

WHITE CASTLE TREESIT
HAS THREE PLATFORMS
AND A SUPPORT CREW

PHOTO CFD

FOREST SCIENTISTS MEET WITH TREESITTERS

The White Castle pilot project is an unusual kind of logging proposal and it's led to an unusual forest defender vs. forest scientist dynamic. When forestry professor Norm Johnson of OSU, who created the project along with Jerry Franklin of the University of Washington, found out that the Cascadia Forest Defenders (CFD) had taken to the trees last week to stop the proposed logging, he decided he would head out to the site near Roseburg and talk to the protesters. He went to Berkeley in the '60s, he says, where, "If you weren't protesting, then you weren't awake."

CFD spokesperson Mary Grace says he will receive a warm welcome and that the treesitters have a lot of questions for Johnson.

The CFD press release begins, "Cascadia Forest Defenders are meeting the challenge issued by timber-sponsored forest ecologists, Norm Johnson and Jerry Franklin, at the White Castle Timber Sale located 20 miles east of Myrtle Creek." It continues, "Treesitters, blockaders and the support crew have found their new home near the headwaters of Myrtle Creek on O&C land about to be logged in the name of science."

The federal O&C lands have been the center of a debate over how to manage them, with the governor, Rep. Peter DeFazio and Sen. Ron Wyden all attempting to put forth proposals in Congress. The main one calls for dividing the forest between conservation and industrial-type logging.

CFD is targeting scientists rather than the Bureau of Land Management because "the Norm and Jerry show along with the politicians — Wyden, DeFazio — all have the goal of making more land open to logging," Mary Grace says. She adds, "Most people want forests, not fiber farms" and calls the variable retention harvest a "sneaky backdoor" and a way of saying, "we are not taking all of the forest, so this is not as bad as it could be."

CFD cites Doug of Heiken of Oregon Wild and his criticism of the pilot project as "a cynical attempt to pass off clear-cutting century-old trees as restoration." Heiken says while Oregon Wild is not involved in the treesit, the group is actively protesting the project. He says, "Oregon Wild is concerned that one million acres of clear-cuts are going to slip through under the label of 'ecological forestry.'"

Johnson says that clear-cutting (also known as a regeneration harvest) and a variable retention harvest (VRH) are not the same, scientifically, and that they have very different ecological outcomes. "Here's our puzzle," he says, "we wanted to create a silvicultural strategy in which we could actually not create a tree farm, but as best we can recreate a forest." He says this strategy uses approaches that retain the cycle a forest normally has.

White Castle is a native stand — it has never been logged — whereas the other pilots, including one near Eugene, are in previously logged areas. He says the site "does take your breath away a little." One goal of the projects, Johnson says, is to create "early seral habitat," with its bushes, forbs and hardwoods, and help the wildlife that depends on it. "Why wait until they are threatened and endangered?" he asks. Such habitat is lacking in industrial forestland, which uses pesticides to get rid of it. The goal of a VRH is to re-create a more natural forest and to allow for logging as the BLM, which Johnson says no longer logs old growth in western Oregon, runs out of stands of trees to thin.

But if you make even a logged forest complex and beautiful, then Johnson asks, "Do we have the heart to harvest it?" He says, "You see that in the complexity of White Castle; I don't have the answers, but we need science to illustrate the implications of policy."

Johnson goes out to the White Castle site to speak with the CFD treesitters as well as to the nearby Buck Rising pilot project on June 20. — Camilla Mortensen

NEWS

TAX BREAK GRANTED DESPITE QUESTIONS

After a brief but vociferous debate, the Eugene City Council voted 5-3 June 17 to grant Core Campus, a Chicago-based developer, approximately \$4.5 million in tax exemptions over 10 years for a planned 12-story student apartment building. In response, neighborhood advocate Paul Conte announced that he would file a ballot initiative petition to abolish any Multiple-Unit Property Tax Exemptions (MUPTes) granted after April 2013.

Opponents of the tax break point to the boom of student housing springing up around Eugene without tax breaks, and they call the Core Campus MUPTe an unnecessary solution to an imaginary problem. Eugene's rental vacancy rate is estimated at somewhere between 4 percent and 5 percent, which is generally considered healthy.

Advocates of the MUPTe maintain that the high-rent student apartment building, which will bring in higher property taxes after the exemption is over, won't be built without the tax exemption. The city's financial analysis of the project includes Core Campus' claim that its investors in the project will require a minimum rate of return of 8.96 percent in the first year, and it won't make that much without the tax break.

Conte calls the financial analysis pathetic, and he says Core Campus' own numbers indicate that it doesn't need the 10-year MUPTe it was granted. "Even if you use their numbers, why are we giving them four or five more years of this tax exemption than they say they need to make it work?" he asks. Core Campus has pledged to return about \$1.04 million to the city to fund affordable housing after five years, but Conte says that a shorter-term tax exemption would net more tax revenue for the cash-strapped city coffers.

Rather than allowing for a project that would otherwise not be built, Conte says the MUPTe simply allows developers to include pricy features they can't afford without a tax exemption. "It's unfair to developers to have to compete in a market in which Core Campus is going to be able to deliver a more attractive product at the same price because the city is helping them pay for it" by granting a tax break, he says.

Councilors Mike Clark, Greg Evans, George Poling, Chris Pryor and Claire Syrett voted in favor of the MUPTe; Councilors George Brown, Betty Taylor and Alan Zelenka opposed.

As Poling moved to vote on the tax break, Brown protested the rush toward voting in light of "lots of unanswered questions," and said that council didn't need to make a decision until mid-July. During council's discussion preceding the vote, Taylor objected to the "false assumption" that no one will build on the space without a guarantee or a subsidy.

Zelenka criticized the fact that Core Campus provided a local hiring plan but would not be required to follow it, and he called the LEED silver certification planned for the building insufficient and "barely above our housing code." — Shannon Finnell

GOLD DIGGERS HURT LANE COUNTY PARKS

Gold mining and all its negative environmental effects have made their way to the waterways of Lane County. River guide Frank Armendariz was out walking his dog early in May in an open section of Armitage Park when he says he saw a Jeep parked inside a portion of the park still locked behind gates and a man digging away at the riverbank. Gold mining in southern Oregon has led not just to the degradation of rivers but also to shootings and legal battles, but, until now, it has not been much of an issue on the McKenzie River.

Panning for gold is a type of what is called placer mining. A miner digs up dirt and gravel from hard-packed streambeds, puts it in a pan, then swirls it through water, sifting out rocks and sand, while the heavier gold sinks to the bottom of the pan. Digging into stream banks damages riparian areas along the water, which affects water quality and habitat.

Armendariz reported the digging to the park host and to Lane County Parks, he says. He says when he spoke to the park host about his concerns, "Turns out the guy digging in the bank was the brother-in-law of the park host, and the park host had unlocked the gate and had allowed his brother-in-law in the closed section knowing he was going to be digging in the bank."

Last week, Armendariz, who has been active in efforts to protect the waters, fish and wildlife of the McKenzie and other rivers, was back at the park and, to his dismay, he saw more cars parked with the Jeep and five or six more people digging into the riverbank. He reports he saw digging again on June 18.

CONTINUED P. 11 >>>