



SCORCHED EARTH POLICY

It's already time to start planning for fire season. It's always that time if you're involved in fire management in the West. The "Scorched Earth" panel at last weekend's Public Interest Environmental Law Conference (PIELC) at UO discussed how fires, from small prescribed burns to enormous "megafires," are dealt with by firefighters, managers and scientists. The panelists also talked about a soon-to-be-released fire management policy.

Timothy Ingalsbee of FUSEE (Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics and Ecology; the acronym also refers to a pyrotechnic device) organized the panel and led off the discussion on "Appropriate Management Response" (AMR) to wildland fires. AMR, according to Ingalsbee, "expands the strategic and tactical options for fire managers so they can choose from a full spectrum of potential actions – everything from aerial monitoring to aggressive suppression can be used to manage wildland fires."

The panelists discussed two main types of fires: wildfire and prescribed fires. Mike Beasley of the National Park Service described the anatomy of a fire and fighting it, focusing on his work in Yosemite. Mary Kwart, now retired from U.S. Fish and Wildlife service, focused on Alaska, where she says thanks to global warming there were 10 wildfires above the Arctic Circle in 2007. The permafrost is melting, areas that were ponds are now meadows of grass and "the tundra is burning," she said.

Though people tend to think of wildfires as negative, both kinds of fire can benefit the landscape when in an area that would naturally burn. Ingalsbee said past fire management policies have called for suppression of all human-caused fires, but he hopes the new policy will allow for more discretion in when a fire needs to be put out.

Firefighters don't yet know what will be in that new fire policy, due to be released March 29. It was "largely crafted in secret," said Ingalsbee. "Citizen involvement in wildfire management is the last best hope." – *Camilla Mortensen*

OILGAE: SCUM OF THE EARTH

With gas headed for \$4 a gallon and corn tortillas growing more expensive, will pond scum save the SUV?

Researchers at OSU experimenting with algae photobioreactors think it's possible in five to 10 years.

"A lot of people are working on it," said Ganti Murthy, assistant professor of biological and ecological engineering at OSU. "It's just a matter of putting it together, making it work."

Growing algae in a closed system takes far less water than corn and can produce 20 to 100 times more biodiesel per acre than can soybeans, according to a press release from OSU.

Algae can also be used to soak up global warming pollution. Feed it carbon dioxide from a coal plant, and it can grow up to 30 percent faster, according to Murphy.

As is the case with other biofuels, the trick is finding a cost-effective, energy-efficient way to farm and then squeeze the oil out of the plant matter. Algae has the added challenge of having to remove a lot of water.

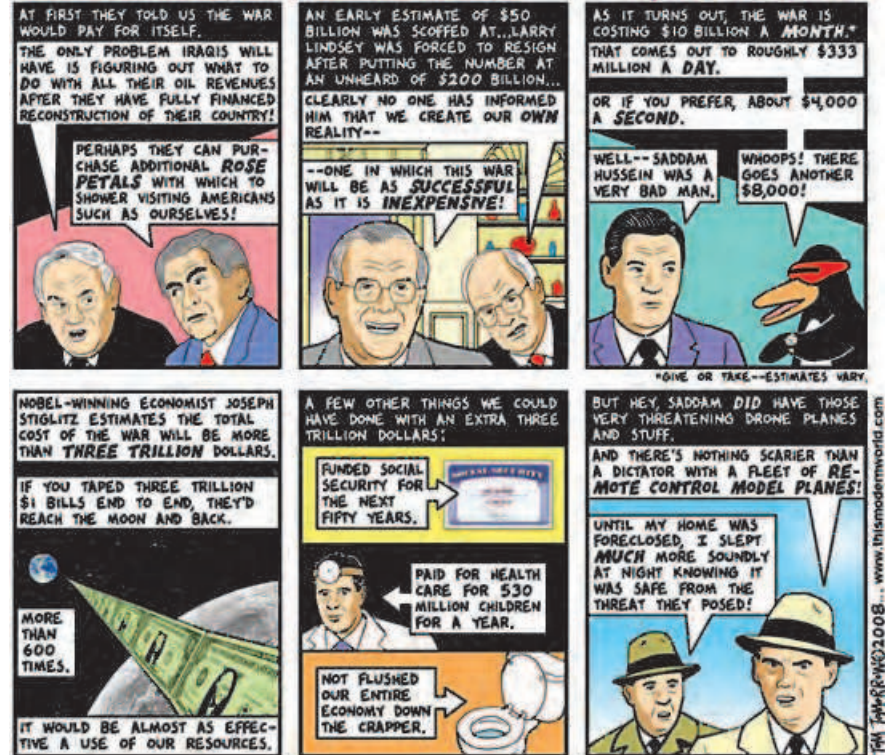
Other biofuels have proven to be disappointing. Researchers recently found that biofuel crops may increase, not decrease, global warming because they result in farmers clearing natural vegetation for crops, according to a study published last month in the leading journal *Science*.

Oilgae has the potential to use far less land. But still the U.S. Department of Energy has estimated that replacing the nation's gas with algae would require enough pond scum to cover the entire state of Maryland.

Ironically, Corvallis may still hold the secret technology to solve the energy crisis, but not in a photobioreactor. The city has one of the highest bicycle commuting rates in the nation. – *Alan Pittman*

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



news Briefs

TORREY BUCKS VS. PIERCY

Jim Torrey's announcement that he plans to spend a quarter of a million dollars to unseat Mayor Kitty Piercy will bring huge piles of developer money into local politics.

In 2006, Torrey spent \$649,000 to run unsuccessfully as a Republican trying to unseat Democrat State Sen. Vicki Walker. Torrey's campaign was funded largely by developers, Republican Party leaders, timber barons, polluters and corporations either directly or through their Political Action Committees (PACs), according to finance reports.

In 2004, Torrey flirted with running as a write-in against Piercy, who had defeated her main challenger for mayor in the primary. Torrey decided not to run but still spent \$38,000. Torrey's biggest donor at \$8,000 was Arlie & Co. The development company is run by John Musumeci, who made tens of millions of dollars speculating

on land for Sacred Heart hospital to move from downtown to a bend in the McKenzie River. Land, timber and development speculators Greg Demers and the McDougal brothers gave Torrey \$2,000 each.

Likely big issues in what's promising to be a fierce battle for mayor include:

- **Republican.** Torrey claims he's no longer a Republican. But it's unclear if that's just a ploy to win votes in an election year and town dominated by Democrats. In the past, the Republican Party and big Republican donors have pumped hundreds of thousands of dollars into Torrey's campaigns. Torrey has donated thousands of dollars of leftover campaign funds to Republicans and personally contributed \$2,000 to President George Bush's 2004 re-election campaign, the maximum donation allowed. In 2006, Torrey told the City Club that he supported Bush and his decision to invade Iraq. "I think it's made it safer from terrorism."

- **Sprawl.** Torrey has advocated for expanding the urban growth boundary. That would allow developers like Musumeci and Demers, who have speculated on vast tracts of cheap farm and forest land in the LCC basin and west of Eugene to reap huge profits.

- **West Eugene Parkway.** Torrey was a big backer of the freeway through the wetlands when he was mayor. Piercy has opposed destroying natural areas for the highway. Land speculators and construction companies may still hope to cash in by restarting the project.

- **Abortion.** Torrey is anti-choice. Piercy is pro-choice and formerly worked for Planned Parenthood.

- **Torrey's record.** Torrey has a consistent pro-developer, pro-corporate welfare and anti-

