

THE SISKIYOU MOUNTAIN ADVOCATE

The relentless push by BLM timber sale planners and the constant threat of old-forest logging in the Applegate Valley

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

In the summer *Applegater*, I discussed the long-standing tradition of forest activism in our area and Applegate Siskiyou Alliance's (ASA) recent lawsuit against the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) massive Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) logging project. This legal challenge, which includes the Late Mungers and Penn Butte Timber Sales above Williams and Murphy, claimed that the BLM violated its 2016 Resource Management Plan (RMP) in multiple ways, including:

- approving activities incompatible with the RMP's recreation management directions, and
- authorizing logging activities in Late Successional Reserve (LSR) forests that would delay or preclude the development of northern spotted owl habitat for 20 years or more, relative to no treatment.

We also claimed that the BLM violated the National Environmental Policy Act by:

- failing to take a hard look at project activities
- failing to provide site-specific environmental analysis
- inappropriately "tiering" to previous analysis
- failing to provide adequate public involvement opportunities.

We also demonstrated that the proposed logging would increase fire risks by:

- removing large trees up to 36" in diameter
- removing significant forest canopy down to 30 percent
- implementing group selection clear-cuts up to four acres in size and up to 20 percent of a stand
- regenerating dense, flammable young growth that will dramatically increase fire risks over time.



Old-growth forest proposed for logging by the BLM in the Cedar Flat Timber Sale along the Grayback Mountain Trail. Photo: Luke Ruediger, Applegate Siskiyou Alliance.

Magistrate Court Judge Clarke agreed with many of ASA's concerns, saying in his Findings and Recommendations that the proposed logging "would sacrifice habitats for commercial logging." He also found that the logging "would not have the intended effect and would instead exacerbate fire issues" by creating "highly flammable young stocks interspersed throughout the thinned units." His Findings and Recommendations ruled resoundingly against the IVM Project and the Late Mungers/Penn Butte Timber Sales. However, a final remedy awaits additional legal briefing, as Judge Clarke is required to refer his findings to District Judge Ann Aiken for approval. Thus, despite a very favorable ruling from the Medford District Court, the final outcome is still pending.

Meanwhile, despite BLM's prior agreements with the plaintiffs that they would not hold a timber sale auction for these sales during briefing, they sold the

Late Mungers and Penn Butte Timber Sales just one day before release of Judge Clarke's ruling. By selling these unlawful timber sales that were rejected by both the courts and the public, the BLM further demonstrated its real motivation: the conversion of old-growth forests into board footage for the timber industry.

Further demonstrating its focus on timber production, BLM quickly proposed yet another Williams-area sale, the Cedar Flat Timber Sale, targeting mature and old-growth forests on Glade Fork, Rock Creek, East Fork, West Fork, and up to Cedar Flat on the ridgeline dividing Williams from Selma in the Illinois Valley.

The proposal includes 3,222 acres of potential commercial logging, including 2,493 acres in LSR forest set aside to protect old-forest habitat for the northern spotted owl and other species. This logging is likely to include a mixture of heavy commercial logging, group

selection logging, riparian reserve logging, new road construction, and the logging of large overstory trees that support complex old-forest canopies, important wildlife habitat, and high levels of fire resilience.

Although the national BLM recently approved a policy of landscape health and the preservation of old-growth forest habitats as a climate solution, our local BLM managers continue to target old forests with a form of staggered clear-cut logging they call "group selection," in which they select and remove whole groves of mature trees to create "openings" that look, feel, and function like small, staggered clear-cuts. The removal of large, habitat-rich, and fire-resilient trees has damaging implications for wildlife that require forest cover, while regenerating dense, young, highly flammable vegetation that fuels more severe, fast-moving wildfires.

The BLM has opened a public comment period for the Cedar Flat project extending until December 31, 2024. ASA is out monitoring proposed timber sale units. Based on what we have seen so far, we believe significant mature, late-successional, and old-growth forests will be targeted in the Cedar Flat Timber Sale. In fact, logging units have already been identified high on the face of Grayback Mountain, on Glade Creek, and along the Grayback Mountain Trail in spectacular old-growth forests. We hope residents from across the valley will comment on this damaging project and will oppose the Cedar Flat Timber Sale.

For more information, visit eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2032836/510.

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Pipe Fork land sale on hold

BY CHAS ROGERS

Josephine County Commissioners have stopped the Pipe Fork land sale—again. They have denied the Conservation Fund, a national nonprofit group established to purchase and protect unique lands, the opportunity to help save this remarkable land in Williams at the base of Grayback Mountain. They have thrown last-minute special requirements at the local community's efforts to purchase Pipe Fork from the county and stop the clear-cutting of this magnificent Port Orford cedar forest.

The commissioners had agreed in writing to consider selling the land for conservation but refused the offers at the last minute. They first wanted extra funding of over \$750,000 in a "secret assessment" over the value of a whopping \$2.02 million Yellowbook Appraisal (Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions). They were surprised when the Williams community came up with \$300,000 extra funding toward the purchase of the property and cautiously agreed to consider the sale. But at the last minute, Commissioner Baertschiger asked for a surprise down payment of ten percent of the sale price or \$203,000. The Conservation Fund refused because they had already offered a signed contract with \$10,000 in earnest

money. The board refused to second the motion and to vote on the deal that was established. The commissioners then said they needed a last-minute deed restriction from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) stating there would be no logging anytime and continuous public access. Neither the Conservation Fund nor BLM could accept this encumbrance on the land sale. This was after the commissioners expressly wanted to clear-cut the forest on the south-facing slope next to the Pipe Fork Creek from the beginning.

Many hundreds of hours were required for the community to create contacts, write letters, fundraise, and promote the outstanding features of the area. We finally partnered with the Conservation Fund to purchase the land and with BLM to hold it into the future as a research natural area for the Port Orford cedars and for trails and recreation. BLM has applied for and acquired grant funding amounting to \$2.02 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a program to create more recreation and protected lands in the US. Pipe Fork was approved for funding by the US Congress as number one in the state of Oregon and number four in the nation! We even found local donations of \$300,000 to make this



Without conservation, this stream running through the Pipe Fork property could be negatively impacted.

land sale move forward when Josephine County demanded more than the appraised value.

We have worked for over four years in our attempt to save the Pipe Fork from clear-cutting, a practice that removes all trees—whether they are marketable or not—and burns the refuse and destroys the understory growth. After clear-cutting, the commissioners would plant a fir tree monocrop, thus reducing the native plant variety, and then spray the land with herbicides to reduce competing vegetation. This would decimate the land, killing plants and animals alike and leaving a desert-like environment on the steep south-facing slope. Herbicides could wash into the creek from the steep terrain to poison the water for fish, wildlife, and people downstream. The damage from

clear-cutting would forever be its legacy.

The refusal of this sale by the commissioners after so much time and effort from Josephine County citizens, the Conservation Fund, and BLM is devastating and leaves us saddened for the future of the community, the water, wildlife, and forests. The stream flow could be diminished by clear-cutting the south-

facing slope and would heat up during summer and be detrimental to fish and humans downstream. We depend on this cool, clear water as a constant source for our streams and salmon habitats. This land should be saved for conservation using the grant money awarded and kept intact for the future for our families and children to see and enjoy the forest of giant cedars and lush understory of maples and ferns.

The efforts to save Pipe Fork will continue as we search for other ways to purchase the land and place it into conservation. Stay in touch with us at williamscommunityforestproject.com for details about this project and others in the upcoming year.

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