

# School Sprays

Big Timber teaches chemistry.

Lynn Bowers matches her maps. The 63-year-old artist/activist drapes herself in loose layers of greens and purples and pinks, a rainbow that flows with her as she takes on the local Goliaths of industrial forestry. Her maps of Lane County follow suit, with multihued highlights marking the private lands where timber companies have sprayed herbicides to keep down competitors of their cash crop, Douglas fir. Purple dominates the 2006 map — representing more than 5,000 acres of sprays by Weyerhaeuser Company, which owns more than 12 percent of Lane County.

Bowers would like to see her maps a lot less colorful. Especially around local schools.

As the founder of the nonprofit Forestland Dwellers, Bowers has mapped out all of Lane County's timberland herbicide applications for the past three years using spray notifications filed with the Oregon Department of Forestry. While updating her 2006 map, Bowers realized that some sprays are planned near local schools, right at the start of the school year.

Weyerhaeuser plans to spray a "test mix" of herbicides by helicopter about a half mile west of Marcola Elementary School and a mile from Mohawk High School beginning Sept. 25. The company also submitted paperwork to spray by helicopter about a mile south of Walterville Elementary beginning Aug. 14. Seneca Jones Timber Company plans to ground spray about a half mile north of Twin Oaks Elementary beginning Sept. 15.

"Children are especially vulnerable to this stuff," Bowers says. "And they don't get notifications. Nobody would know a thing about it if I wasn't up there spreadin' rumors."

Bowers and another Forestland Dweller, Robin Winfree-Andrews, sent a letter to Twin Oaks Principal Larry Soberman about Seneca Jones' spray plans. It was news to him. "The concerns seem legitimate," Soberman told *EW*, "but I'm going to have to get some more information to ensure the safety of my students."

Seneca Jones did not return *EW*'s calls.

Another Forestland Dweller, 66-year-old artist Ayala Talpai, paid a visit to Marcola School District Superintendent Rolla Weber. But he, like Soberman, was reluctant to sound any alarms. "I have no idea what the spraying is supposed to do or what the possible side effects would be," he said. "If we knew it was an issue we would certainly notify parents. But without more info, I don't have any reason to say anything."

Something different happened in Walterville. After residents contacted Weyerhaeuser protesting the planned aerial spray near the elementary school, the company paused. "We're working with the neighbors to figure out a way to handle that [spray], not because of a safety issue, but because of

the perception of safety," Weyerhaeuser spokesman Mike Moskovitz said. "We may go in there and spray by hand, because that's what the neighbors want us to do."

Members of Forestland Dwellers and its local allies, Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, Oregon Toxics Alliance and The Pitchfork Rebellion, would like timber companies to phase out aerial spraying, which they view as imprecise and hazardous. They reluctantly prefer ground spraying, which lessens the risk of herbicide drift.

Ground spraying is not as cost-effective as using helicopters, Moskovitz said. But he assured *EW* that Weyerhaeuser's pilots, most of them military-trained, spray in compliance with Oregon's Forest Practices Act: noting wind conditions, observing the product labels, and keeping buffers around sensitive wildlife habitat ("which includes people," he said).

But no buffers will be maintained around Marcola or Walterville elementaries. "The buffers are not needed, in that the schools are so far away that it's not even an issue," Moskovitz said. "Even a half mile is more than enough to be safe. More of a concern is 100 to 500 feet away."

The Forestland Dwellers disagree, citing OSU research that shows pesticide drift of up to 1 mile even for ground applications.

The test mix of Garlon4 and 2,4-D to be used near Marcola Elementary is a new, "environmentally friendly" product called Milestone, which has a "vegetable base" and can be applied in a diluted form, Moskovitz said.

But neither herbicide screams "green." Garlon's active ingredient, the broadleaf plant killer triclopyr, has been linked in lab tests to increased risks of breast cancer, genetic damage and reproductive problems. And 2,4-D (2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid), one of the two active ingredients in Agent Orange, has been linked in epidemiological studies with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and childhood leukemia — though Moskovitz says it's less toxic than undiluted caffeine or aspirin.

Bowers, busy organizing a growing group of Forestland Dwellers, says the next step is legislation to place a moratorium on spraying near schools. Her blue eyes grew as round as her wire-rimmed glasses when she learned that even Weyerhaeuser may be amenable to the idea.

"We're always open to constructive dialogue and hearing from our neighbors," Moskovitz said. **EW**



Lynn Bowers

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