

Seeing the Forest

Through the trees

There's an old cliché that one can't see the forest for the trees. It is used to describe people who are so focused on details that they fail to see the big picture. Nowhere is this failure to see the forest for the trees more evident than the rush to utilize dead trees for biomass fuels and/or the presumed need to "thin" forests to reduce so called "dangers" and/or "damage" from wildfire and beetle outbreaks.



Dead trees are not a "wasted" resource. An abundance of dead trees, rather than a sign of forest sickness as commonly portrayed, demonstrates that the forest ecosystem is functioning perfectly well. For far too long we have viewed the major agents responsible for creation of substantial qualities of dead trees – beetles and wildfire – as "enemies" of the forest, when in truth, they are the major processes that maintain healthy forest ecosystems.

Recent research points out the multiple ways that dead trees and down wood are critical to the forest. One estimate suggests that two-thirds of all species depend on dead trees/down wood at some point in their lives.

Dead trees are very important for functioning aquatic ecosystems as well. Trees create structure in streams that shapes stream channels, reduces water velocity and erosion, and provides both food and habitat for many aquatic species, including trout.

Once a tree falls to the ground and gradually molders back into the soil, it provides home to many small insects and invertebrates that are the lifeblood of the forest, that help recycle and produce nutrients important for present and future forest growth. For instance, there are hundreds of species of ground nesting bees that utilize down trees for their home. These bees are major pollinators of flowers and flowering shrubs in the forest.

Ants are among the most abundant invertebrates in the forest and many live in down trees and snags. Ants play a critical role in the forest, helping to break down wood, aerate soil with their burrows, and protect trees against the onslaught of other insects. One study found that ants killed 85 percent of the tussock moths that attacked Douglas fir, and there are many other examples of how ants protect trees from tree predators.

A recent review of 1,200 lichen species found that 10 percent were only found on dead trees, and many others prefer dead trees as their prime habitat. Lichens, among other things, are important convertors of atmospheric nitrogen into fixed nitrogen important for plant growth.

Even the charcoal that results from wildfires burning up trees is important for soil productivity, helping to increase soil nutrients, water-holding capacity, and as a long-term storage mechanism for carbon.

Several recent studies have concluded that both beetle-killed forests and the burned forests that remain after stand-replacement wildfires have among the highest biodiversity of any habitat type.

Logging, thinning, biomass removal and other forest management introduce all kinds of negative impacts to the forest ecosystem, from the spread of weeds to soil compaction to alteration of water flow, disturbance to wildlife, creation of new ORV trails and increases in sedimentation, that all lead to the degradation of the forest ecosystem itself. Most of these negative impacts are ignored or glossed over by proponents of thinning and biomass removal.

Forest "management" is so focused on trees and wood products that it represents a critical failure to see the forest through the trees.

George Wuerthner is an ecologist and writer with 34 published books. He will be speaking at 7 pm Wednesday, May 6, at Harris Hall, 8th and Oak, on "Wildfire Hysteria & Forest Biomass Greenwash."

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SLASHING SERVICES?

In this week's issue (4/23) you have two items concerning the newest proposal for a new police station. In both pieces you make the claim that "the city is raising taxes and slashing services." As a member of the city Budget Committee, I am writing to challenge this characterization. What taxes are being raised, and more significantly can you point to any place where services provided by the city of Eugene (not Lane County or the state) are being slashed?

While I will admit I don't stay up to speed as much as I should on the taxation side of this issue, I can say that unless I fell asleep during the most recent Budget Committee meeting and missed something dramatic, there are no plans to "slash" city services in order to fill the \$12 million deficit in the city budget. There will be some programs that were funded on a multi-year basis whose funding is about to expire and may not be renewed, but those are decisions that will be made over the course of the upcoming budget committee hearings.

That fact is that the city manager (Jon Ruiz) has proposed a budget that seeks to retain current service levels and close the budget deficit without laying off any city workers, an approach that has earned him kudos from some and criticism from others. Your paper does a disservice to our city when it casually throws around unsupported statements about "slashing" services. I hope you will take some time to actually look through the city manager's proposed budget which was just released this week, and provide our community with much needed accurate reporting on how Ruiz plans to close the budget deficit.

Claire Syrett
Eugene

NASTY BUGGERS

I am not a fan of spraying, especially in these current sensitive times of random lawlessness in that area. I am as anti-chemical as anyone could be. But I also grew up on the East Coast during the onslaught of the gypsy moth infestation, and believe

me, you do *not* want those things destroying the Northwest. If I have to choose between permanent neurological damage and gypsy moth infestation, I will choose the former. I repeat, you do *not* want those fuckin' things ruining the West Coast. They get into every little corner, cutting a swath, destroying plants with disgusting little egg sacs, leaving a wake of wanton wee folk.

I would love to see an alternative to spraying. It was effective in the East, if way too late. I sincerely hope we won't have to resort to sprays, but if the gypsy moth is allowed to get a foothold I am so outta here! Believe me, something must be done.

Ken Sokolov
Eugene

HELP EUGENE SAY NO

I am writing with the voice of Eugeneans who are speaking out, with an overwhelming majority, against biomass extraction. Biomass is not green energy. Please do not allow desperate industries to decide the fate of Oregon's health and natural environment. Please listen to the vote of the people whom you lead and represent when we say "no biomass."

Vote "no" on HR 1190 and S 536. Please, let's stop these bills that destroy the meaning and hope of a green energy future. Burning biomass will pollute our air and cause irrevocable environmental damage. Biomass is not a green or clean energy. Just because trees are green does not make burning them a source of clean energy. The Seneca biomass plant that is almost in effect will release tons of lead, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, dioxin, particulates, mercury, benzene, chromium and many more hazardous air pollutants. These pollutants from Seneca biomass, and all biomass plants, will leave Eugene in a haze of pollution that we will breath every morning, afternoon, evening and night for decades to come. Please join the many Eugeneans who are coming together to stop this hazardous industry.

People are organizing under the guidance and help of Cascadia's Environmental

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