

# Forest Service harvests cones for seeds

The U.S. Forest Service has its own version of "coneheads."

They're not aliens with pointed heads claiming to be from France, a la "Saturday Night Live," but forest technicians working to ensure that an ample supply of seeds will be available for planting.

Gathering cones for seeds is not an idle pastime, but an important aspect of reforestation and a very competitive venture among private companies such as Weyerhaeuser.

Private individuals have also gotten into the act, selling cones to nurseries who usually pay \$5-7 per bushel. Approximately 100 cones, depending on size, comprise a bushel. The Forest Service also used to pay individuals for cones, a practice it has continued in recent years, according to Shelley Butler, a forest technician at the Zigzag Ranger Station.

"We get all our own cones except those we trade with other districts," Butler said. "The Forest Service used to buy from other people, but it couldn't track the seed source."

"A lot of people would bring in cones from other areas," she added.

Cones need to be traced to a specific area so that their seeds can be planted in a location with a similar climate, elevation and soil type.

Cones are being sought by the various Forest Service districts in the northwest. The Zigzag district has a surplus of Douglas Fir seeds and is concerned primarily with obtaining cones from Noble Firs.

Retrieving the cones is no easy task. The seeds are ready for picking for one month only in the fall when 50 percent of the shells have seeds in them. Since climbing the trees is the major method of retrieving the cones in this area,

climbers must wait until a good, dry day.

This year the rain has limited the crew out of Zigzag. Tuesday was the first day that Butler and forest technician Dave Hanken could scale the 120-foot Noble firs to throw the cones to the ground.

Their method is easy. They select a tree loaded with cones and Hanken climbs to the top, aided with equipment similar to that of a mountain climber. He throws a couple of cones down to Butler who checks to see if the seed percentage is high enough to continue the harvest. If so, Hanken will throw or shake nearly every cone down from the tree, usually about three bushels.

Other areas use different methods, such as mechanical climbers or tree shakers, but the trees in the Zigzag district are too large or too isolated for these tactics.

From the Kinzel Lake area, where Butler and Hanken collected three bushels, the cones will go to the Columbia Gorge district, where the cones will be placed on racks to dry for 1-2 weeks. They will be examined by a state seed certifier who will document the source and type of the cone.

From there, the cones will be sent to the Wind River Nursery in Carson, Wash., where the seeds are extracted from the cones. The nursery will develop them into seedlings, holding the young trees for two years until a district puts in a request during planting time.

Eventually, the seedlings will replace trees which have been logged or burned.

So the next time you see a guy in a forest service outfit at the top of a 100-foot Noble Fir don't be alarmed, he's just your average conehead.



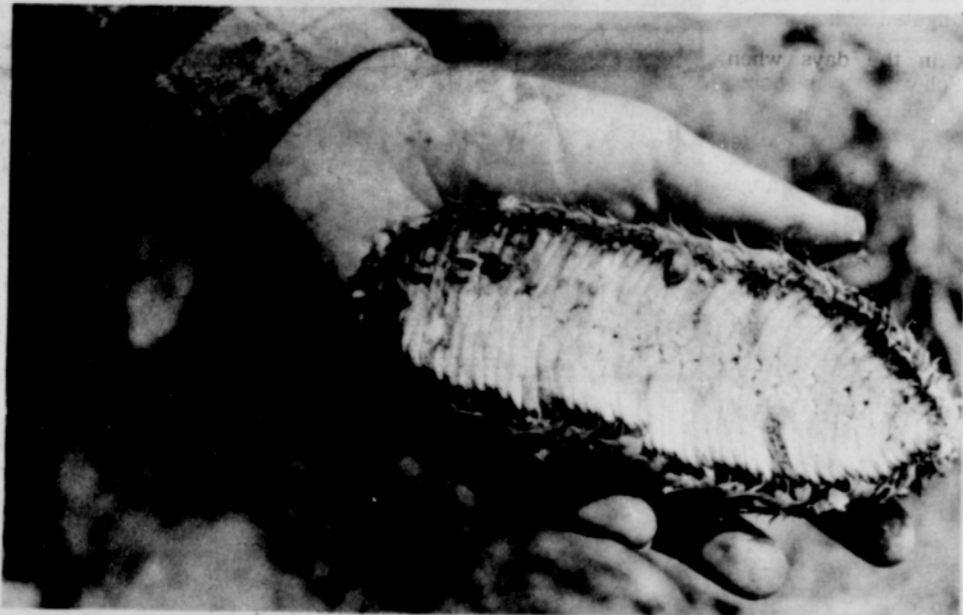
Dave Hanken picks at the 100-foot level.



Rappelling is a fast way down, if there are no limbs.

Story and photos

by Mark Floyd



Cones should be 50 percent full of seeds.

## 4-wheelers to gather

Four-wheel-drivers from Salem to Seattle will gather at the Gresham Fairgrounds Sunday to oppose a federal proposal to convert more than 13 million Pacific Northwest acres to wilderness.

The press conference and rally is set for 1 p.m. and is sponsored by the Pacific Northwest 4-Wheel Drive Association representing members in Oregon, Washington and Idaho. A spokesperson said Friday that 5,000 persons are expected for the rally.

The group is gathering to voice its feelings about the U.S. Forest Service study on RARE II.

U.S. Rep. Les Aucoin has said he will attend the rally and speakers will include representatives from the governor's office and Joe Poppino from the Forest Service's Portland office. Poppino is the RARE II coordinator for the Pacific Northwest region.

Four-wheel-drive association members are planning convoys to the rally, one starting in Seattle and picking up members in Tacoma, Longview and Vancouver, and another coming north from Salem and collecting support up the valley.

The forest service has been conducting a review and evaluation of roadless areas, and Oct. 1 is the end of the period for comments and proposals from the public. Some of the areas will be proposed for wilderness, others for non-wilderness purposes, and some will need further study, Worthington said.

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