

PIELC

Chainsaw Massacre

Forests become election year battleground.

■ By Alan Pittman

On Sept. 11, 2001, Greenpeace had planned to announce its list of the 10 most endangered forests in the world.

The terrorist attacks changed all that. As the nation's attention focused on Osama, George Bush was left to serve the timber industry as the "worst environmental president" in the nation's history, says Andrew George of the National Forest Protection Alliance at the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference at the UO last week.

The post 9/11 logging push by Bush left environmentalists in despair, says Mike Roselle of Greenpeace at a panel discussion on endangered forests. "I'd never seen a more dejected group of people," he says. "Things looked really bad."

But as in the past, the movement is bouncing back with the excitement of unseating Bush in November. This year is "one of the most important in my memory" to the environmental cause, Roselle says. "We can lay old-growth clearcuts on his doorstep."

With both houses of Congress and the presidency pro logging, "the triple Republican government is completely siding with the timber industry," George says. "We're left with getting down in the trenches and fighting timber sale by timber sale."

But George says the heavy handed logging will backfire. Bush has "united the entire environmental movement" to fight the kind of grassroots battle that is its strength.

Chosen high profile anti-logging campaigns in places like Oregon, Alaska, Idaho and even the east rim of the Grand Canyon will help convince "the great greenwashed middle" to vote against Bush, George says. "We're going to do a little political jujitsu."

The forest battle has become a national issue, reaching all the way to the hillbillies in southwest Virginia, says JR Moore of the Clinch Coalition in a southern drawl.

Heavy logging on national forests has caused violent flooding in his area that has wiped out communities, left one man dead in a slide, and choked trout lakes and streams with sediment, Moore says. The Clinch Coalition boasts 5,000 members, has local Congressmen on its side and recently helped unseat a pro-timber industry county commission.

"We are super strong, and we are not going to give up," Moore says of the battle to save the area's forested highlands for the next generation. He quotes one 72-year-old woman active in the rural group, "Leave the High Knob the hell alone!"

Lesley Adams of the Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center is fighting the largest timber sale in modern U.S. history, the half billion-board-foot Biscuit fire sale.

She says the Bush administration has tried



to portray the sale as fire salvage, but in reality the fire burned in a mosaic and much of the sale is green old growth. Fire is an important part of local ecology, clearing brush and allowing trees to seed. Some pine cones need fire heat to open, Adams notes.

More than 20,000 people wrote in to oppose the Biscuit sale, but protesting the logging on the ground is difficult because it's far away from major cities, Adams says. "It makes it really hard to organize masses of people when we don't have masses of people living there."

But a June rendezvous camp is already scheduled and environmentalists are trying to get more people into the beautiful woods on tours to see what's at stake. "One of the best things you can do for a forest is have people fall in love with it," Adams says.

Roselle says there is some "suspicion" among environmentalists that the Bush administration may have laid a political ambush for environmentalists over the fire salvage logging issue. But even so, Roselle says environmentalists have to take the bait. "By God, we've got to win on fire because we're going to have fires every damn year."

Adams says forest activists have already begun scouting tree sits for the Biscuit sale and

other logging sales that threaten pristine roadless areas in the southern Oregon region. "We're going to dig in and fight like hell to save it."

Will the Bush administration use the Patriot Act to fight back?

So far they haven't, says Roselle. The government has targeted Greenpeace with an IRS investigation and with an "unprecedented" criminal case that threatens to forbid the group from direct action, he says. But activists should test and push the USA PATRIOT Act and not be intimidated, he says. "We've found we can have the same kind of direct actions we've always had," Roselle says, although that may change this summer.

Roselle, wearing a "Forest Crimes Unit" T-shirt, says Greenpeace isn't doing civil disobedience. It's the loggers that are breaking the law, he says. "We are insisting our laws be upheld."

Moore says the Forest Service does appear tense post 9/11. At a recent picket at a Virginia Forest Service office, one activist went inside to use the bathroom, according to Moore. A Forest Service ranger, suspecting a bomb plot, kicked down the door with his pistol drawn, catching the young man with his pants down, but no bomb.

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