

In the past couple of years towns in Clatsop County have seen increasing numbers of deer, elk taking up residence in the city limits. Not surprisingly there have also been increased numbers of cougar sightings.

The reason for this phenomenon is obvious. We are destroying their habitat by clearcutting followed by years of repeated aerial spraying of toxic chemicals.

From a broader perspective, deforestation is a key reason that researchers have estimated that since 1970, a shocking 50 % of the planet's species have gone extinct. They say we are now in the planet's 6th world wide ^{MASS} ~~extinction~~, the last one having occurred over 68 million years ago.

Bringing the issue back home, Tim Josie, the chairman of the FTLAC has recommended to the Board of Forestry that they expedite the harvest of older trees before endangered species take up residence and remove them from the possibility of harvest.

Josie has in the past also recommended that 90% of state forests be subject to industrial timber

harvest thereby sacrificing designated conservation areas.

I'm proud to say that the people of Clatsop County do not agree with Josi's positions or those currently held by the FTLAC.

Based on what our County Commission Chairman described as overwhelming public support the commission voted to opt out of the timber industry's Linn County lawsuit which if victorious will most likely result in an increased harvest on state land.

Clatsop County advocates:

- Balanced forest management and no increase in timber harvest on state land.

- preservation of trees that are older than 70 years

- The elimination of aerial spraying in favor of hand brush removal.

- Increased protection of water and habitat.

Now is the time for creating a new vision for Oregon forests that emphasizes selective logging, restoration and the establishment of more parks and recreation sites on state land.

According to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department state parks added 1.1 billion dollars to the state's economy in 2016. Fort Stevens in our county contributed 40.1 million to that figure.

Along the Oregon Coast, which are increasingly the site of massive clearcuts, the parks saw the highest visitation rates accounting for more than half of the 1.1 billion dollar total.

When considering these figures remember that state economists now say that timber and timber products now account for less than 1% of the state's gross national product.

This should tell you where Oregon's future lies, not in increasing wood products as the slick new TV ad by the timber industry still the Oregon Forest Resource Institute proclaims.

Eliminating the budget of that Institute and returning those timber tax dollars to the counties

where they belong would be a good first step in restructuring the way forestry business is done in Oregon.

I sincerely hope you can find the wisdom and courage to stand up to the timber industry to protect our forest which left standing are our best hope for mitigating the effects of global warming.

Ask yourself -

What are you going to tell your children and grandchildren when they ask you what you did to help slow global warming?

Roger Dorband
Astoria, Oregon
info@ravenstudiosart.com

THE RATIO OF RETURN



Roger Darbawd - Astoria, Or
~~503.322.1212~~ info@rarevstudiosart.com

In a statement made after their merger with Plum Creek Timber Company, Weyerhaeuser Company CEO Doyle Simons said, "We saw a unique opportunity to combine the two industry leaders in a way that will generate substantial value for shareholders." Those last three words reflect the corporate world's raison d'etre. In language common to shareholders the "value" Simons refers to is most often expressed by the term "ratio of return", a relatively simple formula for evaluating company profitability that has become a corporate standard. Reductively defined it is derived from dividing the company's net profit by its net worth. Investors fastidiously track this ratio in order to decide which companies to invest in.

The corporate/investor obsession with the ratio of return has been like a dagger to the heart of humanity's conscience and compassion for the earth and each other - like a dagger, yet more like a disease. The elevation of money and profit above all else is a contagion that has spread throughout the entire culture. The most blatant example may be the rampant greed of those in the banking industry that led to the sub-prime mortgage crisis of the last decade creating monetary loss and suffering for millions of people. Even more venomous greed prompts weapons manufacturers to insist on profits rather than halting the sale of assault rifles in a country that has experienced an epidemic of mass murders with those very weapons. When one considers the gun manufacturer's behavior it is hard not to conclude that we have hit moral rock bottom.

By contrast the sins of the timber corporations may seem petty but clearcutting, which degrades soil and water quality, and aerial spraying of herbicides whose negative effects we are just beginning to understand, are done with considerable disregard for the impact on people and the environment. There is a parallel to the violence inherent in the weapons manufacturers' activity in clearcutting as well.

Anyone who had been in war, or has visited war zones, knows that walking into a clearcut is like visiting the scene of a recent deadly battle. Nothing moves, the silence is deafening and everywhere violence and chaos are etched into the landscape. When children are exposed to clearcuts the lesson they are taught is that nature and beauty are expendable. They lose their respect for the land making it possible to casually throw an incendiary firework into a forest in order to impress friends resulting in a devastating wildfire that hurts everyone.

In an interview some years ago writer and visionary Ursula K. Le Guin said, "If you cannot or will not imagine the results of your actions there's no way you can act morally or responsibly." In spite of the Supreme Court's decision in 2010 granting corporations the same right as citizens under the 1st amendment,

corporations are not people. They are more like robots that know how to make profits. Successful companies know how to do that well. But unlike people they don't have imaginations. So can we expect them to "act morally or responsibly"?

While the notion that corporations involved in extraction of natural resources are incapable of acting responsibly is imperfect logic, a look around at the degradation of the environment they have caused gives credibility to the conclusion. Be it water pollution from fracking, die offs of flora and fauna from oil spills, coal plants belching CO2 into the atmosphere or the impact on soil, water and climate change of cutting down the rain forests of North and South America, even when acting within the letter of the law the scale of their activities is taking the planet in an ominous direction.

As the Native American activist, Reuben Snake, said, "If you don't watch where you're going, you're going to wind up where you headed." We are well into the 21st century but corporations that extract natural resources are still living by the old mythos that nature is there for us to exploit and profit by.

In 2013, Tim Josi, Tillamook County candidate for Representative of District 32, whose campaign is supported by the timber industry, suggested to the Board of Forestry that they expedite the cutting of 60 -80 year old trees before endangered species inhabit them eliminating the trees from harvest. Two years earlier he proposed that instead of holding 30% of the state forests for conservation zones that the Board of Forestry make 90% of those forests available for industrial timber harvest.

By pursuing the fruits of the old ways individuals like Josi, and the timber companies in general, are taking us in the direction of ecological disaster. The corporate values of ownership, dominance, growth and control over nature are in direct opposition to the ecological laws of interdependence and limitation. To continue believing these divergent values can coexist is to invite ruin. Either we establish an ecological world where we protect and harmonize with the earth, where forests, water, air and humanity are valued beyond profit, or we will all go down together in our stubborn resistance to the truth.

THE TIMBER INDUSTRY'S FALSE NARRATIVES

The greatest irony of the information and technology age is our susceptibility to false stories, or in the parlance of the day, fake news. There is simply too much information to sort through so many people succumb to believing sources that are consistent with their point of view. In Oregon timber companies have been shaping the stories about forests they want us to believe through a proactive advertising campaign lead by the Oregon Forest Research Institute.

Though their name suggests credibility the information that the OFRI puts out is mostly propaganda promoting the timber industry. A classic example is a statement made in an opinion piece in the Eugene Register Guard in June of 2014 in which the OFRI is quoted as saying that when it comes to clearcutting “clean air and water are a given”. Just two years later federal regulators withheld a grant of 1.2 million dollars from Oregon for failure to clean up coastal stream pollution mostly from logging, runoff from old forest roads and landslide prone areas and aerial spraying of pesticides.

It would be foolish to chide timber companies for growing young fir trees after they have clearcut. The problem is that the OFRI tries to convince the public that the tree farms they create are synonymous with mature forests, suggesting that they deliver the same benefits in spite of abundant data to the contrary. A good example of such data is the 2016 Perry and Jones study done by Oregon State University that demonstrates that when compared with mature forests clearcutting drastically reduces stream flow beyond 50 years in spite of replant.

In their on-line praise of the “benefits of clearcutting” the OFRI describes how clearcuts provide grazing land for deer and elk and improves habitat for birds, insects and pollinators. They fail to mention what happens to those same species when clearcuts are routinely, repeatedly, aerially sprayed with toxic chemicals. The result is that pollinators are disappearing and deer and elk are taking up residence in towns like Gearhart and Seaside because their habitat has been compromised or destroyed. Even notoriously people averse cougars have been sighted in towns like Astoria.

Another story line proffered by the OFRI on billboards around the state and on TV claims that “Oregon will never grow out of trees.” More accurately that would read, “...never grow out of tree farms.” Even that claim may be in question in light of research last year by Forest Economic Advisors showing that the sustainable yield after replanting in western states may exceed timber growth in the next two years.

In Oregon, the Center for Sustainable Economy has demonstrated statistically that forest loss to clearcutting has exceeded forest regrowth by 45% between 2000 and 2013. The Center has also revealed that western Oregon has nearly 522,000 acres less forest cover on its state and privately managed forestlands today than it had in 2000.

OFRI and big timber also claim that timber harvest is vital to Oregon’s economy. That depends on what your definition of “vital” is. State economists show that timber harvest’s contribution is now hovering around 1% of Oregon’s gross domestic product. “Its about jobs!”, the industry shouts. But Oregon Employment Department data shows that due to automation and the choice of many logging

companies to ship logs overseas for processing very few jobs are created when harvest is expanded.

It is hard to trust statistics on employment and economics that are put out by timber industry supporters such as the OFRI, or by the timber companies themselves. But unfortunately the exaggerated economic numbers they put out have an effect on public perception. Perhaps the best source on the importance of timber to employment in Clatsop County comes from Sperling's Best Places, a premier data and research firm which doesn't have a dog in the fight so to speak. They set the number of employees in agriculture, fishing and timber combined at 13% of the total employed in Clatsop County.

OTHER TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Further in the interview mentioned above Ursula LeGuin says, "Babies are moral monsters, completely greedy. Their imagination has to be trained into foresight and empathy." Unfortunately such training is futile with morality neutral corporations or when dealing with the hardened greed of some corporate CEO's. Their stubborn pursuit of profit above all else is clearly displayed in places like Rockaway Beach where in a little over a decade timber companies have clearcut 92% of the Jetty Creek watershed and sprayed herbicides over tributary streams that feed Jetty Creek. The result has rendered Rockaway Beach's water unsafe to drink on numerous occasions, cost taxpayers there over a million dollars for a new filtration plant and created general concern over water shortage.

Only electing pro environment candidates who will try to change laws regulating corporations will prevent more Rockaway Beach catastrophes. Meanwhile politicians who have been bought by timber corporations will keep mulishly resisting changes to the Oregon Forest Practices Act unless of course those changes increase profits for their benefactors. With the help of Timber industry lobbyists, many of the most significant changes to their benefit have already been achieved.

For the past 20 years these companies, including Weyerhaeuser, have been converting from ordinary corporations to new entities called Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) or Timber Investment Management Organizations (TIMO). This change is fundamental to their avoidance of corporate taxes since REIT timber companies receive federal income tax exemptions each year because they pass on 90% of the profit to their investors, and TIMO's timber profits are tax free because investors actually own title to the land and claim the income directly.

Chuck Willer, administrative director of the Corvallis based Coast Range Association, has done an exhaustive study of what he calls "Wall Street Forestry". More accurately, he is referring to investment owned timber corporations whose base and activities are now global is scale. He explains that "because Oregon tax law

uses federal net income as the basis for stating Oregon income, the TIMOs and REITs don't pay state income tax on timber profits."

In addition to avoiding state income tax, Willer's research reveals that in 1993 the corporate lobbyists convinced the legislature to eliminate most harvest tax on timber. The pie got even sweeter for the corporations in 1999 when House Bill 3575 was passed which phased out all remaining harvest tax on large corporate forest lands. That bill accompanied Ballot Measure 50 which the timber industry also helped craft. Ballot Measure 50 froze local property tax rates at 1996 levels and implemented a new property valuation formula that allows timberlands to be valued at 20% of their fair market value after removing the value of the standing forest. In essence large corporate timber lands are now assessed at less than 10% of the fair market value.

The Coast Range Association's research also shows that between 1990 and 1995 timber companies paid an average of \$119.2 million per year in taxes to local Western Oregon counties. During the 5 year period from 2007 to 2012 they paid only \$18.4 million per year to those same counties. The story the timber corporations like to tell for the reduction of tax money creating the county revenue crisis is that tighter restrictions on timber harvest on federal land and the implementation of balanced forest management on state land along with tighter environmental laws have produced a decline in harvest. But in reality timber harvest declined by only 15% between the two time periods. During the same time period there was a reduction of 84.6% in corporate forest property tax, monies that could have been going to county services.

THE TAKEAWAY

Like modern day Titans, large corporate timber companies devour trees and regurgitate money which they hoard instead of paying back their fair share to the public whose resources they are exploiting. Only better laws can curb their appetite and bring justice to the system of taxation in order to relieve economic pressure on timber counties. It is important to vote for candidates, whether local, regional or state, who will work to bring these changes. Winning those elections will only happen when more of the public is informed and become activated.

Considering the dismantling of the EPA and the deregulation of industries under the current administration it is easy to despair and begin seeing clearcuts as the new normal and climate change as an inevitability. But change is in the air. Heartening positive solutions already underway and the pathway from pessimism toward a hopeful view of the future will be explored in next month's final segment.