recover. Not to anyone’s surprise, the Service’s Final

Owl Recovery Plan helped out BLM’s proposed WOPR increased clearcutting plan by eliminating over 1.5 million acres of Critical Owl Habitat.

Since the Service approved their Final Owl Recovery Plan that eliminated these 1.5 million acres of Critical Owl Habitat, they have been sued by both the timber industry and 18 environmental groups. The timber industry (including the Swanson Group and Rough and Ready Lumber Company that operates in southern Oregon) sued because they want more owl habitat removed from the Service’s

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Owl Recovery Plan so more timber can be cut. The 18 environmental groups are suing to have the Service provide additional owl habitat to protect old growth, spotted owls and other affected species. Either way, BLM’s WOPR is in trouble.

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I believe the environmental groups will win their case because outgoing

Bush officials have manipulated the science in the Final Owl Recovery Plan. Congressional committee chairman Nick Rayhall, a democrat from West Virginia, recently had this to say about Bush’s manipulation of the Endangered Species Act:

“It has become abundantly clear that this administration does not give one whit about the Endangered Species Act. Its strong-arming of Federal scientists, slow-walking of listing decisions, and stonewalling of new rules have convinced me that every attempt to fix the mismanagement of the Endangered Species Program under this Administration is a lost cause.”

In addition, the Service’s Final Recovery Plan does not plan for the recovery of the owl as required. For example, the Final Recovery Plan estimates that spotted owl recovery will take 30 years, but states “the useful life of this plan is approximately 10 years.” This is an interim plan, not a Final Recovery Plan.

Also, the Final Recovery Plan is not based on the best available science in numerous ways, including its failure to rely on the Northwest Forest Plan, its failure to adequately protect dispersal habitat and links between habitat and its failure to consider threats to the owl on non-federal forest land.

All of these issues are now to be resolved by the courts, leaving BLM waiting for a ruling before their WOPR Plan Revisions can be implemented. And this is just the first court challenge

to the validity of the WOPR Plan. There will be additional disputes over BLM’s planned huge increase in old-growth clearcut logging, wrongly placed off-road vehicle “emphasis areas” and many other outrageous proposals contained in the WOPR.

BLM’s contrived Forest Plan Revision is the Bush Administration’s final effort to deliver unsustainable amounts of public timber to the timber industry. It is pathetic that BLM has been pressed so hard by Washington, D.C. officials and the timber industry folks to dismantle the protections and ecosystem management offered by their existing Northwest Forest Plan. For the past eight years we have suffered the downgrading of our environmental laws and regulations, censored science and political interference in our forest planning processes. As we used to say on the street when I was a boy, “Good riddance to bad rubbish.”

With any luck, the new Obama administration will offer us more honesty, competence and accountability in managing our public forest lands. But it’s up to us to raise awareness and let the new administration know that BLM’s Western Oregon Plan Revision needs to be set aside. The protections outlined in the Northwest Forest Plan must be reinstated. Let’s end this WhOPPeR!

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Storytelling Guild

Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre’s Jungle Book production

Sunday, January 18
1:30 and 4:00 pm

The Storytelling Guild and Craterian Performances present Tears of Joy Puppet Theatre’s production of ‘Jungle Book’ at the Ginger Rogers Craterian Theater which is located at 23 South Central Avenue in downtown Medford. There will be two performances on Sunday January 18, 1:30 and 4:00 pm. Doors will open 30 minutes prior to each performance and seating is limited.

This is a wonderful opportunity for us to share our love of books and storytelling in a beautiful theater setting. Open to the public, admission is free. We are collecting new or gently used children’s books that go toward our “Pass the Book” program. The Storytelling Guild distributes these books to local outreach programs to benefit our children in need. In addition to this program and many others, the Storytelling Guild sponsors the Children’s Festival so mark your calendars for July 12-14 2009 at the Britt Grounds in Jacksonville, “Imagine the Fun”. For more information visit our website at storytellingguild.org

For more information call Kathy Balint at the Craterian, 541-779-8195, Est. 301.

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Pass the Book

The Storytelling Guild of Jackson County is collecting gently used and new children’s books for its “Pass the Book” program. Each year the Storytelling Guild distributes children’s books to 18 agencies in Jackson County to share with the families they serve. From Head Start to the Children’s Advocacy Center, from the Dunn House to foster parents, from the Community Health Centers to Healthy Start, 2,701 children’s books made their way in 2008 into the hands of children in their homes, in waiting rooms, at Kids Unlimited, in Juvenile Detention and the Juvenile Shelter, at On Track, the Magdalene House, the Providence Birth Place, at Rogue Valley Medical Center’s Moms and Tots and Pediatrics, through Jackson County Health and Human Services Vital Links program, at Access food pantries, and at North Medford High School’s Child Development program.

It wasn’t enough. More books were needed. So the Storytelling Guild has set a higher 2009 goal: 3,500 children’s books. Help meet the goal!

Books may be donated to “Pass the Book” during the month of January at all 15 branches of the Jackson County Library and at all 8 branches of Umpqua Bank in Jackson County. Books are needed for all age groups, from babies (board books are very welcome) to teens and all ages in between. Share your love of books and reading: donate children’s books to the Storytelling Guild’s “Pass the Book” program.

Questions? Email billeter@entwood.com

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