

OPINIONS

Behind the Green Door | Community outrage

BY CHRIS BRATT

One of our daughters recently sent us a news article about the work of a central Oregon forest activist, Carol Van Strum, the author of a 1983 book titled *A Bitter Fog*. The article was about preserving and making public her 40-year collection of research documents on pesticide spraying on public and private forestlands around her and her neighbors' homes in the forest.

For decades Carol and her small rural community have been battling the chemical industry, timber companies, and the US Forest Service (USFS) over spraying herbicides throughout their local forests. Her collected documents (200,000 pages of information) will now be available to the public through a project called the "Poison Papers." These documents are a "history of deceit and collusion involving the chemical industry and regulatory agencies that were supposed to be protecting human health and the environment," said Peter von Stackelberg, a journalist who helped put the collection online.

I know and revere the work of Carol Van Strum and her community group. Their research efforts and commitment helped bring an end to pesticide spraying on all public forestlands nationwide in 1983. They continue to work locally to

end aerial pesticide spraying on private timber company forestland. (Yes, the Oregon Department of Forestry still allows pesticide spraying on private forestlands.)

The efforts of this small group of central Oregon forest activists epitomize the huge challenges faced by rural forest communities like ours here in the Applegate. Many of us have come here to live a simpler life in or near our public forestlands, which make up 50 to 60 percent of the community land base.

I know I came to Applegate with the expectation that public agencies like the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the US Forest Service would be managing our forests in a sustainable way and protecting all of our natural resources.

But I soon found out there was constant extensive political interference and pressure to cut more trees for increasing county revenues and jobs. I found the same problems that Carol Van Strum found in her forest—that our community bears the environmental, as well as the social and economic, impacts of agency decisions. I also found that if concerned community members band together, we could improve the environmental quality of our forests by improving federal agency decision making.

In many cases, our community is shut out of policy and specific project decisions because we don't have the knowledge or the necessary access to scientific or technical information or expertise. Public participation is one of the National Environmental Policy Act's (NEPA's) fundamental objectives—the NEPA calls for full public disclosure and open decision making—but because the law's details are left to each federal agency, any particular agency may choose not to emphasize that detail of the law, forcing a battle with communities wanting information.

Presently, the BLM is preventing concerned Applegate and adjacent area citizens from fully participating in their Pickett West (PW) Forest Management Project by not allowing a citizen-drafted alternative. This PW Project uses a new BLM strategy designed to reduce tree canopy cover: taking the mostly closed canopy of the PW forests down to only 30 to 60 percent coverage. Lots of old-growth trees will be cut. Many community people and groups do not support cutting old-growth trees, nor do they support this action because the "main purpose and need for the Pickett West Project is the production of a sustainable supply of timber" (PW

Environmental Assessment, page 33). Further, this new logging strategy is lacking a monitoring plan and a more complete evaluation by peer reviewers and a wide range of stakeholders.

In the PW project's environmental assessment, the BLM claims that the management strategy is based on forest restoration, yet the prime impetus for this strategy is timber production. BLM is pretending to heal the forest by cutting it down. Historically, this is the same management smugness that has led the BLM and others to the overcutting that has resulted in our present state of regional and local compromised forest ecosystems.

I know Carol Van Strum would want us to band together in our outrage to eliminate these overcutting practices and repair these public forests that are so out of balance. She wants us to play the Lorax, like her, and "speak for the trees." I hope you will, too.

For more, read about the PW Project at Luke Ruediger's blog at thesiskiyoucrest.blogspot.com.

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Pickett West Timber Sale: Old-growth logging disguised as 'restoration'

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

The Pickett West Timber Sale is perhaps the worst old-growth logging project proposed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in southern Oregon for many years. The massive project proposes to log some of the last remnants of old forest surrounding the communities of Selma, Merlin, Galice, Wilderville, Murphy, and north Applegate. The Pickett West Timber Sale also proposes significant logging in tributaries of the Wild and Scenic Rogue River between Grants Pass and Graves Creek.

Although these last intact forests, now targeted by the BLM for logging, stand above our homes and communities, very few of us have visited them. They are not the iconic wilderness landscapes of the West, but they are the backdrops to our communities and represent the charm and beauty that bring people to our region. They are the last fragments of natural, fire-resilient old forest. They provide

streams for salmon and strongholds for the northern spotted owl. They are the last small corridors of intact forest threading our low-elevation habitats together, and they are islands of habitat in otherwise fragmented landscapes. The fact that they are the last makes them disproportionately important to our communities, our fisheries, and our wildlife.

The Pickett West Timber Sale proposes 5,251 acres of commercial logging and 14 miles of newly constructed roads. In total, the project identified 145 units spread across 200,000 acres of southwest Oregon.

A broad-based coalition of conservation organizations, recreation enthusiasts, businesses, fishing organizations, rural residents, and citizens across the region will be joining together to protect these last intact stands and oppose the Pickett West Timber Sale. We will not watch these last stands fall to the whine of the chainsaw. Instead, we will work to preserve, respect,

and enjoy them, as they define who we are as southern Oregonians.

The Pickett West Timber Sale targets old-growth stands throughout southern Oregon for heavy industrial logging. Half of the units in the timber sale are in old-growth stands between 150 and 240 years old. These old, complex forests are highly fire-resistant, provide important forest habitat, and are increasingly rare, especially at low elevations and adjacent to local communities. These stands protect our viewsheds, our clean water, and our wildlife habitat. They buffer our communities from the effects of uncharacteristic wildfire and provide accessible and important recreation opportunities like Hellgate Canyon on the Wild and Scenic Rogue River and the proposed Applegate Ridge Trail.

Ironically, the BLM claims these highly industrial logging treatments are "restorative" in nature. Somehow, reducing canopy cover to 30 percent, rendering important northern spotted owl habitat "unsuitable," building new roads, logging large old-growth trees, and drastically increasing fuel loads in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is being promoted as "restoration." In reality, it is a timber grab intended to mislead the public into thinking that old-forest logging is necessary to increase forest resilience and restore the natural role of fire.

The manipulation of science and the misrepresentation of proposed industrial logging treatments as "restoration" constitute a new low.

The Pickett West project proposes to convert closed-canopy, late-seral, and old-growth forests to open-canopied, low-density stands. By logging old closed-canopy stands, the BLM says it will create relatively stable and more fire-resilient forests. However, the outcome of logging old-growth forest to 30 percent canopy cover will dramatically degrade habitat values and increase fuel loads.

With each large old tree removed, resilience to wildfire is reduced. The drastic canopy cover reduction proposed in the "restoration thinning" prescriptions will have a number of consequences: highly flammable, young vegetation will proliferate and replace large fire-resistant trees; habitat connectivity for species like the Pacific fisher and spotted owl will be lessened; and the views across our valley and from our homes will be degraded by new roads and logged-off hillsides.

The Pickett West Timber Sale is an outdated industrial model that many thought we had left behind. It targets the very old-growth forests that many believe had been "saved." Unfortunately, the BLM has responded to the shift in public opinion regarding public land management by changing their rhetoric, but not changing their practices. The days of old-growth logging are back, and they are called Pickett West. For more information, visit thesiskiyoucrest.blogspot.com.

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Opinion pieces are limited to 700 words; letters are limited 450 words. Submissions will be edited for grammar and length. Opinion pieces **must** include publishable contact information (phone number and/or email address). All letters **must** be signed, with a full street address or PO Box and phone number. **Anonymous letters and opinion pieces will not be published.** Individual letters and opinion pieces may or may not be published.

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Email opinion pieces and letters to the editor to gater@applegater.org or mail to *Applegater*, Applegate Valley Community Newspaper, Inc., PO Box 14, Jacksonville, OR 97530.

