

ger empire. And salvage logging is a great way to do it."

What's more, Stahl believes that the Forest Service set the Biscuit salvage project up for failure for political reasons. Originally the agency planned to log 90 million board feet, but expanded the project four-fold in response to a report funded by the timber industry. That required more planning that stalled logging operations for nearly a year, and now the Forest Service is blaming environmental lawyers for the wait. During the delay the burned trees have decayed, lowering their value.

**Taxpayers for
Common Sense calls the
Biscuit salvage project
"one of the biggest
money losers in our
nation's history."**

"The Forest Service said, 'Let's use Biscuit to show that these damn environmentalists get in the way of cutting trees,'" Stahl says. "Biscuit is going to be their poster child for how planning and NEPA cause analysis paralysis." NEPA is the National Environmental Policy Act, a federal law passed in 1969 that requires public agencies to study the environmental and public health impacts of major federal projects.

NEPA is already under fire in Washington, D.C. A federal transportation bill aims to streamline NEPA by eliminating the public process and allowing road building to continue while appeals are pending. In addition, a congressional task force is reviewing NEPA, possibly in an attempt to overhaul the law. "They're trying to build a record on carefully orchestrated public hearings that NEPA doesn't work, and Biscuit will be front and center their example," Stahl says.

U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith (R-Ore.) seems to support that effort. In a July 13 op-ed in the *R-G*, Smith wrote, "I believe that the Biscuit Fire aftermath requires Congress to update our laws to address the environmental catastrophes left in the wake of wildfire."

Rolf Skar, campaign director for the Siskiyou Regional Education Project, says that the Biscuit salvage project also bucks against the Northwest Forest Plan, a 1994 law that prioritizes ecological values over economics in public forest management. He suggests that by planning an unusually large operation in areas normally off-limits to logging, the Forest Service purposely bit off more than it could chew. "The only way to connect the dots is to assume that the folks in Washington, D.C., wanted to rewrite this project to include the roadless areas and the old growth reserves. Now we have politicians setting the stage to pass Healthy Forests Part II," he says, referring to federal legislation that gives the Forest Service expanded authority to log in sensitive areas.

Native Forest Council President Tim Hermach puts it bluntly: "The Biscuit salvage project is clearly a scam to transfer public wealth to industry. There's nothing honest about the timber industry. Unfortunately, the Forest Service has become equally dishonest."

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