

suppression, is what keeps forests healthy." The forests of Oregon were born in fire, and fire plays an important custodial role by clearing out dead brush and small trees, recycling nutrients and maintaining the structural complexity of what would otherwise be dense and homogeneous forest stands.

But a hands-off approach to managing the Clark Fire was not an option, according to Gardner, the incident commander. "A lot of things make that not a good idea for this area," he says, pointing to nearby residential areas and extensive (and highly valuable) neighboring private timberlands. Aggressive firefighting tactics are also called for, he says, because almost all of the fire is burning in the Fall Creek Late Successional Reserve, some of the most productive spotted owl habitat in the world. "This is not the place I'd pick to let a fire burn."

But according to Ingalsbee, the issue is bigger than this one fire. "The Willamette National Forest has made a conscious choice not to do any pro-active fuel management in these owl reserves, so by default they've chosen to use aggressive fire suppression as their only form of management. There's lots of legitimate fuels reduction thinning needed in reserves that's not getting done. Their plans for this and the rest of the forest is fire exclusion, which is impossible and futile and ultimately an environmental calamity when a fire burns through there."

The answer, he says, is for the agency to turn its back on the industrial forestry model entirely. Stop clearcutting in old-growth and roadless areas. Practice judicious fuel reduction thinning and reintroduce fire to ecosystems that need it. And create management plans that instruct how

'IT'S A MISNOMER THAT THEY'RE FIGHTING FIRES, IN FACT THEY'RE FIGHTING THE FOREST,' SAYS TIM INGALSBEE. 'THEY USE ALL THE TOOLS AND IDEOLOGY OF WARFARE AND THEY ASSAULT A FOREST ECOSYSTEM.'

and if to fight fires when they start.

"The forest evolved with fire both natural and human caused, but not with fire suppression and criminal arson. It's a bad scene that we're in." (The Forest Service is still investigating exactly how the human-caused Clark Fire began).

The Fire Service

One thing is certain, thousands of hours of flight time and fire crew overtime does not come cheap. By the 25th, the cost of suppressing Clark has come to almost \$8 million (as *EW* goes to press, costs have reached the \$14 million mark). The 800 firefighters holding the line on the eastern end of the fire on this day have deployed 50 miles of fire hose and 250 pieces of mechanized equipment. They've used 13,000 AAA batteries, consumed 70,000 bottles of water, eaten 28,000 meals, taken 13,000 showers and produced 15 tons of dirty laundry.

To Ingalsbee, the Forest Service has



THE POLITICS OF FIRE



OREGON'S WILDFIRES are becoming a popular backdrop for political theater, and a ready-made smokescreen for aggressive new logging policies being pushed by the Bush administration.

Almost exactly a year ago Bush stood in the still smoldering ashes of the Biscuit Fire in southern Oregon to unveil his "Healthy Forests Initiative," which would exempt "fuel reduction" logging from environmental laws. Last Thursday he came to the Bend area from a Portland fund-raiser to take a helicopter tour of the B and B Complex, a large wildfire burning towards summer homes at Camp Sherman on the Metolius River.

Later at the Deschutes County Fairgrounds, Bush told a crowd of local Republicans "it's hard to describe to our fellow citizen what it means to see a fire like we saw. It's the holo-

caust, it's devastating."

"We write checks a lot on fire-fighting, and we'll continue to do that. But it seems like to me we ought to put a strategy to manage our forests in a better, more common-sensical way," said Bush.

Jasmine Minbashian, coordinator of the Northwest Old-Growth Campaign, scoffed at Bush's remarks.

"Bush wants to make forests healthy by cutting down healthy forests. He wants to protect the environment by gutting environmental laws. That's not common-sensical."

Minbashian, who coordinates the Northwest Old-Growth Campaign, was one of almost 200 protestors outside the fairgrounds who rallied around a six-foot diameter slab taken from the stump of an old-growth "forest health" timber sale logged near Grants Pass this summer. — James Johnston

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