

Timber Town vs. Tree Town

Another forest feeding frenzy on its way?



Timber Town growls and belches mostly outside of Tree Town's collective consciousness.

Conscious of it or not, we find our air is fouled by biomass burners, wood and paper processing gases and log treatment vapors. The surrounding forest that feeds the mills, hidden largely behind locked gates (but not from Google Earth), is fragmented with huge clearcuts and freshly sprayed plantations. Our precious water, bleeding out of these heavily logged watersheds, is contaminated by eroded soil and toxic forest chemicals.

It's easy to forget that much of our infrastructure — roads, bridges, railways, dams and power plants — was built for transporting logs and powering mills. With over a billion board feet logged out of Lane County's forests in big harvest years, our county is, literally, the timber epicenter of the U.S. Yet many of us barely notice a quarter million loaded log trucks lumbering through our midst during these periods.

We are, however, kept constantly aware by industry's PR machine that our schools depend on logging revenues and our basic public services remain tied to timber harvest levels. This awareness works its

fearful spell for today's Lords of Logging. "You want your kids to read and write?" "You want police and fire protection?" "Don't interfere with us logging your forests."

Although the timber industry makes only a 3 percent contribution to 21st century Lane County's economy, a far greater share of land, wealth and political process is under their control. Banks, business and industrial complexes, gravel and paving companies, trucking firms, media enterprises, educational institutes and even politicians are owned or influenced by timber dollars.

Federal, state and local agencies are routinely bullied by timber interests. Forest Service managers get the cut out or suffer demotion. State agencies are pressured to sell public timber for a fraction of its value. County commissioners play ball or risk having Big Timber generously fund and run someone against them.

Big Timber is behind the latest effort to privatize public forests in a legislative proposal deceptively named the O&C Trust, Conservation, and Jobs Act. Sponsored by "independent" Congressman Peter DeFazio, this act would transfer a million and a half acres of reasonably protected

public forests to a "trust" governed by a board of directors that includes two mill owners. These forests would then be "managed" according to Oregon's equally pro-logging Forest Practice Rules.

If this act is successful, much of the forests that surround and buffer Tree Town's air, water, wildlife and farmlands will be clearcut, then ignominiously poisoned. The gain in revenue and jobs, greatly exaggerated by the act's promoters, will be relatively minimal compared to Lane's total budget and labor force. The mega-mills that already purchase most of the BLM's timber sales will profit hugely from yet another feeding frenzy on our forests.

It's no wonder the timber industry keeps the pressure on us. Lane County has some of the last and greatest surviving stands of old trees, virtually all on federal lands. This mature, high value public timber is, for industry, a great prize. If they can bypass federal environmental protections and control the right people, they can make hundreds of millions more logging our forests.

Once the mature BLM-managed remnants of the "checkerboard" forest around us are cut out, it'll be harder for

those of us in Tree Town to ignore Timber Town.

The surrounding hills will be completely barren or, at best, monotonously carpeted with fire- and disease-prone tree plantations. We'll have fewer fish in our streams and more toxic algae blooms in our lakes. Once our share of trickle-down dollars from the looted federal forests is spent, we'll still be trying to fund schools and services.

The best thing we would get out of this latest public forest giveaway is that, in a decade or two, there would be little left for some mills to feed on and they'll move on to other unprotected forests, towns and hostage workers. But not, unfortunately, forever. When the fiber farms that replace our forests are ready, mills will return to grind them into chips like they're doing now the South.

There's still time for the people of Tree Town to push back against Timber Town's latest scam to steal and log more of our forests. Help save the watersheds around Eugene from a dismal fate. Push back together, push now! Start with telling your representatives this proposed O&C Act is undemocratic and unacceptable. **EW**

Roy Keene is a local real estate broker and private timberlands specialist.



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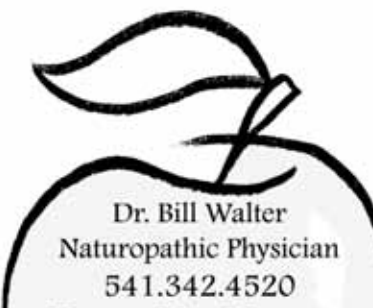
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