



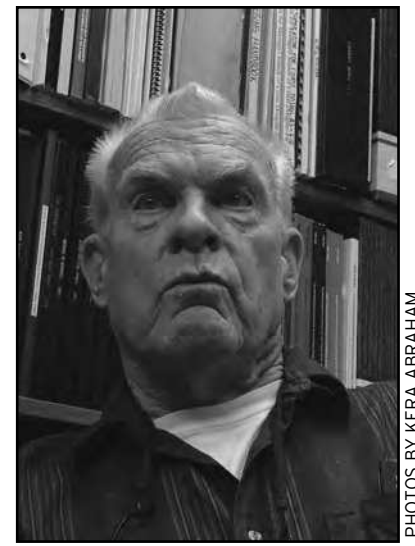
Reps. Greg Walden and Peter DeFazio sparred at a Feb. 24 Congressional hearing in Medford.



OSU College of Forestry Dean Hal Salwasser



College of Forestry Professor John Sessions



College of Forestry Professor Emeritus Michael Newton

PHOTOS BY KERA ABRAHAM

gressional opposition. Reps. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) and Jay Inslee (D-Wash.), neither of whom receive major campaign contributions from the timber industry, have attacked the bill as an ecologically irresponsible gift to the forest resource industry.

“Walden’s bill basically waives most environmental laws,” DeFazio said. “I think the overall impact — and the people in the timber industry don’t contest this — is to give total discretion to [U.S. Agriculture Undersecretary] Mark Rey to do whatever he wants on federal lands.”

To counter-punch the timber power behind Walden and Baird’s bill, DeFazio and Inslee need public opinion on their side. And for that, they need science showing that logging after natural disturbances hurts a forest’s ability to recover. Until January, they had the support of a cadre of forestry experts and a small body of scientific data, but they wanted something more specific.

They were about to get it — from the very same college whose dean was backing FERRA.

The College of Forestry

The split in opinion over post-fire federal forest management is most theatrically expressed in Peavy and Richardson halls, the main forestry buildings on the OSU campus. Dean Salwasser presides over a faculty and student body that includes hydrologists and wood product engineers, future park rangers and aspiring timber company CEOs.

The faculty and students can be crudely divided into two major camps: those who pri-

marily concern themselves with forests as profit generators and those who view them as ecosystems. That’s not to say that engineers who design logging roads know nothing of hydrology, or that tree breeders don’t understand wildlife ecology. But CoF students and faculty in their respective departments research the questions asked by their funding sources. And that makes all the difference.

“There has always been this tension between the pure scientists and the applied technicians at the College of Forestry,” said 1979 CoF alumnus Andy Stahl, now the director of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics.

There seems to be consensus on one thing: The Biscuit Fire is red meat for researchers. According to Salwasser’s recent budget report, the CoF will have to make \$4 million in cuts over the next two years unless it can bring in new revenue. Biscuit is one big charred piggybank, and the CoF, as the nearest forestry college, has already received hefty federal grants for ecosystem research as well as amped-up private contracts from timber interests.

In the 2004 fiscal year, 61 percent of the college’s research funding came from federal grants and contracts, 15 percent from the state’s timber harvest tax, 5 percent from private gifts and most of the rest from state and federal general funds.

So it makes practical sense that Salwasser, as steward of the college’s future, proposed making all of the Biscuit area a management experiment — with his faculty and students on the receiving end of federal research funds. But if for the past several decades the CoF has

maintained a precarious equilibrium between its ecosystem- and profit-focused scholars, the Battle of Biscuit represents a tipping point in the future of forestry education.

The Donato report

In January, CoF grad student Daniel Donato released a study that gave DeFazio and Inslee scientific ammo against Walden’s bill. The research, supported by a \$300,000 federal grant from the multi-agency Joint Fire Sciences Program and co-authored by CoF professors Beverly Law and Boone Kaufmann, found that two years after the Biscuit Fire, salvage logging killed 71 percent of seedlings that had sprung up after the burn and left six times more tinder on the ground than in unlogged areas. Donato submitted his report to the prestigious journal *Science*, which peer-reviewed it and then published it online Jan. 5.

By suggesting that salvage logging impedes forest regeneration, the Donato report contradicted FERRA’s premise that post-fire logging can aid forest recovery. “If we’re going to log for economic goals, we should be honest with ourselves and say it’s for economic reasons,” Donato told *The Oregonian* (“Scorched Forests Best Left Alone,” Jan. 6).

Rather than congratulating his student on publication in the nation’s most rigorous science journal, Salwasser turned his attention to “damage control.” In the days immediately following the Donato report’s publication, the dean exchanged a flurry of intense e-mails with regional and national timber industry

leaders, Republican congressional staff, Forest Service employees and OSU faculty, devising strategies to play down Donato’s findings.

“We’re walking the line on academic freedom and censorship with internal review,” Salwasser wrote in a Jan. 6 e-mail to OSU President Ed Ray and OSU Government Relations Director Jock Mills. “This will be delicate to handle, but the fallout from our constituents is pretty fierce.”

Encouraged by Salwasser and Associate Dean Steve Hobbs, Sessions led a group of industry-oriented OSU faculty members — Michael Newton, Steven Tesch, Paul Adams, Steven Fitzgerald and Robin Rose — in an attempt to discredit Donato’s report and delay its print publication. They wrote a letter to *Science* editors attacking Donato’s methodology and findings, complaining that the student had reached overbroad conclusions, failed to identify the environmental context of his research, used unusual seedling-counting methods and ignored proper internal review protocol.

Science editors printed the Donato paper anyway. *The Oregonian* and other news outlets reported on Sessions’ attempt to delay it. The Bureau of Land Management pulled funding for the last year of Donato’s study. Rep. Inslee called on the U.S. Inspector General to investigate the BLM’s decision. The BLM restored the funding less than a week later, but the investigation is ongoing.

Environmental groups cried foul, a cadre of OSU professors and others leapt to Donato’s defense — another flood of angry e-mails to Salwasser — and suddenly the debate

Vested interests

Some see irony in CoF Professor John Sessions’ criticism that grad student Daniel Donato’s report, published in the journal *Science*, is overly political. Sessions’ own July 2003 report for the Douglas County Commissioners — which, by spawning a bill, had more influence than Donato’s, which merely weakened the case for one — contains more advocacy than science. Presented as an independent synthesis despite its timber-motivated funding source, the Sessions report was never formally peer-reviewed. It contains numerous omissions and statements unsupported by fact, yet it was used as the scientific basis for FERRA.

“It was pseudo-scientific but it was a polemic, shrilly espousing these forestry practices from the ’50s and ’60s that I thought we had left behind,” said Richard Fairbanks, former leader of the Forest Service team that drafted the Biscuit logging alternatives. “He didn’t understand the basic ecology down here.”

Sessions, who gained academic repute for his logging road designs and timber harvest models, insists that he has no allegiance to the timber industry. But he admits that he was close with late Bohemia Logging Company owner Faye Stewart. In the ’60s, when Bohemia pioneered the practice of logging by air with helium balloons, Sessions, then a forestry student, would ride around with Stewart, who called him “professor.” The title was premature but pre-

scient — Sessions is now the CoF’s “Stewart Professor,” his position funded by the timber baron’s estate.

Sessions also works closely with Columbia Helicopters, whose choppers are used to haul logs out of roadless areas and steep hills. E-mails obtained by public records request reveal that Sessions took a flight over the Biscuit Fire area with Columbia Helicopter executives while preparing a report that would deliver the company a stream of business. In December 2003, Columbia chairman Wes Lematta’s wife donated \$1 million to the CoF.

Sessions told *EW* that Columbia has little vested interest in post-fire logging, and that the company gets most of its business delivering water to put out wildfires. But a Jan. 6 e-mail from Columbia Vice-President of Forestry Operations Max Merlich to Dean Salwasser says otherwise. “Post catastrophic harvest is the most important part of our business,” Merlich wrote.

Sessions’ most stalwart supporter is CoF Professor Emeritus Michael Newton, who co-authored the Sessions report and joined in the attempt to derail the Donato report. Newton is credited with pioneering the now-common private forestry practice of clearcutting, re-planting with Douglas firs and then dousing the soil with herbicides to kill competing vegetation — the same strategy that the Sessions report recommends for federal forest lands burned by the Biscuit Fire.