How thinning will be accomplished raises queries

By THE OREGONIAN

Federal land managers are preparing to carry out President Bush's new initiative to thin flammable forests by exempting logging projects from citizen appeals and, in some cases, environmental scrutiny.

The measures could give timber cutting aimed at reducing wildfire immunity from the web of laws and regulations that environmental groups often use to slow or stymie logging.

They come just as Congress last week appeared deadlocked on legislation to carry out the presidential plan, suggesting that the administration wants to proceed with thinning millions of acres of overgrown Western forests regardless of whether Congress acts.

"I'm not comfortable sitting around and waiting for an outcome as uncertain as legislation can be," said Mark Rey, undersecretary of agriculture, who oversees the U.S. Forest Service. "We're going to do this because we're committed to getting the job done."

Among the plans by top administration and forest service officials:

*Exempting fire reduction and some other logging projects from the requirement that environmental impact statements or assessments be completed, and with them multiple chances for public comment.

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*Allowing forest supervisors to revise their management plans governing logging and other forest uses without going through the environmental and public reviews they do nowl

*Revising regulations so that citizen appeals of forest service decisions do not automatically block those decisions, as they do now.

The moves took on new prominence last week as the Senate deadlocked over its own attempt to step up thinning of fire-prone forests in a year during which federal firefighting costs hit a record \$ 1.2 5 billion.

At issue in Congress is whether judges could block forest-thinning projects. Republicans, led by Sen. Larry Craig, of Idaho, want to restrict judicial power, while leading Democrats want to leave judges the option to halt logging that they find unlaw-

The president meanwhile has directed the forest service and other federal land agencies to speed work in Western forests on their own, Rey said. They are drawing up an administrative measure, called a categorical exclusion, to exempt thinning and related activities from review under the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires close scrutiny of federal actions.

Rey called it "one of the

two or three most important pieces" of enacting the president's forest initiative because it would free forests from completing long and costly reviews often blamed for gumming up land manage-

Other critical elements, both which are under way, are reforming the appeals process and designing model environmental documents to save staff time, he said.

A categorical exclusion allows agencies to examine records and conclude that they have done enough environmental reviews of certain kinds of projects to know that such projects have minimal effect. They then could exclude similar projects — in this case thinning and the like — from future review.

Besides thinning, projects could include salvage logging of burned trees and rehabilitation of charred for-

Environmental groups complained that the approach closes the public out of public land decisions. They fear that limiting environmental review will open the door to thinning that takes bigger, commercially valuable trees under the guise of abating fire risk.

But Rey said that the law allows categorical exclusions specifically so that agencies need not review for similar projects over and over. He said that agencies must notify the public of projects, even if no review is conducted.

And while public comment is useful, Rey said, "It's also accepted that it's not necessary every time something happens."

23 Linger

25 Nothing

26 Lady o

28 Peach

34 Old

Evening

orange

French

The forest service also is at work on a second categorical exclusion to exempt timber sales under a certain size fron environmental review. Such sales could include live trees; those threatened by bugs and disease; and others burned or blown over.

While the measures could pave the way for thinning, salvage and other logging projects to proceed much faster, officials said, land managers still could complete full reviews of exceptional projects where the environmental effects are unclear.

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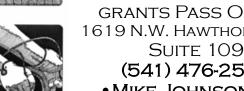


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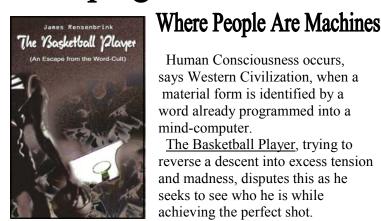


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Escaping The Word Cult



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Triva Time by Walter Bramch

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- 1. What is the most common street name in the U.S.? 2. What hide-and-seek game is
- played around a tin can? 3. What country's air force was destroyed on the ground on the morn-
- ing of June 5, 1967? 4. What was the name of the craft in which Thor Heyerdahl sailed from Morocco to Barbados in July, 1970?
- 5. What actor portrayed the devil in the movie "Damn Yankees"? 6. What do you lose when you suf-
- fer from phalacrosis? 7. What four seas are named for
- 8. What term describes an animal with a constant blood temperature? 9. How did the Beaver get his nickname on "Leave it to Beaver"?
- 10. What was a "California prayer book" to an Old West gambler?
- Trivia Time Answers 1. Park; 2. Kick-the-can; 3 Egypt's; 4. The Ra II; 5. Ray Walston; 6. Your hair; 7. The Black, Red, White and Yellow; 8. Warmblooded; 9. When he was a baby, Beaver couldn't pronounce his real name, Theodore; 10. A deck of cards

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