

Study: A few large trees in Eastern Oregon store most carbon

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

JOSEPH — When the U.S. Forest Service recommended lifting a 25-year-old ban on logging large trees in six national forests across Central and Eastern Oregon, the idea was to create healthier landscapes better adapted for drought, disease and more intense wildfires.

New research suggests the proposal could, however, undermine the forests’ role in mitigating climate change by absorbing carbon from the atmosphere.

Large trees, defined as 21 inches in diameter or bigger, make up 3% of the forests, yet they store 42% of above-ground carbon in their trunks, stems and branches, according to a study published Nov. 5 in the journal *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*.

David Mildrexler, an ecologist with the Eastern Oregon Legacy Lands in Joseph, led the study to inform future forest management decisions.

“Providing this information, I hope, will allow everyone to understand that these large trees play a very important role in our forest ecosystems,” Mildrexler said. “We should think very carefully before we start with widespread removals



Frontiers in Forests and Global Change/Contributed Photo

A stand of ponderosa pines and Douglas fir. Large trees — those 21 inches in diameter or bigger — make up 3% of national forests in Central and Eastern Oregon, yet they store 42% of above-ground carbon in their trunks, stems and branches, according to a study published Nov. 5 in the journal *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*.

of them.”

Earlier this year, the Forest Service proposed amending its rule that forbid cutting 21-inch-diameter trees in the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, Malheur, Ochoco, Deschutes and Fremont-Winema national forests — part of a broader set of environmental regulations known as the Eastside Screens.

Instead of a blanket ban, the amendment would turn

the 21-inch standard into a guideline, allowing for some logging of large trees in areas where land managers say it would benefit the forests.

For example, the Pacific Northwest Research Station issued a report in February which concluded that removing some large trees, especially undesirable shade-tolerant species, could help protect old-growth ponderosa pine

and Douglas fir by reducing competition for moisture and eliminating ladder fuels that drive larger, hotter wildfires.

But Mildrexler said the role large trees play as a carbon sink cannot be understated.

“As these trees continue to grow over the next 10-20 years, they will continue to rapidly accumulate more carbon,” he said. “Letting these big trees grow big-

ger is absolutely important to solving climate change. It would also be good for protecting water and fisheries, habitat and wildlife, and cultural values that we value for our forests.”

Mildrexler and his team analyzed 3,335 forest inventory plots across the six national forests as part of the study. Specifically, they were interested in looking at the size and composition of five main species, including ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, Engelmann spruce, grand fir and western larch.

Using that data, Mildrexler said they could use species-specific equations that allowed them to determine how much above-ground carbon was stored in the larger trees.

“You can see there is a very disproportionate amount of carbon that is stored in these large trees,” he said. “That is consistent with other studies globally, that in some forest systems we find as much as half of the above-ground carbon is stored in the largest 1% of the trees.”

Stephen Baker, a spokesman for the Forest Service’s Pacific Northwest Region office in Portland, said the agency recently finished its public comment period for the Eastside Screens revision, and a final rule is

expected by spring 2021.

Carbon storage is one of the topics that will be analyzed in the final environmental assessment, Baker said.

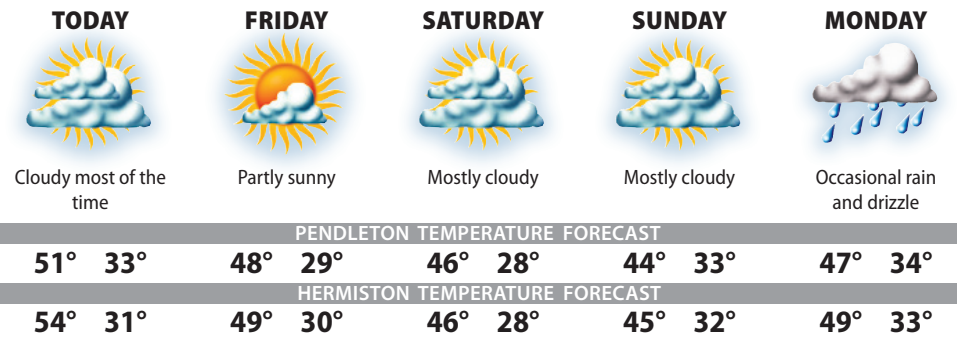
“We’re looking at how to best balance multiple values and priorities, including managing for wildfire and protecting wildlife habitat,” Baker wrote in an email.

Andy Geissler, federal timber program director for the American Forest Resource Council, said the carbon study further validates the proposed Eastside Screens amendment, allowing for the harvest of some large trees to protect others amid shifting conditions.

AFRC, a timber industry group, submitted its comments on the Eastside Screens, arguing that a more adaptive 21-inch harvest rule will provide land managers with the flexibility to meet desired forest conditions.

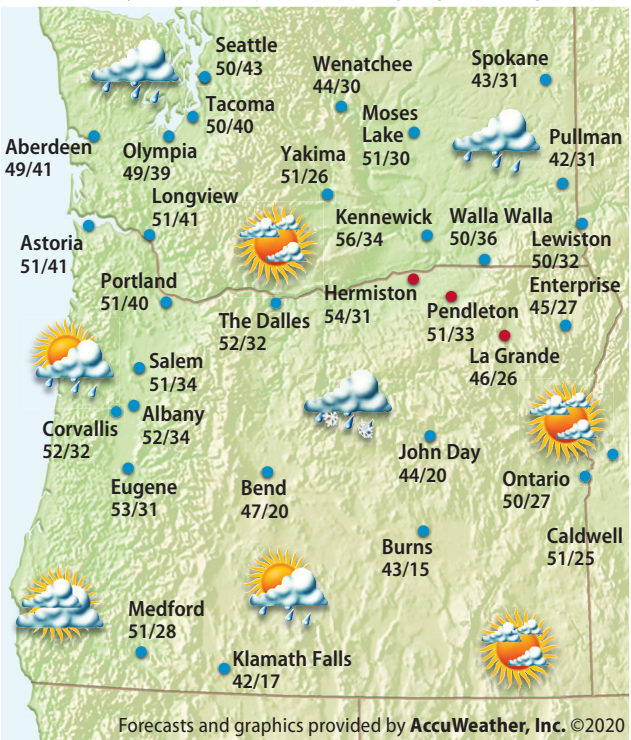
“I think it’s easy to look at this paper and say, if these large trees are storing this much carbon, we should leave them alone,” Geissler said. “That fails to recognize that these forests are dynamic. They are competing for resources. ... Nothing that I read in this paper took me aback and made me think the Forest Service was going down the wrong path.”

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

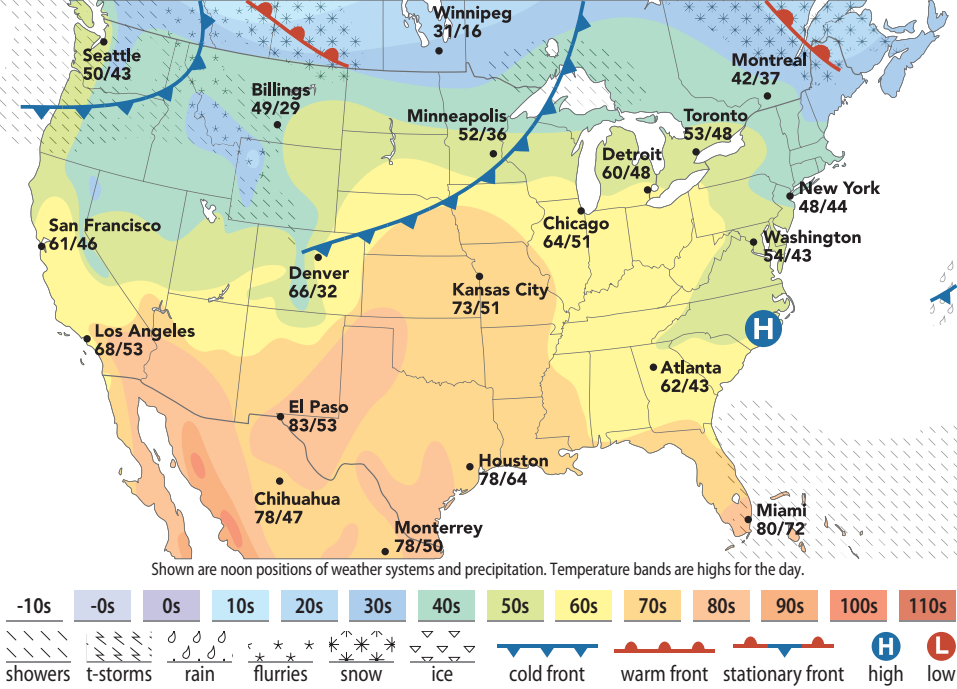
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	59°	41°	
Normals	48°	32°	
Records	75° (1897)	4° (2014)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.02"		
Month to date	2.30"		
Normal month to date	0.81"		
Year to date	12.06"		
Last year to date	11.45"		
Normal year to date	10.84"		
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.			
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW	
Yesterday	54°	42°	
Normals	49°	32°	
Records	71° (1932)	9° (1961)	
PRECIPITATION			
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.03"		
Month to date	1.61"		
Normal month to date	0.68"		
Year to date	3.90"		
Last year to date	4.95"		
Normal year to date	7.99"		
WINDS (in mph)			
	Today	Fri.	
Boardman	WSW 7-14	SW 4-8	
Pendleton	WSW 8-16	SW 4-8	
SUN AND MOON			
Sunrise today	7:01 a.m.		
Sunset tonight	4:20 p.m.		
Moonrise today	11:55 a.m.		
Moonset today	8:45 p.m.		
First	Full	Last	New
Nov 21	Nov 30	Dec 7	Dec 14

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 93° in Tucson, Ariz. Low 5° in Silver Bay, Minn.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Oregon’s unemployment rate falls to 6.9%

By **MIKE ROGOWAY**
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon’s jobless rate fell a full percentage point in October, to 6.9%, but the number of long-term unemployed has tripled since the coronavirus recession began last spring. That’s according to data out Tuesday, Nov. 17, from the Oregon Employment Department.

Oregon added 14,200 jobs last month and has now regained almost half of the jobs it lost during the first two months of the pandemic. The state’s outlook is highly uncertain, though, with Gov. Kate Brown ordering a coronavirus “freeze” beginning Wednesday, Nov. 18, amid an enormous spike in infections.

While the freeze allows nearly all businesses to continue operating as they have been, it requires bars and restaurants to stop dine-in service and shutters all gyms. The freeze will last at least two weeks in most of the state, and at least four weeks in Multnomah County where the recent outbreaks have been

especially severe.

Oregon bars and restaurants added 1,700 jobs last month, but the sector remains down 20% from a year ago, with fresh closures about to begin.

The employment department failed to promptly pay jobless claims at the beginning of the pandemic, overwhelmed by the flood of claims and hobbled by an obsolete computer system that was unable to adapt to changes in benefits programs. The department says it’s much better positioned to process any new claims that accompany the pending freeze order, but tens of thousands of Oregonians are still waiting for their initial claims to be processed.

Oregon’s October unemployment numbers match the national rate. Just 3,900 Oregonians filed new jobless claims in the first week of November, the lowest total since February in the weeks before the pandemic hit. The pace of job losses has slowed enormously over the past several weeks, but the resurgent coronavirus could renew Oregon’s economic struggles.

Meanwhile, a large subset of workers doesn’t appear to be benefiting from the state’s economic recovery. The employment department said Nov. 17 that 54,600 Oregonians have been out of work for at least six months.

Many of those workers have received extended unemployment benefits, which last as long as 39 weeks under federal coronavirus legislation. With Oregon’s coronavirus downturn now in its 35th week, though, those benefits will soon expire.

Separate federal bonuses, which paid workers an extra \$600 a week initially and an additional \$300 a week later, have also expired. And the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program Congress established for self-employed workers in March runs out at the end of the year.

Coronavirus infections are up sharply across the nation, but no additional federal relief measures appear imminent as Congress is deadlocked over the size of any future aid package.

IN BRIEF

Walla Walla Public Schools to remain in distance learning through end of 2020

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — Walla Walla Public Schools will keep students in distance learning through the end of the calendar year, Superintendent Wade Smith said at a Tuesday, Nov. 17, school board meeting.

Citing 489 active COVID-19 cases in Walla Walla County, Smith said the district

can’t consider returning at this time.

“Based on everything we’re seeing, we’re going to have to continue our distance learning at least through Dec. 18,” Smith said. “We simply cannot look at resuming in-person learning before that.”

Dec. 18 is the last day of school before winter break begins. School is set to resume on Jan. 2.

Smith’s comments came in his report to the board. There was no further board discussion on the matter.

— *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*

CLARIFICATION: In the Page A1 story “The Last Straw,” published Tuesday, Nov. 19, a photo was incorrectly used as the main illustration for the story. Bare Bones Beer & Tobacco has no plans to close.

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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