

OPINIONS

Here we go again... BLM'S Nedsbar Timber Sale

BY CHANT THOMAS

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is again planning Nedsbar, another enormous “landscape” timber sale in the Little Applegate and Upper Applegate watersheds. Judging from attendance for BLM’s “open house” at the Jacksonville Library in July, the several dozen Applegate residents who made the journey over Jville Hill to the dinnertime meeting are concerned about this second largest non-salvage timber sale ever planned for BLM Applegate forests. Locals’ concerns are continuations of those from BLM’s largest such timber sale, Bald Lick, that covered much of the Nedsbar area and that failed to sell in 2005 and 2006. Many locals cited Bobar, an earlier logging project that covered much of the Nedsbar and failed to sell in 2003.

Some locals mistakenly believe BLM’s position that their logging prescriptions will reduce fire danger in the Applegate. Yet more locals are learning that the opposite is true. Forest stands, logged by BLM’s typical thinning, will suffer decreased fire resistance as new canopy openings admit increased sun into the forest understory and floor, evaporating essential moisture earlier in the summer and extending fire season by lengthening the amount of time the fine fuels are tinder dry. Fuel loads will increase, in addition to the untreated logging slash, as increased sunlight stimulates rapid growth of shrubs, grasses and other fine fuels on floors of the opened stands. Between increased fine and medium fuels and stands prematurely drying out, fire hazards will increase dramatically over pre-logging levels.

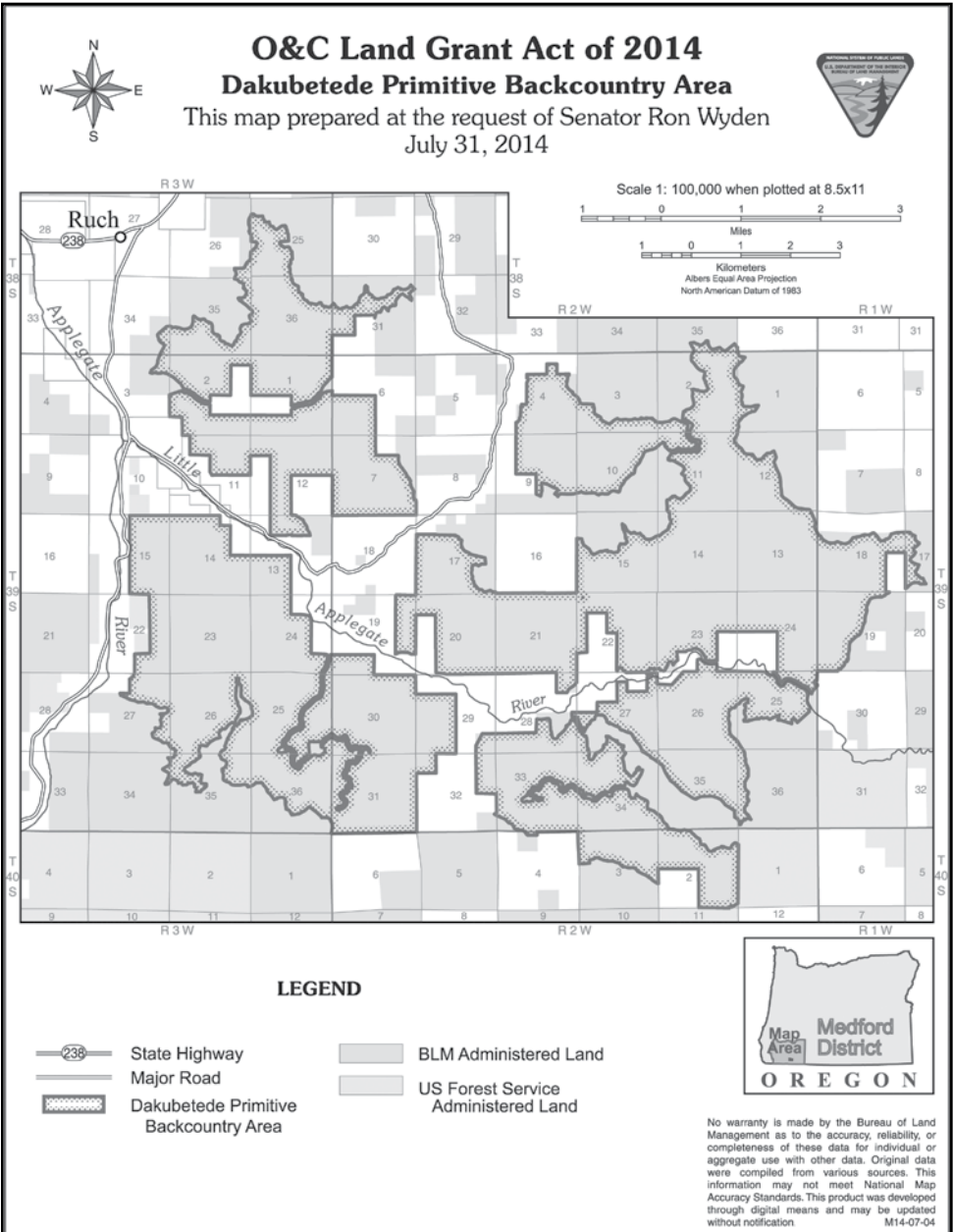
Professional fire ecologists understand that when wildfire moves into closed

canopy stands with higher moisture retention, it tends to underburn slowly, as the wind cannot penetrate far into a closed canopy stand. When wildfire moves into tree plantations or opened stands, it tends to blow up and burn intensively as it rapidly consumes the higher volumes of drier fine and small fuels, driven by winds that penetrate the opened stands. Such fires are often quickly drawn up through canopy openings like chimneys, where they then begin to spread through the canopy. Such fires generate strong winds and often burn so erratically with elevated flame lengths that it becomes unsafe to place fire crews near the fire. Such fires often eject firebrands that start new fires, especially in opened stands that have prematurely lost their moisture content.

Locals are concerned that proposed BLM logging would stoke future forest fires with more fuel and make thinned forests more susceptible to wildfire.

Local residents also are perplexed as to why the BLM would locate an enormous logging project right in the core of an area considered special enough by Senator Wyden to deserve specific protective designation. Wyden’s proposed O&C legislation, which would double logging on BLM Applegate forests, also proposes protection of significant Applegate wildlands as Primitive Backcountry Areas (PBA). In addition to Wellington and Mungers Buttes, the largest area is the 21,200-acre Dakubetede PBA (see map), which includes the spectacular Little Applegate River Canyon (home of the popular Sterling Mine Ditch Trail system) and nearby areas.

Locals understand that protective



designations such as Wilderness Areas, National Parks and Monuments, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and PBAs are beneficial to local economies. They’re familiar with research that discovers how rural western counties with the most acreage of designated protected areas exhibit greater economic growth, job diversification, and increased personal and investment income. Conversely, the research shows that rural western counties with little or no protected

areas and still dependent on traditional extractive industries suffer from economic stagnation and out-migration.

Locals will be watching to see if the BLM’s proposed Public Involvement Plan for the Nedsbar Timber Sale will make any difference, remembering that Citizen Alternatives for Bobar and Bald Lick were “eliminated from detailed study” in the Environmental Assessment process.

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Climate crisis: A symptom of underpriced fossil fuels

BY CAMILA THORNDIKE AND DAN GOLDEN

“I just can’t understand the solar tax credit. Why photovoltaics?”

We were talking with Mark Wisnovsky, a local vintner and owner of Valley View Winery. Mark, like so many entrepreneurs in southern Oregon, is constantly searching for ways to simultaneously green his business and improve his bottom line. Over the past 15 years, he’s reached out to the US Department of Agriculture, Pacific Power, and a handful of other state and federal agencies, trying to navigate our complex kludgeocracy of tax credits and subsidies for clean energy. “It’s like a puzzle, with all the different grants and deadlines and incentives. I need one person to help me manage it all.” Mark could hire a specialist if Valley View was a larger operation, but he can barely justify solar panels as it is. “We’re at the point where it would make sense if we get 80 percent of it covered. As best I can tell, 70 percent is more realistic.”

“All the winemakers I know really just want solar thermal systems to keep their fermenters warm in the winter,” says Mark. Solar thermal is a relatively simple technology that concentrates sunlight on a heating medium, usually water and propylene glycol. It comes at a price tag of \$10,000—roughly one-fifteenth the cost of a comparable photovoltaic system, but there are no tax credits available for solar

thermal systems. So, when the weather gets cold, Mark turns on the electric heater at a cost of \$400 per month.

It’s tempting to conclude that renewable energy incentives need a little fine-tuning—consolidate here, simplify there, and expand eligibility to include solar thermal systems. But what about all the other alternatives? Who decides which investment is best among solar thermal, wind and biomass? Is there *ever* a case when the government would know better than Mark which technology is best for Valley View?

If we were serious about creating a green economy, we could hardly do better than write blank checks to small business owners. But with *no* strings, who would invest in clean energy technology at all? And for that matter, who’s to say anyone should? Mark points out that it’s hard to justify photovoltaics *anywhere* in the Pacific Northwest: “Why not build a solar farm in a state like Arizona and feed that energy into the grid? If it’s clean, I don’t care where it comes from—we share the same earth, the same air.”

It’s a fool’s errand to weigh the relative benefits of new energy technologies. The world’s brightest engineers couldn’t even describe a totally sustainable world. To free ourselves from fossil fuels is probably the most ambitious transition in human

history. It’ll take all of us—every engineer, every investment banker, every vintner—abating fossil fuels in the way that makes the most sense for him- or herself. It’s not the role of government to make sustainability profitable; rather, it’s the job of the business to make their profit sustainable for the planet.

Buckminster Fuller once said that a problem adequately stated is very nearly a problem solved. Mark is the victim of a misstated problem. The climate crisis is not a symptom of inadequate clean energy, and it’s certainly not a symptom of expensive solar panels. The climate crisis is a symptom of underpriced fossil fuels. The hidden costs of coal, oil and gas are not reflected in the products and activities that burn them. If Mark’s electricity bill included the costs of hurricanes, floods and wildfires, he’d probably invest in that solar thermal system, subsidy or not.

It comes as no surprise that the overwhelming majority of economists say

a carbon tax is the most cost-effective way to fight climate change. It costs society less to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by taxing carbon than it does to subsidize solar panels. The highest priority of the 2015 Oregon legislature should be to adjust the price of carbon energy to reflect its true costs to our health and communities. But it would be a mistake to squander the revenue on inefficient subsidies.

It’s time that we trust Oregonians to make the decisions that work best for themselves, by redistributing the revenue evenly among *all* voters. Then, if a vintner decides to invest in that new solar thermal system, he’ll have the resources to do it. If he decides not to, that’s his prerogative too. But if he’s looking out for his bottom line, he’ll have to look out for the climate too.

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Burn reminder

Before burning outdoors any time of year,
check with your fire district to make sure
that day is an official burn day
and not a **NO** burn day.

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