

# Oregon State cut down 420-year-old Douglas fir

Doubts emerge over reason

By **ROB DAVIS**  
*The Oregonian*

When the first English colony was established at Jamestown in 1607, the Douglas fir seedling was about eight years old, growing on a hillside 20 minutes northwest of what is now Corvallis.

It climbed slowly for decades, competing for sunlight. While some forestland in the area was burned by the native Kalapuya people and converted to prairie, the fir and others around it were in a wetter part of forest and free to grow. If fire came through, it didn't kill them.

By the time of an 1826 Pacific Northwest exploration by the famed botanist David Douglas, the fir species' namesake, the tree already was a giant more than 200 years old.

There it stood for generations — until May, when the chainsaws came.

The seedling that sprouted in 1599 in Oregon State University's McDonald-Dunn research forest was cut down by the public college, along with other trees more than 250 years old. The decision netted \$425,000 for the university's College of Forestry. School officials say the revenue will fund teaching, research and outreach, but it happened at a time when the university's forestry school has accelerated other timber cuts and dipped into its reserves to fund \$19 million in cost overruns on a major construction project.

The forestry school's interim dean, Anthony Davis, has since acknowledged his mistake in approving the 16-acre cut known as the No Vacancy harvest. He has temporarily halted all logging of trees older than 160 years on the university's 15,000 acres of research forests.

"Harvesting this stand



Rob Davis/The Oregonian

One of the stumps in the old growth grove clearcut by foresters with Oregon State University.

did not align with the college's values," Davis wrote in a July 12 letter to the school community, first reported by the Corvallis Gazette-Times. "Moving forward, we have learned from this matter."

The felling of the old growth trees raises questions about Oregon State's land stewardship at precisely the wrong time. Top state leaders are weighing whether to hand over management of the 82,500-acre Elliott State Forest to the university's College of Forestry, a transfer that would quintuple Oregon State's forest holdings.

## Doubt

Records reviewed by The Oregonian cast doubt on the university's justification for cutting what it knew were trees as old as 260 years. Records also show the university recently allowed a separate clearcut seven times bigger than permitted under its own management plans.

Taken together, the cuts threaten the credibility of a school that has deep ties to the timber industry but says it can be trusted to do more than maximize timber production in the Elliott.

"I don't know why they're so blind to the magnificence of these trees," says Norm Johnson, a retired Oregon State forest ecology professor who helped develop the Northwest Forest Plan, the Clinton-era blueprint that ended the 1980s timber wars in federal forests. "It's just very discouraging. And it raises all sorts of concerns about management of the college forests."

"They made it a much heavier lift for the college to get the Elliott."

The old-growth clearcut might have gone unnoticed.

Doug Pollock, 55, a former Hewlett-Packard sustainability engineer who lives in Corvallis, remembers getting a notice on May 6 that the university planned to log the nearby McDonald-Dunn stand, a spot he explored frequently with his family. The notice arrived one day before the university closed the forest to the public.

Surely, Pollock remembers thinking, they won't cut the giants.

"It was just this alley of big, majestic trees," Pollock said. "You just assume that old growth trees like this would be protected in the management plans at OSU."

Those plans protect 350 acres of Oregon State's old growth — 2% of its holdings. Those holdings include tracts in places including Columbia County, Gaston, Corvallis and Union County.

Johnson, the retired Oregon State professor, fought unsuccessfully to have the protected areas include the 16-acre grove that became the No Vacancy timber sale.

But even though the trees weren't protected, Johnson said, the university's forest managers waited to harvest them. Through decades when old growth was flying off federal land, the school left the old growth grove alone.

"They knew it was special, they knew it was different," Johnson said. "You got these really old trees here, which are of themselves magnificent, but there's a stand of them. It's just remarkable."

Pollock discovered the trees had been cut while out on a run. He was devastated.

Pollock started asking questions of Brent Klumph, the college's forest manager. In a May 30 email, Klumph told Pollock that the plan-

ning process for the harvest started two years ago "when we first started to notice mortality within the stand."

The interim dean, in his public letter, said the decision to clearcut the trees was "based on recent evidence of a decline in stand health" and was intended to turn the old growth grove into land that generated timber.

But the university's own records raise questions about that justification.

In 2018, a survey known as a timber cruise estimated that 4% of the harvested lumber would come from dead or dying trees.

"Almost none of it is dead and dying," said Johnson, who reviewed the cruise at The Oregonian's request.

"This stand was not unhealthy in an ecological sense," Johnson said. "In fact, it was the opposite."

When the trees were finally cut this year, the school's intent, Davis wrote in his letter, was to turn the stand into "a timber-generating future condition."

In other words, the giants were taking up space that could be used to plant trees for harvest.

## Learning opportunity

Surveying the sun-baked clearcut this week, Davis said the school was using the No Vacancy cut as a learning opportunity for its participation in the Elliott State Forest discussion.

"I actually think accountability and trust partly come from transparency and being able to say we wouldn't do this again," he said, "because we've now had a chance to realize that runs counter to some of the values which weren't being amplified, that weren't articulated."

Davis said he should have sought more information about the ages of the trees before approving the cut. He was clear that responsibility stopped with him.

"We should have acted differently on this stand," he said.

Oregon State's College of Forestry, university officials often proclaim, is the No. 2 forestry school in the world. (As ranked by the Center for World University Rankings in the United Arab Emirates.) It is home to preeminent scientists conducting groundbreaking research.

It also has strong financial links to the timber industry. Numerous faculty positions are endowed by timber companies and their executives, including the deanship, funded by a \$5 million gift from Allyn Ford, the former CEO of Roseburg Forest Products.

The forestry school's management decisions have drawn nationwide scrutiny.

In 2006, Hal Salwasser, then the school's dean, led a contingent of professors who tried to suppress the publication of a graduate student's work in Science, the nation's preeminent scientific journal. The student, Dan Donato, had found salvage logging after wildfires doesn't help forests recover and could increase fire risks. The finding ran counter to the industry's position.

A year later, two landslides from clearcuts logged on university-owned land on U.S. Highway 30 west of Clatskanie sent a wall of mud and debris into Woodson, a small community. No one was killed, but the slides damaged homes and vehicles.

More recently, \$6 million in accelerated timber sales from the school's forest near Clatskanie are being used to help defray cost overruns for a College of Forestry construction project, the Oregon Forest Science Complex. Costs ballooned on the \$60 million building, meant to showcase the potential for a pricey building material made in Oregon known as cross-laminated timber.

## Port settles with derelict boat owner

By **EDWARD STRATTON**  
*The Astorian*

The Port of Astoria has settled a dispute with the owner of a derelict boat Coastwise formerly parked at the East Mooring Basin.

The Port voluntarily dismissed all claims without costs against Nick Mathias, the vessel's owner. The details of the settlement were not disclosed.

The Port sued Mathias last year for more than \$112,000 in back-due moorage and abandonment fees. The agency claims the California resident sent a letter in September announcing he would abandon the Coastwise.

Mathias claimed the Port unfairly raised the rent on him while the East Mooring Basin deteriorated. Last year, The Port closed a rotting causeway at the marina, requiring boat owners to board skiffs to reach their vessels.



Edward Stratton/The Astorian

The Port of Astoria settled a dispute over back-due rent with Nick Mathias, owner of the fishing vessel Coastwise, which has been removed from the East Mooring Basin.

"They knew I couldn't move the boat. They knew I had no choice but to keep paying," Mathias wrote in his response to the Port's lawsuit. "There was no way I could continue to pay this amount so I had no choice but to abandon the boat along with all of the money I had spent fixing it up."

The boat has since been taken away.

The settlement ends the

last of three lawsuits the Port has filed in the past two years trying to cut down on derelict vessels languishing in its marinas. The agency secured a \$41,000 judgement against Marvin Olson, a Colorado resident and owner of the 1976 wooden sailboat John Muir, and more than \$17,000 from Henry Tomingas, an Alaska resident and owner of the charter vessel Wilderness Explorer.

## Local building company fined over wetlands

*The Astorian*

Local building company North River Homes will restore wetlands and pay a \$50,534 fine over violations at its Willow subdivision in Warrenton.

The state Department of Environmental Quality fined North River Homes, owned by the Nygaard family, for placing construction soils and sediment in wetlands, and for other violations of its stormwater permit. The state ordered the company to inventory wetlands and create a plan for restoration.

John M. Nygaard, a representative of the company, said a contractor at the subdivision didn't keep records up to the state's standards

and went outside the project area. The company plans to pay the fine, enhance nearby

wetlands as mitigation and start soon on the first phase of 30 homes, he said.

**WANTED**  
Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber  
Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA  
Contact: John Anderson • 360-269-2500

ONLY VALID AT BEAVERTON/ALOHA LOCATION  
CALL TODAY TO PERSONALIZE YOUR ORDER 503.642.0849

**\$150 OFF** LEER CANOPIES  
**\$100 OFF** BEDLINERS SPRAY IN AFTER BEFORE

**AllAmerican**  
TRUCK & SUV ACCESSORY CENTERS  
21575 SW TUALATIN VALLEY HWY • ALOHA 97006  
\*MUST PRESENT THIS COUPON TO REDEEM  
\*SOME EXCLUSIONS MAY APPLY

**The Clatsop County Fair**

**July 29 - Aug 3**  
**10am - 10pm**  
Adults \$5 | 12 & Under \$3 | Parking \$2

**TUES: FREE Hog Roast • 4pm**  
**FRI: Midland Concert, gates open 6pm**  
**SAT: Demolition Derby • 11am**

**NEW RIDES!** **GREAT FOOD!**

**Davis Amusement Cascadia** **GRILLS GONE WILD**

**MONSTER TRUCK RIDES EVERYDAY!**

**CLATSOP COUNTY FAIR EXPO**  
92937 Walluski Loop  
Astoria, Oregon • 503-325-4600  
WWW.CLATSOPCOFAIREXPO.COM