

Nearby Clearcuts

FIGHTING AGAINST THE LOGGING AND AERIAL SPRAYING OF OUR FORESTS

To clear the land for settlement, early pioneers grabbed an axe and did work that demanded time and energy enough to break a sweat. Later, two men could work a crosscut saw through old growth in half the time and half the sweat it took a man with an axe.

When the internal combustion engine was adapted to saws, one man could drop a tree in a matter of minutes. Now one person in an enclosed, heated and air-conditioned compartment operates a machine that cuts through a 3-foot-diameter fir in a matter of seconds, uses the same machine to strip, cut to length and stack the log and moves on to what formerly would take at least half a dozen men with chainsaws to accomplish in a day. A still photo of this latest weaponry fails to do it justice; to see one in action check out “The Ultimate Wood Cutting Vehicle” on YouTube.

To stay apace, commercial timbering moved from single species, 80-year felling cycles to 60 and now to 40 in less than 50 years, and fast growing hybrids and even clones are quickly shaving more years off the cycle. As a result, trees subject to this regimen never have a chance to become forests, robbing understory and underground plants, organisms, animals and insects of habitat, and with every accelerated clearcut increasing global warming.

But that’s just the outline of the story. Accessing trees that will be cut requires roads usually made by heavy equipment that disturbs the soil and provides ideal conditions for the invasive, non-native species that such machinery often introduces and spreads.

Aerial spraying of pesticides eliminates or stunts the competition of invasive vegetation and of non-commercially viable trees such as maples, oaks and madrones. These poisons drift from helicopters or wash into streams, creeks and rivers, affecting humans, pets, domestic livestock and wild animals. The land is replanted with a monoculture — typically Douglas fir — and the cycle begins anew.

Incredibly, this ecological trauma is a common practice legitimized by Oregon’s Forest Practices Act and a host of political and bureaucratic enablers. The McDougal brothers, Greg Demers and a plethora of other opportunists are easy to dislike for their callous pursuit of filthy lucre. But it’s important to understand that they cannot operate without city, county or state approval.

Not so long ago, clearcuts were hidden from the public by roadside buffers. But gradually discretion and deceit gave way to open greed, and the public by and large became inured to stumps and logging roads as common features in their viewsheds.

Though the McDougal brothers have ravaged the landscapes of Lane County for decades, recent logging on the west edge of Lane Community College drew attention because of its proximity to the college, because it became a political and environmental issue for a high school ecology class — members of which testified at a local land use hearing — and because the significant bite it took out of heavily wooded slopes is highly visible to the many cars passing by it on 30th Avenue.

To the quick cutting and slash-burning regime, the McDougals, Weyerhaeuser and their ilk add the more serious and long-lasting impacts of housing sprawl, bringing residents and their infrastructure farther into the country and driving wildlife out.

The property near LCC is typical of how the system operates: Hired consultants apply for county legal lot verifications, often based on old and sometimes illegible deeds that pop up in ostensibly single tax lots. After the county’s approval they submit a new application with the approved lots property line adjusted for maximum financial benefit to the developers. It’s a common and deadly paradigm: Buy cheaply, clearcut the trees when the market is high and sell what remains as lots for high-end housing.

When the state Legislature authorized commercial (F-1) and residential impacted forestland (F-2) zoning in the early 1980s, allowing in F-2 one house on a minimum 80 acres, surely they didn’t anticipate the property division commonplace in Lane County today. Now with so-called “template dwellings” approved on just a few forested acres and old deeds providing the pretext for further land divisions, instead of one large tract with one house, one well, one septic system, one driveway and one utility line, Lane County is permitting multiple houses, wells, septic systems and infrastructure on smaller lots created within the same acreage. Most of these manipulated lots retain their F-2 zoning and their tax deferrals even though, practically speaking, these pieces have lost most of their value as productive timberland.

Considering that Oregon is one of the fastest growing states in the nation, we can expect to see more of Lane County’s rural landscape urbanized by weak, anachronistic land use laws and enforcement and often questionable Land Management Division (LMD) policies and practices. In defense, LandWatch Lane County, a nonprofit working for over two decades to protect Lane County’s countryside from sprawl, has been forced to file numerous costly appeals, including a challenge to the legality of four of the six lots the county’s hearing official recently approved on the McDougal clearcut near LCC. Through this volunteer organization, vulnerable wildlife depend on vigilant and supportive neighbors to avert the saws and subdivisions intending to move in next door.

Before such land use transactions, however, the Forest Practices Act and its defenders, the State Forestry Board and politicians of all stripes, provide the validation and backup for practices that should have gone the way of lead paint and DDT. Even former governor Tom McCall left the timber industry to its own devices.

Notwithstanding, prolonged, persistent and loud public outcry by contacting political representatives, writing letters and editorials and direct confrontation has been and will be effective, as it was in the multifaceted, long-term fight to stop field burning. State and national representatives must hear that clearcutting and aerial spraying of pesticides are Oregon’s past, not its future.

Robert Emmons is president of LandWatch Lane County.

A SURVIVOR SPEAKS

Each shooting hits too close to home. Every time there’s a Las Vegas, Parkland, Sandy Hook, I am 16 again. I am walking to the Thurston cafeteria. I am late today. The morning’s fight with my mom delayed me, saving my life.

As I’m walking, students run out of the entrance like a flock of gulls scared off our football field by a menace.

“Run if you want to live, Chalan,” a senior yells. The men are wearing tuxedos. Today is the Men of Excellence breakfast, celebrating the strong, young men of our school.

The juxtaposition of finely dressed students fleeing has me thinking that this is a game. Because, back then, what else could it be?

I relive this: the news vans, helicopters, sirens, searching crowds for friends so I can hug them, feel them alive.

Every time a mass shooting happens, I remember trying to call my mom. Landlines were more normal. Lines are busy. It’s hours before I reach my mom, telling her I’m okay. I didn’t die in school today.

For 20 years I have read it’s a mental health issue, video games, movies, parenting, drugs. Other countries have all of those and don’t have murdered children.

They have strict gun control. They don’t have the NRA buying politicians like Trump, Rubio and Ryan.

To the rhetoric, I say enough. To complacency and conspiracy, enough.

Enough placating other arguments.

I want stricter gun regulation and I want it 20 fucking years ago.

But today will do.

*Chalan N. Moon
Eugene*

ONE DOWN, 4,999 TO GO

As a Kansas voter, I really need to know how to sign the petition to add Bob Keefer and Rick Levin to our ballot. Please.

*Scott Bradley
Wichita, Kansas*

NOT FUNNY, BOB

We should keep our sense of humor during this Reality Show Presidency, but Bob Keefer running for governor of Kansas is decidedly un-funny. It is careless, and echoes the ignorance of privilege that is at the core of this country’s political and social crisis.

The kids in Kansas are taking a political stand against a government that doesn’t represent them and using existing legislature to initiate change. It isn’t supportive to co-opt their statement, Bob, and use it as a personal joke. If those kids in Kansas are running in earnest? Well, Bob, you just made sure no one will take them seriously. Thanks for helping the cause, Bob, #sarcasm.

What’s more, candidacy filings are processed by government administrators and officers whose job it is to actually govern, and who are paid by local taxpayer money. Your joke, Bob, actually cost the state of Kansas and its citizens real resources, resources best used to process actual and concerned candidates with well-considered platforms and vested interests.