

LOGGING

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Rather than having a blanket exclusion on harvesting large trees, the Forest Service is instead recommending replacing the standard with a more adaptable guideline. Restoration projects would generally emphasize preserving both old and large trees, but with greater flexibility for land managers to adjust where needed.

The proposal defines “old” trees as 150 years, and “large” trees as more than 30 inches in diameter for grand fir, white fir and Douglas fir, and more than 21 inches for any other species.

In February, the Forest Service’s Pacific Northwest Research Station issued a report analyzing the Eastside Screens and concluded that removing some large trees may be beneficial for forest health.

As wildfire suppression became a widespread practice, researchers claim the forests are growing more dense with shade-tolerant species like white fir and grand fir. Not only do these trees compete for moisture and resources, but they are less fire-resistant than older, larger ponderosa pines.

Factor in climate change, and studies indicate the forests are becoming more susceptible to disturbances like drought, insects, diseases and large so-called “megafires.”

According to the Pacific Northwest Research Station’s report, “it is clear from our experience in applying ecosystem science to policy in the (Northwest) that simplistic rules and standards will, over time, generate unintended consequences, making it more rather than less difficult to manage for resilience to climate change and other threats, and to provide for multiple ecosystem services.”

Andy Geissler, federal timber program director for the American Forest Resource Council — a timber industry trade group that supports amending the Eastside Screens — said replacing the 21-inch standard would ultimately give the Forest Service greater latitude to meet its management goals.

“The objective of the Eastside Screens isn’t changing,” Geissler said. “That’s still staying the same.”

Environmental groups, however, argue the recommendation is based on politics and cherry-picked science that will weaken

habitat for wildlife and threaten older, larger trees that act as a carbon sink.

Rob Klavins, Northeast Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild, said going from a legally enforceable standard to a non-enforceable guideline will create a loophole “big enough to drive a log truck through.”

Klavins, who lives in Wallowa County, said he worries that replacing the 21-inch standard will make it more difficult for forest collaborative groups and partners to find consensus on projects in the future.

“Collaboration works best when there are agreed upon rules and sideboards. The Eastside Screens created the conditions for us to try and find common ground,” he said. “Without that, it’s a free-for-all.”

Klavins also criticized the Forest Service for rushing through the review process during a global pandemic, potentially limiting public participation. The Forest Service hosted three webinars in May leading up to its environmental assessment, including a science forum, intergovernmental workshop and partner technical workshop.

Veronica Warnock, conservation director for the Greater Hells Canyon Council based in La Grande, said the Forest Service should have conducted a more robust Environmental Impact Statement required under the National Environmental Policy Act to fully gauge the long-term impacts of changing the 21-inch rule.

“There are a lot of things open to interpretation here,” Warnock said. “There is a huge spectrum of activities where you can say we’re meeting the intent of this guideline. ... To say that it is not going to result in more large trees being cut would just be erroneous.”

Geissler said he does not anticipate a major spike in timber volume from replacing the 21-inch rule.

Last fiscal year, the six national forests sold a combined 229 million board-feet of timber, of which 178 million board-feet was sent to the sawmill. The rest was sold as firewood, biomass and non-saw material. For the 2020 fiscal year, the target is 255 million board-feet.

A 30-day public comment period is now underway, and two webinars are scheduled for 6-7:30 p.m. Aug. 19 and 1:30-3 p.m. Aug. 20, to provide information and gather feedback.

PIZZA

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Country Club, where Rogers periodically cooks wood-fired pizzas for its couples night. She bakes about 60 pizzas for most couples nights.

All of the wood-fired pizzas Rogers cooks have a thin crust. She explained if thicker dough was used, the outer shell could harden first. This would prevent the interior of the crust from being cooked through.

All toppings available for regular pizzas at Local Harvest are also available for its wood-fired pizzas. Rogers enjoys adding special toppings for her wood-fired pizzas, including peaches.

“We try to have fun with it,” she said, noting other new varieties offered include a bison pizza.

Cooking wood-fired pizza is a joy, Rogers said. “I love it,” she said. “You get to cook these beautiful pizzas and do it so quickly.”



Photo by Dick Mason/EO Media Group

Harvest Rogers slices a wood-fired pizza she made Friday, Aug. 21, at Local Harvest Eatery and Pub, La Grande. She and her father Bruce Rogers own the establishment.

BYPASS

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extended, national environmental enforcement clemency because monitoring oversight was relaxed. “The harm from this policy is already done,” said Cynthia Giles, EPA’s former assistant administrator under the Obama administration.

EPA has said it will end the COVID enforcement clemency this month.

Refinery giant Marathon Petroleum, already struggling financially before the pandemic, was one of the most aggressive in seeking to dial back its environmental monitoring. On the same day EPA announced its new policy, the Ohio-based company asked Indiana officials for relief from its leak detection, groundwater sampling, spill prevention, emissions testing and hazardous waste responsibilities at its facilities statewide. Indiana declined to issue a comprehensive waiver but agreed to consider individual requests.

“We believe that by taking these measures, we can do our part to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus,” Tim Peterkoski, environmental auditing and processes manager for Marathon Petroleum, told the Indiana Depart-



Photo by Paul Sancya/AP file

In this April 21 photo the Marathon Petroleum Corp. refinery is shown in Detroit, Michigan. Thousands of oil and gas operations, government facilities and other sites won permission to stop monitoring for hazardous emissions or otherwise bypass rules intended to protect health and the environment because of the coronavirus outbreak, The Associated Press has found.

ment of Environmental Management.

Marathon also pushed for and was granted permission to skip environmental tests at many of its refineries and gas stations in California, Michigan, North Dakota and Texas.

Spokesman Jamal Kheiry said Marathon sought broad regulatory relief early in the pandemic, when it was uncertain how long lockdowns would last or how its operations would be affected. But the company continued emissions monitoring and other activities, he said.

Penny Aucoin, a resident of New Mexico’s oil-rich Permian Basin, said since the pandemic, she

and her husband have spent days begging regulators to investigate surges of noxious gas or hisses that they feared could signal a dangerous leak from one of the many oil and gas companies operating near their mobile home.

“There’s nobody watching,” Aucoin said. “A lot of stuff is going wrong. And there’s nobody to fix it.”

Maddy Hayden, New Mexico’s environmental spokesperson, said her agency stopped in-person investigations of citizen air-quality complaints from March to May to protect staff and the public but stood ready to respond to emergencies.

Almost every state reported fielding requests from industries and local governments to cut back on compliance. Many were for activities like delaying in-person training or submitting records by email rather than paper. Others, however, were requests for temporary exemptions or extensions on monitoring and repairs to stop the flow of harmful soot, toxic compounds, disease-carrying contaminants or heavy metals, AP found.

Regulators, for example, waived in-person inspections at parts of a former nuclear test site in Nevada, switching to drive-by checks.

North Carolina allowed Chemours Co., which is cleaning up dangerous industrial compounds in drinking water, to pause sampling of residential wells because it would require entering elderly residents’ homes.

Saint-Gobain, whose New Hampshire plant has been linked by the state to water contaminated with chemicals, has requested delaying smokestack upgrades that would address the problem. The company says the delays are necessary partly due to problems the company’s suppliers and contractors have faced because of the coronavirus.

JOBLESS

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accommodation and food services account for 100 of the claims.

Leisure and hospitality saw the biggest jump in new jobs from June to July,

increasing from 500 to 560. Wallowa County saw the biggest decrease in unemployment rate of the tri-county area for July, dropping 0.8 points and moving below 10% to 9.8% while seeing an increase of 50 jobs to 2,590. The county saw a decrease of about

30% in continued claims and is down to 112, just above pre-pandemic levels. Health care and social assistance make up almost one-fourth (26) of the continued claims in Wallowa County. Leisure and hospitality saw a bump from 250 jobs in June to 290 in

July, the most in the county. That number, though, is still about 30% lower than the county has averaged in summer months in the industry in recent years. The county has not reported a week with 10 or more new first-time claims since early July.

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