

# Merry Christmas

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EO Media Group/Mateusz Perkowski  
Garrett Huggins and his wife, Ashley, prepare mistletoe for sale.

## MISTLETOE SEASON

### ENTREPRENEURS PROFIT FROM PARASITIC PLANT

By Mateusz Perkowski  
EO Media Group

After more than a decade in business, Garrett Huggins doesn't aspire to become a mistletoe magnate. Huggins is content to earn most of his income as a union carpenter while selling the wild-harvested holiday crop through his family's company, Genuine Oregon Mistletoe, as a sideline.

"We don't expect it to become a million-dollar company, but it does make Christmas happen for us, you know?" he said.

Though they get plenty of help from friends and family, Genuine Oregon Mistletoe is basically a two-person operation: Garrett collects the mistletoe from oak trees in Southern Oregon while his wife, Ashley, handles the marketing. Both help tie strands of the leafy perennial into bundles with ribbon and package them for shipping.

"When people call, they talk to me," Ashley said. "He didn't want to deal with the customer service side of things."

#### Wholesale parasite

The Hugginses are similar to other mistletoe entrepreneurs in Oregon, where the parasitic plant com-



EO Media Group/Mateusz Perkowski  
Ashley Huggins holds a bundle of female mistletoe that contains berries of the parasitic plant.

monly infects oak trees. They see it as a fun yet frantic way to earn extra money in the weeks leading up to the holidays.

"The season is really short," Ashley said.

Genuine Oregon Mistletoe is run as a wholesale operation, selling about 10,000 bundles of mistletoe a year to nurseries, Christmas tree lots, Boy Scout troops and other holiday retailers around the U.S.

The company has grown more sophisticated over time.

Ashley's uncle built a website that's made Genuine Oregon Mistletoe more prominent than in the early days, when it was dependent mostly on word-of-mouth.

Meanwhile, Garrett's uncle lends him a truck equipped with a boom crane so he no longer has to endanger life and limb climbing ladders to the upper reaches of oak trees on a family member's farm in Southern Oregon.

"I don't want to risk it, because if I were to get hurt, that would affect my full-time job," he said.

#### Shotgun harvest

For smaller-scale mistletoe sellers, blasting the plant

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## Forest Service forms council to address Blue Mountains Forest Plan

By George Plaven  
EO Media Group

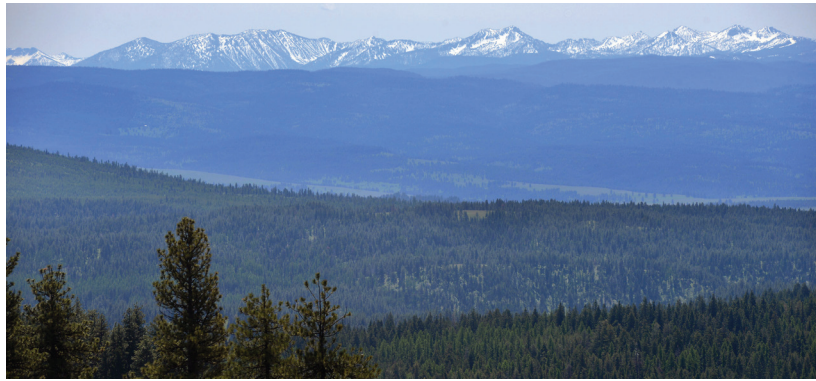
The U.S. Forest Service spent the last 15 years working to update land management plans for three national forests in Eastern Oregon and southeast Washington.

In the end, it still wasn't enough to bring competing interests — including loggers, ranchers, nature lovers, ATV riders and environmentalists — together on the same page.

Now the agency is trying a different approach, working directly with state, county and tribal representatives as part of a newly formed intergovernmental council aimed at resolving deep-rooted conflicts over the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur national forests.

Collectively known as the Blue Mountains National Forests, the area encompasses 5.5 million acres, roughly the size of New Jersey, stretching from east of Walla Walla, Washington, to south of John Day.

Each forest has its own individual resource and management plan, which identifies goals and desired conditions for the landscape. While



File photo

The U.S. Forest Service has formed an intergovernmental council to discuss management of the Blue Mountains.

the plans do not make any project-level decisions, they do establish broader guidelines for livestock grazing, timber harvest, wilderness and roads.

Forest plans are supposed to be updated every 15 years to account for the latest science and changing conditions. The Blue Mountains Forest Plan was last updated in 1990.

Coming up with new plans for the forests has proven especially difficult, with intense public scrutiny and backlash. Earlier this year, the For-

est Service announced it was withdrawing its latest proposal and would re-engage with communities.

Chris French, the reviewing officer and Forest Service deputy chief, said that while the 5,000-page plans passed legal muster, they were difficult to understand and implement.

"I think that was really noteworthy news for everyone involved," said Eric Watrud, supervisor of the Umatilla National Forest. "We wanted to make sure we as an agency could move forward with something

the communities could support."

#### Counties object

This is not the first time the Forest Service has taken a step back to fix perceived flaws in the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision.

The agency released a draft version of the plans in 2014, which was met with overwhelmingly negative feedback. In response, the forest supervisors began a series of meetings around the region to develop new plan alternatives and seek compromise.

What they came up with — dubbed "Alternative E-Modified" — called for thinning 33% of dry upland forests to improve wildfire resilience, while doubling the current timber harvest and designating 70,500 acres of new wilderness.

Still, it was met with opposition.

The Eastern Oregon Counties Association detailed eight primary issues in its objections, including economics; access; management area designation; pace and scale of restoration; grazing; fire and salvage

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