

Reservation forest continues to provide many benefits

By Tracy Dugan

Most of us know that the Grand Ronde Tribe has been enjoying some recent financial success due to economic ventures like the Spirit Mountain Casino. What some tribal members may have forgotten is that the Natural Resources Division (NRD) staff continues to manage our reservation forest lands and that timber harvesting continues to be both a significant source of income for the Tribe and an essential task in maintaining a healthy and productive forest. Also, what some tribal members may not realize is the unique manner in which the reservation is managed.

I recently had the opportunity to spend a few hours with two of the Tribe's Foresters from the Natural Resources Division. I met with Jeff Kuust, the Tribe's Timber and Roads Coordinator, who is responsible for planning and administering the Tribe's timber harvest and road maintenance programs, and Pete Wakeland, a Tribal Forester responsible for timber sale layout and logging contract administration.

Currently, the Tribe's Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP), dictates that the Natural Resources Division harvest an average of 5.7 million board feet of timber each year from the 10,054 acre reservation. "This is the sustainable harvest level for the Reservation that has been calculated," said Kuust. "In other words, the Tribe could conceivably continue to harvest and replant at this level, under the current constraints and objectives, forever and not run out of timber. There seems to be this idea floating around that we have been over-harvesting. This is simply not true. To date, we are right on target since we first began management of the reservation lands back in 1989."

While their primary job is to ensure a sustainable timber harvest from the reservation, our Foresters manage other resources also. In fact, the first step the NRD takes before harvesting timber from the reservation is to assess the environmental impacts that may occur. This is done through an interdisciplinary process involving not only the timber sale layout staff, but also the Natural Resources Division Biologists, the Environmental Coordinator, the Silviculture and Protection Coordinator and the Natural Resources Division Manager. Together they determine what impacts there may be from a given harvest unit and what can be done to avoid or mitigate for these impacts.

"We take pride in the fact that we are preserving fish and wildlife habitat in our harvest planning," said Wakeland, as we arrived at a recent regenera-



tion harvest (clearcut) unit called 'Its-Woot.' "The Tribe usually exceeds State requirements for resource protection on harvest areas," Wakeland pointed out. The NRMP requires four wildlife trees per acre harvested to be left and, when possible, two snags per acre are also preserved. The stream that is buffered along the Its-Woot sale flows year-round, but does not have fish in it due to an impassable waterfall downstream. Nevertheless, this stream was protected by leaving standing trees, some of which were 'topped' or cut off at about 30 to 60 feet up the tree to create 'snags.'

"Snags provide habitat for insects that are fed upon by birds such as woodpeckers. The woodpeckers in turn create 'cavities' or holes for small mammals such as flying squirrels to nest in. The squirrels then may become prey for the rare spotted owl or the more common red-tailed hawk, to name just a few of the species dependant upon snag habitat," said Kuust.

The NRD also works cooperatively with the recently created Cultural Resources Protection Program (CRRP) to determine if harvest plans may present negative impacts to culturally significant areas on the Reservation that would need protection. In fact, the boundaries of the Three Creeks Logging Unit (a regeneration harvest unit) originally included part of a ridge that experts believe was the location of the Tillamook Trail. "Through intensive collaboration between the NRD and CRRP and examination of the site by a Consulting Archeologist, new boundaries were established and a road

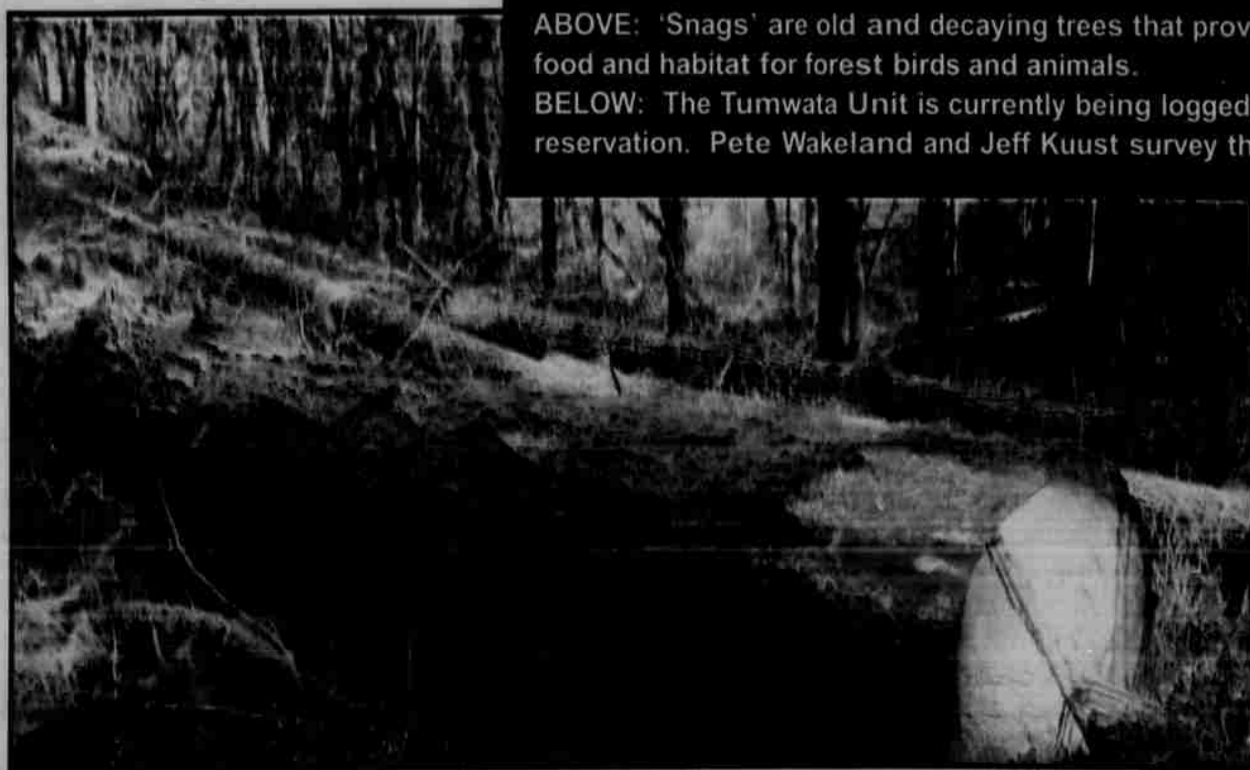
was relocated to cross the ridge line in only three places, all of which lacked any indicators of the trail location. The remainder of the ridge is a protected area," said Wakeland. "In addition, a provision is included in the timber sale contract that would impose a \$10,000 fine for any illegal entry or disturbance to the trail's standing timber buffer." Another contract provision will require the Purchaser to rehabilitate the road after logging. "We feel that these are pretty strong incentives for the logger of this sale to avoid disturbing this area," said Kuust.

Besides wildlife habitat and cultural resources, the NRD also is concerned about other resource issues. "Maintaining water quality is another primary concern for the NRD," said Kuust. "We routinely leave unharvested stream buffers that are unthinkable by industry standards. Because of these stream buffers, I believe that our harvest areas do not impose significantly negative effects on water quality." The NRD is also concerned about management of big-game populations. "We will always need some level of regeneration harvesting to provide grass and shrub forage areas for deer and elk," said Kuust.

The NRD has also recently begun thinning some stands (blocks of standing trees). "Thinning is important in certain areas because the trees grow so thick that they begin to compete with one another for sunlight, water, and nutrients. When this competition occurs, some trees begin to overshadow others and some trees slowly die," said Kuust. "We have begun thinning some stands that are showing these signs of 'stagnation' or a dramatic decline in stand growth rate. These are stands that, if not thinned, would not put on much wood growth for probably decades. Nor, would they provide good wildlife habitat, because there would not be enough sunlight reaching the ground to allow shrubs and grasses to grow." By thinning out some trees, the Tribe can sell some timber and give the remaining trees the room they need to grow. The result is that the Tribe will have fewer trees, but those trees will be healthier and will become bigger, faster! Habitat conditions for many animals will also improve.

Management of natural resources on the reservation is truly unique. Careful, cooperative planning ensures that the forest will remain healthy and productive. The reservation continues to provide income and recreation using a management style that tribal members can be proud of.

Jeff Kuust and Pete Wakeland contributed to writing this story.



ABOVE: 'Snags' are old and decaying trees that provide food and habitat for forest birds and animals.

BELOW: The Tumwata Unit is currently being logged on the reservation. Pete Wakeland and Jeff Kuust survey the area.

