Saving the forests for the trees: Why we need to harvest commercial-sized trees in the Late Successional Reserve

BY ELIZABETH BURGHARD

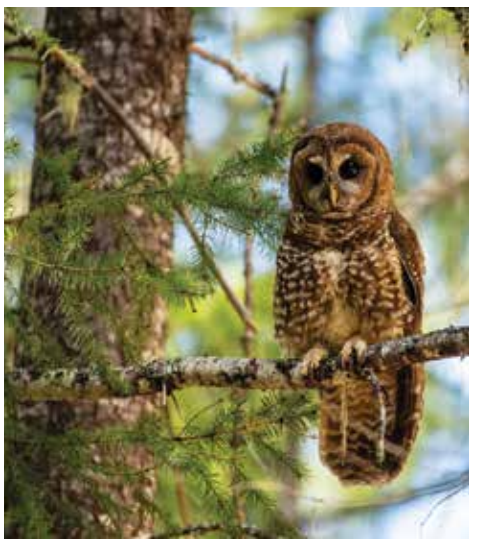
By now, many people have heard stories about the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Medford District's plans to harvest thousands of acres of "old-growth" forest. Due to the high amount of misrepresentations and disinformation that is circulating about the projects included in the BLM's Integrated Vegetation Management for Resilient Lands Environmental Assessment, I would like to set the record straight. Despite what you may have heard or read, the BLM Medford District's integrated vegetation management projects are designed to *protect* older, structurally complex forests—sometimes called old growth—and the highest quality northern spotted owl habitat in the district. These efforts directly support the implementation of the BLM's Southwestern Oregon Resource Management Plan (RMP), which calls for us to speed the development of northern spotted owl habitat and help forests respond positively to climate-driven stresses and wildfire.

The goals of the BLM Medford District's integrated vegetation management projects are to develop fire-resilient forests, to reduce wildfire risks to homes and other infrastructure, to improve wildland firefighter safety, and to restore native habitats for a variety of sensitive plant and animal species—goals that I think we can all agree on. To achieve these goals, a team of subject-matter experts, including botanists, wildlife biologists, fire ecologists, foresters, and others, worked together to develop a comprehensive strategy based on the best available scientific data and information. The team analyzed 14 years of monitoring data from local fuels treatments and wildfire interactions and considered lessons learned from past projects in the Applegate Valley, as well as from work completed under our 2012 Programmatic Integrated Vegetation Management Environmental Assessment, such as our oak restoration efforts at the Table Rocks.

The BLM Medford District's integrated vegetation management projects aim to remove fire-prone vegetation—smaller, weaker, and poor-quality trees—to make more room for the continued growth of fire-resistant vegetation—like older, more mature trees. Removing trees of various sizes is crucial to achieve these restoration goals. The BLM considers the removal of trees with a diameter greater than eight inches a "commercial" activity, so some of this work will be accomplished through the BLM's established commercial timber sale program. However, none of the timber harvested by these projects will count towards the BLM's timber sale targets under the O&C Act. The integrated vegetation management projects would not remove any conifers that are greater than 36 inches in diameter and that are 150 years old or older.

Our integrated vegetation management strategy is built on the Rogue Valley Integrated Fire Plan and the Rogue Basin Cohesive Forest Restoration Strategy. Both plans have been collaborative efforts, with partners from local government officials, state agencies, and nonprofit organizations like the Nature Conservancy. These efforts call for a landscape-scale effort to reduce the risk of fire. Projects completed under IVM will help us achieve the forest restoration goals established in our RMP as well as the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan. To learn more about the effectiveness of the BLM's past hazardous fuels treatment projects, I encourage you to check out the fall 2021 (page 14) *Applegater* article titled "Do fuels treatments really tame fires?" These projects have demonstrated that wildland fires within treated areas are more likely to be low-severity and more likely to be safely put out while they're small.

This work is critical for our southwestern Oregon communities. Southwest Oregon has 22 communities with the highest cumulative wildfire risk in the state. The heat dome of 2021 resulted in widespread tree mortality across the region, and we continue to face persistent drought, longer wildfire seasons, and larger, more intense wildfires. Our forests are overcrowded and competing for limited water resources, and experts predict that we will continue to see trees dying in the face of long-term drought conditions. Simply put, we need to increase the pace and scale of these types of projects to protect our communities and sustain our forests' health. These forests need our help, and this work will save our larger, older trees and create the next generation of large old trees for Oregonians to cherish well into the future.



BLM's IVM is designed to speed the development of northern spotted owl habitat and help forests respond positively to climate-driven stresses and wildfire. Photo: Kyle Sullivan.

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Stop the spread of vineyard mealybugs

BY MAUREEN FLANAGAN BATTISTELLA

Do you have a production vineyard or backyard vines? If so, watch out for vine mealybugs (*Planococcus ficus*) found in Oregon for the first time in the summer of 2021 and most recently in Jackson County vineyards. This new grapevine pest spreads easily and rapidly, allows a mold to grow that hinders photosynthesis, leaves fruit unsuitable for human consumption, and is a vector for grapevine leafroll viruses.

Mealybugs are not new to southern Oregon. In 2014 Gill's mealybug (*Ferrisia gilli*) was found in vineyards near Jacksonville and has since spread. Due to its rapid spread and potential for damage, Oregon Department of Agriculture recently issued a quarantine pest alert for vine mealybug and a pest alert for Gill's mealybug.

"Since the vine mealybug was first found in Southern California in the 1990s, it has been recognized as their most serious vineyard pest," notes Rick Hilton, an entomologist with the OSU Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center (SOREC). "About 10 years ago it was found in Napa vineyards and, since then, we've just been waiting for it to arrive in southern Oregon. Now the vine mealybug is here."

Vine mealybug female; note the wax tails or filaments. Photo: University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Vine and Gill's mealybugs are similar in appearance—typically white or gray and 2-4mm in length with a segmented, oblong body with filaments or rods along its edges. The vine mealybug also looks similar to the more commonly found and not reportable grape mealybug with its characteristic two pairs of long wax tails. Mealybugs, in a cluster of fine webbing or glass-like filaments, can be found at the base of shoots and are often discovered at thinning, but they can be found in other parts of the plant and throughout the year as well. The vine mealybug is also hosted by plant families including apple, beet, potato, walnut, and willow.

Equipment and clothing contaminated with the pest are the primary means of mealybug spread, though it can also be transmitted passively by wind. Because moving live plants and plant cuttings can transmit the infestation, vineyard owners should buy their grafting stock only through certified nurseries.

Because of the severity of damage and the risk presented by this insect, the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) has instituted a mealybug monitoring program to understand how and where mealybugs are migrating. This program, which involves a pheromone insect trap that attracts the male mealybug, is free to growers.

If you suspect a vine mealybug infestation, notify ODA immediately by sending an email and photo to plant-entomologists@oda.oregon.gov and report the occurrence at oda.fyi/mealybug. If you want ODA to monitor your vineyard for mealybugs, contact the ODA entomologist at the same email.

For more information on pest control and management for commercial and home growers, visit oregon.gov/oda/programs/IPPM/Pages/Default.aspx and browse the "insects" section or consult the 2022 Pacific Northwest Insect Management Handbook, available online at pnwhandbooks.org/insect.

For assistance with insect pest prevention and management in Jackson County, visit the SOREC website at agsci.oregonstate.edu/sorec or call 541-776-7371.

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