

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## OUR VIEW

# Managing forests to reduce wildfires

In southern Oregon, The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Forest Service and the Klamath Tribes set up what became one of the nation's largest outdoor laboratories.

Instead of racks of test tubes, however, this laboratory was populated by thousands of acres of trees.

The experiment: To determine how best to manage forestland to reduce the damage a wildfire causes.

The Nature Conservancy, which owns a vast swath of forestland, thinned one portion, performed controlled burns on another portion and did both on still another. Other portions were left unmanaged to serve as controls that would allow scientists to compare the management practices.

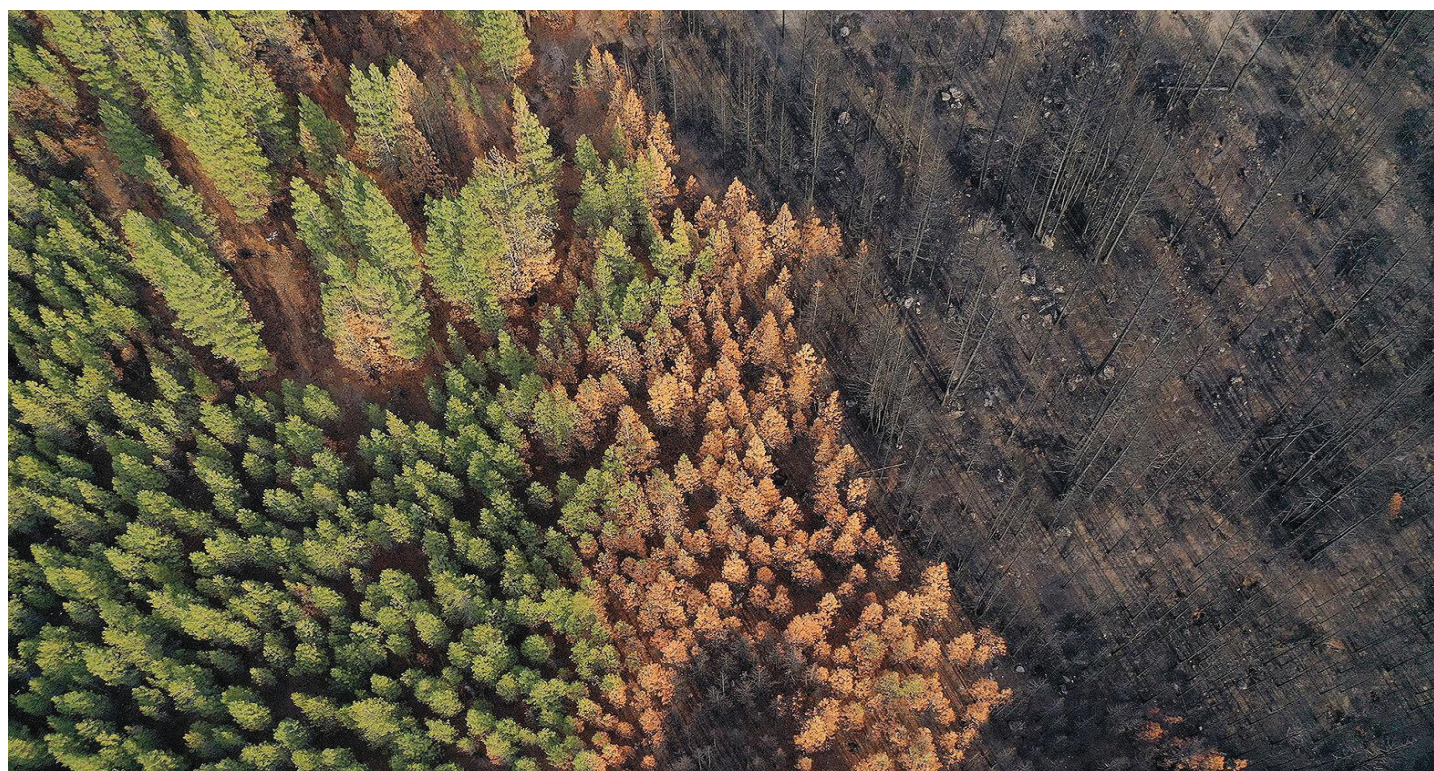
The catalyst was the Bootleg fire — at 400,000 acres one of the largest wildfires in the West this year.

What the experiment showed was fascinating and provides a giant step in the direction of determining how best to manage forests.

It found that the portion of the forest left unmanaged was incinerated. Feeding on the excess fuels, the fire turned trees into charcoal and the soil was transformed into a dead zone.

So much for the theory that forests should be left unmanaged.

The sections that were thinned or that had been managed using controlled burns fared much better. The damage was significantly less than that sustained by the unmanaged forest.



Brady Holden/The Nature Conservancy

At left, an area where both thinning and controlled burning took place before the Bootleg fire. At right, an area where no thinning or controlled burning took place.

But the section on which both thinning and controlled burns had been performed fared best of all.

The evidence clearly shows that thinning and controlled burns together significantly reduce wildfire damage. Most of the remaining trees are alive and will quickly rebound from the fire.

Beyond that, fighting a wildfire in a forest that has been managed is far easier than one where the forest is unmanaged. Towering flames that leaped from crown to crown and laid waste to the forest were

replaced by much smaller flames that could be extinguished.

In one instance, a whirling fire tornado was knocked to the ground when it blew from an unmanaged forest section to a managed section.

There's still lots of work to do. Scientists need to put numbers to the observations and help others come up with follow-up experiments that replicate and expand upon this experiment.

Our hope is the impact of livestock grazing in forests will be included in future experiments.

This will determine the value of grazing as a means of reducing the underbrush that feeds wildfires.

We also live in an era of a changing climate. We need to find ways to reduce the size and number of wildfires, which spew millions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

It is better to sequester that greenhouse gas in trees or lumber by managing the forests than to release it in catastrophic wildfires.

That's something on which reasonable people can agree.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Amen

Just finished reading the editorial, "Too Occupied with Divisions" (The Astorian, Dec. 2), and must say "amen."

But while we witness what's happening at the local level, I think the beginnings stem from the attitude in Washington, D.C.

At 73 years old, I can remember when congressional differences may have been extreme, yet the final outcome was usually a compromise, based on what was best for the country and the people.

Today the goal seems to be a result that's best for the party and its contributors.

WILLIAM BELL  
Astoria

### Enabling

The beginning of the feature story, "A holiday weekend escape route," by Andy Cameron (The Astorian, Nov. 27) was witty and well written, and a humorous description of the day after turkey day.

By the fourth paragraph, the writer loses me when suggesting weekend escape from reality is achieved by using alcohol. An alcohol abuser, or a recovering alcoholic, after reading this story in The Astorian, could see the escape described by Cameron as their trigger, or permission to drink along with all those festive downtown drinkers. Why not? It's part of our local culture, and offers us "solace," or so it states in feature story.

From my perspective, the word "escape" took me back to how I lived, and my thinking, prior to my own relapse-free alcohol recovery 32 years ago. Now that you understand another reader's perspective, as a writer, using less inflammatory words such as "diversion" or "alternative" would have worked better.

RICHARD W. COVERT  
Astoria

### Where's the beef?

I find indignation over The Astorian applying for, or accepting a "handout" from the government amusing, and quite selfish ("Begging," Nov. 20).

Subscribers and advertisers have always paid for the newsprint and influenced a newspaper's content. Our newspaper stands as the underpinning of the community it serves. Why not accept other forms of public support?

I am happy to have accepted and spent the stimulus checks I have, or may yet receive, and businesses of every stripe routinely accept government subsidies. The

subsidies come in many forms, most notably as tax breaks.

Is the writer even familiar with corpo-

rate welfare or government "pork barrel" spending? I think he should stop biting the hand that feeds him. If The Astorian folds,

where would I air my opinions?

GARY DURHEIM  
Seaside



"I get you have overnight delivery, but what's your return policy?"