

THE FUTURE OF OUR FOREST

■ Natural Resources preparing new Management Plan.

By Brent Merrill

The Grand Ronde Tribe's Natural Resources department is preparing a new ten-year Management Plan that will begin in the year 2001 and run through 2010. The Tribe's current five-year management plan concludes at the end of 2000.

After the Grand Ronde Tribe achieved restoration and federal recognition, a reservation of 9,811 acres of timberland in the Grand Ronde area was established. The land was restored to the Tribe on September 9, 1988 by an act of Congress.

The reservation is in the Coast Mountain Range approximately 25 miles inland from Lincoln City.

The Tribe took over management of the land from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Natural Resources Manager Cliff Adams said the Tribe is currently in the first step of building the new plan.

"To build this plan we have to go through the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process and that requires scoping," said Adams. Scoping is an informational gathering process. The Natural Resources department has met with tribal members and interested members of the local community to seek suggestions and input to the plan that will take care of the scoping requirement.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) requires the new Management Plan.

"We have to have a plan in place by the year 2001," said Adams. "We want to know what the tribal members think about the current management and what they would like to see in the future, at least over the next ten-year period."

Adams said the time is now to comment on the important aspects of the plan.

"This is a great opportunity to make their feelings known," said Adams.

Public comment from the non-tribal members of the community was welcome at the scoping meetings that were held. Only one member of the non-tribal member community (David Hampton of Hampton Tree Farms) showed up to comment.

Hampton expressed concern over the continuation of tribal timber to their mills and the perpetuation of the local jobs that depend on that timber.

"Even though it is a small amount of wood that we make available for their mills, it is still very important to them," said Adams.

Adams said the relationship between the Tribe and Hampton will continue.

Tribal community meetings were held during the first week of December. Natural Resources staff updated members on current management practices and listened to comments that could be incorporated into the scope of the plan.

The Tribe's Natural Resources department is also meeting with the two agencies that are adjacent landowners (Bureau of Land Management



Tribal member input will be an important factor in the Management Plan. Here, a Natural Resources community meeting held in Grand Ronde.

Photo by Brent Merrill

and U.S. Forest Service) to the Tribe's reservation.

"We are trying to gather input from all people who might have some interest," said Adams of the scoping process.

Adams said he doesn't want to give the impression that non-tribal members will have a major influence on the plan and its management. The Tribe is extending the comment to those interested individuals as a courtesy.

Adams said the "real meat of the plan" will come from tribal member input, staff input, the Fish and Wildlife Committee, the Timber Committee and the Tribal Council.

The Natural Resources department will continue to look at new and different strategies and approaches to how the reservation timber is managed. Adams said the department will also look at other plans to see if they can take information from those plans and incorporate aspects of them here in Grand Ronde.

The Tribe's original agreement with the BIA is still in place and the Tribe must operate under those constraints.

"That agreement says that we (the Tribe) will continue to harvest timber on an even flow, sustained yield for a 20-year period," said Adams. "We still have nine years of that agreement left."

A consultant has been hired to put the ten-year plan together into a draft document. The consultant is David Evans and Associates of Portland.

The consultants will write the en-

vironmental assessment portion of the plan and be involved in the scoping meetings as well.

Adams said several parts of the ten-year plan are already underway. The community input from non-tribal members and the scoping meetings with tribal members and adjacent agencies has been done.

"We have started the environmental assessment part, but at the same time, some of the staff has started to look at some different approaches and strategies," said Adams. "We will be gathering information for a new inventory for the plan and additional biological information we need for the plan. We will gather all of the base information together to then develop it. Then, the alternatives that come out of the scoping sessions will be examined and a preferred alternative will be chosen that we can build our strategies around."

Because of a major forest fire in 1845, 200-plus year old trees on the reservation are rare.

According to Adams, 200-plus year old trees will not be cut under the plan. Adams said there is only one tree on the reservation that is definitely more than 200 years old. He said there is a small pocket of trees on the reservation land that is around 175 years old and another pocket of trees that are 175 to 200 years old. Those trees will be protected under the plan.

The trees in the 175-year old pocket have their tops still intact. The trees in the older pocket have lost most of their tops, but they are still growing.

A current inventory of the reser-

vation will begin in January.

"We have a lot of stand (tree) information and biological information that we need to collect in order for us to build a good plan," said Adams of the inventory part of the plan.

The inventory will take three months to complete and is an important part of the process.

"We need the inventory information to confirm the inventory that we already have," said Adams.

Currently, the reservation timber is mainly Douglas fir (over 90 percent). Red alder, cedar and other conifers make up the rest of the timber on the reservation. The stands range in age from recently planted seedlings to well over 100 years old.

Most of the seedlings used for reforestation are grown from seeds gathered from trees on the reservation. Reforestation is the process of replanting harvested trees. The Tribe replants four trees for every one tree harvested.

A renewed emphasis on traditional, cultural resources located on the reservation has placed renewed importance on native plants like rushes, willows, alder, cedar, and yew trees. Culturally important plants will be protected and managed under the new plan.

Protection of important tribal resources on the reservation is also receiving renewed emphasis. Stream protection measures have increased and wildlife corridors are being provided. Wildlife trees are being retained in harvested units because they provide additional habitat for birds, mammals and other wildlife.