

# The Oregonian

**Saturday July 25, 2009**

## **No more false starts in our federal forests**

**guest opinion by Dominick DellaSala and Randi Spivak**

In a welcome reversal of the Bush era's train wreck to unravel the Northwest Forest Plan, the Obama administration is living up to its campaign promise to restore scientific integrity and common sense to forest planning.

We should thank Interior Secretary Ken Salazar for his leadership on sending the federal Bureau of Land Management's Western Oregon Plan Revisions -- the WOPR -- and the scientifically flawed spotted owl "recovery plan" into the scrap heap, acknowledging that these plans were illegal and politically motivated.

We should also thank Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore. It was at his insistence that Interior's inspector general investigated and subsequently uncovered rampant political interference in science regarding endangered species decisions under the Bush administration. The reversal of these decisions is a good day for Oregon communities that depend on clean water and healthy fisheries, all of which have suffered from unsustainable logging levels. So where do we go from here? The BLM should tear a page from the playbook of the Siuslaw and Rogue-Siskiyou national forests. Both of these forests focus on ecological restoration by thinning young fire-prone and biologically impoverished tree plantations, repairing and decommissioning failing and unneeded forest roads, and restoring fish habitat.

This recipe has resulted in timber to local mills, family-wage jobs, minimal controversy and a healthier forest and fishery. There are several hundred thousands of acres of industrial plantations on BLM land that would benefit from such thinning and would produce wood to local mills, reduce fire risk and create jobs. And there are willing partners in both the conservation community and timber industry ready to support ecologically appropriate thinning and road removal in places like Roseburg and Medford, where a restoration workforce could be created.

Meanwhile, Oregon's mature and old-growth forests should be enlisted as part of the solution to climate change. Studies from Oregon State University show that Oregon's coastal old-growth forests store more carbon per acre than almost any forest on earth. When these forests are cut down, up to two-thirds of the carbon they store is released to the atmosphere as carbon dioxide through the burning of logging slash and the transporting and

processing of wood products. More carbon dioxide is released by logging than even severe forest fires.

The BLM's WOPR would have increased old-forest logging by 400 percent, releasing the carbon dioxide equivalent of a large coal-fired power plant operating in the region for 36 years. Projects like the WOPR only create more problems in the long run for both the ecology and economy of the region. We agree with The Oregonian's editorial board that there should be no more false starts. Keeping mature and old-growth forests on the chopping block would leave Oregonians with yet another of those false starts.

The Oregon congressional delegation should step up to the challenge left by the trappings of the WOPR to lead us to a true finish. It's high time that these forests are legislatively protected so they can continue to do their part soaking up dangerous pollutants and providing clean drinking water and salmon and wildlife habitat. Creating a restoration economy focused on restoring forests and watersheds would give Oregonians a sustainable path forward and a true finish.

*Dominick DellaSala is chief scientist at the National Center for Conservation Science & Policy and served on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service recovery team for the northern spotted owl. Randi Spivak is vice president of government affairs at the national center.*