

# The forester's DILEMMA

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The way Peter Hayes explains it, every time the timber industry makes a change to the way it harvests America's forests, it's to correct a past mistake.

The vast swaths of replanted tree plantations that cover much of Oregon's private lands today are the industry's reaction to running into the Pacific Ocean after years of clear-cutting, he said.

And Hayes should know. He comes from a long line of American foresters.

The first phase, he said, was when Euro-Americans landed on the East Coast and began logging to clear the land for farming. Then came Phase II: Mine it and move on.

"My family was involved in all five of these phases," Hayes said. "The 'mine it and move on' – there was a whole lot of land that was cut to the bone from the 1920s to the 1950s – just ravaged, and they just walked off and left it. Those lands turned into dead-end cycles of bramble patches. Give them 500 years and they become forests, but in the short run, they wouldn't, and there was a public interest in having more productive lands."

What followed, was Phase III: Tree farms. Foresters began to replant forests because they needed wood for future harvests. But then came a wave of environmentalism; people decided they wanted more than just wood products out of their forests. They wanted habitat for wildlife and the protection of shared resources.

This led us to where we

*Some timber producers say it is time for a cultural shift in how we think about logging and forests' role in the ecosystem*

are today, explained Hayes: Phase IV. We still have tree farms, or plantations, but the Oregon Forest Practices Act also lays out some environmental protections and guidelines.

This phase of forestry, Hayes said, incorporates multiple ideals but rewards landowners for only one: timber production.

For this reason, he said, "the rational landowner is only going to do the thing that they're rewarded for."

Hayes is part of a growing network of timber company operators who are trying to usher in Phase V: managing their forests for both the timber that brings them money, and the ecological benefits that do not – and it's a drastic departure from common current forestry practices.

It's all about placing long-term sustainability above short-term profits, he said.

Many of the big players in America's

timber industry today are risking the future viability of our forests..

We don't know how current practices – plant, clear cut, spray herbicide and repeat – will affect the most valuable part of the forest: the soil, Hayes said.

"It's the great experiment."

## Plantation problems

If you've ever traveled west along Highway 26 for a weekend getaway at the coast, you've probably noticed clear-cutting is still alive and well in Oregon's privately owned forests.

While a freshly clear-cut mountainside can be a jarring sight, some may take solace in the notion that Oregon has laws that require replanting, as evidenced by the many recently planted treescapes – and industry-sponsored billboards reminding motorists of these laws along the same stretch of highway.

At first glance, these "Phase IV" replanted landscapes of Douglas fir,

hemlock, cedar and spruce might resemble native forests, but many scientists and environmentalists say they're nothing of the sort.

Instead, they say, these tree farms are little more than cornfield-like rows of pine or fir trees that are all the same age and same height. They also argue that this system of forestry is damaging our watersheds, threatening native wildlife and contributing to climate change.

Foresters, however, seem split. Some, like Hayes, agree with most of these claims, and others, like Seth Barnes at Oregon Forest and Industries Council, say forestry has come a long way.

Barnes said laws governing foresters in Oregon "are based on science and have been adjusted over the years as new science emerges." And, he said, most foresters he knows believe those laws are "keeping the forests in forestry."

Doug Maguire, a professor of forest management at Oregon State University's College of Forestry, is an expert in intensively managed forests.

"There are a bunch of things that happen in planted forests that are probably done from the standpoint of one objective," he said, "and that typically has been timber production."

And a lot of what happens is up to the landowner and his or her objectives.

In some tree plantations, trees are so densely packed, their crowns eventually touch as they grow, blocking out the sun and limiting growth on the forest floor, he explained. While some landowners might

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