



# AN OPEN LETTER TO THE TIMBER AND MILL WORKERS OF THE NORTHWEST

BY NANCY MOLLER

## ENDANGERED SPECIES

The spotted owl may be the timber worker's best friend. Sounds outrageous? Let me explain. Today the spotted owl, the "spokesperson" for the ancient forests, is the best bargaining chip the workers will ever have.

Ten years down the skid-road, if the timber industry has its way, the Northwest will be out of ancient forest and the forest product workers will be out of bargaining chips... Yet the major timber companies will still be around.

Who will give a hoot? Not Louisiana Pacific. Not Weyerhaeuser. Not Georgia Pacific. Not the public.

People will just shrug their shoulders and say that's the free market system working. Yet, a market-driven economy does not always operate for the best interest of the workers, their community or the public.

The public this time is taking a greater role in the decision-making process, recognizing that ancient forests are no longer just a timber issue or a Northwest issue. Now, because the public is beginning to understand the unique multiple values of these majestic stands, they are joining the national groundswell to protect these spectacular old growth forest communities.

The heavy guns are also getting into the fray. Major national environmental groups, with big budgets, large memberships and lots of political clout, are showing a growing interest in the issue. It isn't the spotted owl that is going to be fried, but the millworkers and loggers who chose to ignore the writing on the wall.

It's time to climb down from those awesome logging trucks and stackers and start negotiation for your "golden parachutes" while you still have a bargaining chip... the ancient forests.

When those ancient trees are logged the timber workers will be no different from the 10,000 Intel workers who have been laid off in the 1980s or the 1300 Tektronix workers who

will join Tek's 9700 already displaced workers of the 1980s. Of course those workers are being provided with some economic cushions for their transitions to other jobs.

On the other hand, if the timber industry consumes those ancient forests, the timber workers who lose out will not be provided with transitional cushions — unless these workers get their acts together now.

"Retrain workers!" Who uttered that unpopular idea? Dale Robertson, Chief U.S. Forester. You wonder how our head forester would even whisper that the industry should start to think about retraining its workers. My, what a target he made uttering this heresy!

Unfortunately, Dale Robertson may become a victim for telling the timber workers what they didn't want to hear... it's crunch time! Yes, it is time to listen; it is time for innovative ideas, and it is time to act while the timber workers still have the spotted owl and can create coalitions.

So get out of your trucks, lay down the boards and cut a deal now, not ten years from now when no one will be dealing.

What do you talk about? Early retirement, retraining, severance pay, medical benefits, log exports, early notification, and ancient forests.

Who do you talk to? You talk to the Oregon Natural Resources Council, Oregon Environmental Council, those big national groups, along with some of the political powers.

Why environmental groups? Responsible environmentalists realize that saving the ancient forest will cause some of the projected unemployment in the timber industry. This awareness makes them accessible to use their clout to lobby government and pressure industry to cushion this transition for its displaced workers.

Why government? The government has a responsibility to the workers, their communities and the industry. Besides, our government has the economic wherewithal to ease the pain for surplus but willing workers.

Why industry? Industry too bears a great responsibility for the reduction in the work force not related to the spotted owl. It should be offering support to its workers in retraining, job search, early retirement, medical benefits, early notification and reduction in log exports. The timber industry has the moral, and hopefully a social, obligation to provide transitional opportunities for their own loyal workers. This will buy time for the hard-pressed local communities.

My advice to you is... put on your hard hats, lace up those boots and get to work creating your future at the bargaining table, and remember I give a hoot.

Nancy Moller is a political and environmental activist from Hood River. She is the mother of four, an orchardist, and a retired educator. This article originally appeared in the Hood River News.



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