OPINIONS

SOS: A program to reduce wildfire hazard—the other side of the story

BY MARK HAMLIN

Wildfire hazards are increasing in the Applegate Valley. Driven by climate change, conifers—especially Douglas fir—are dying. Dead conifers create an enormous fire hazard that lasts decades. Moreover, burning snags when they fall can be lethal to firefighters and residents trying to evacuate. The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) proposed Strategic Operations for Safety (SOS) project addresses the problem.

The risk of a megafire catastrophe in the Applegate Valley is real and increasing. Residents should take note of the big fires that have occurred nearby. For example, on September 8, 2020, the Almeda Fire raced eight miles to destroy 2,357 structures and to kill three people. The Slater Fire, started near Happy Camp, California, roared 31 miles, and killed 14 people. We are surrounded by "high fire hazard" forests, per the Oregon Department of Forestry.

The hotter and drier climate trend will continue until almost all Douglas firs are dead, up to about 3,500 feet. I expect that we'll see very widespread conifer death within ten years. With the backdrop of climate change, the definitive science by Bennett et al (2022), states that most lower elevation sites (under 3,500 feet) in interior southwest Oregon will be inhospitable for Douglas fir by 2055. This also means that we are just beginning to deal with this problem.

Applegate residents should consider what's really in the SOS proposal. BLM's SOS program will reduce wildfire hazards and create defendable corridors along roads by commercial and noncommercial logging. A year or two after logging, residual fuel treatments like prescribed burning are planned. Moreover, "all healthy trees that show no signs of insect infestation or decline will be retained" (SOS EA page 26). So, it's not as clear-cut as characterized by some.

BLM has no budget for this level of fuels reduction without selling merchantable timber to pay for fuels-reduction work. We need to log our way out of a problem. No other means is practical. Unfortunately, if history is a prelude, SOS will be thwarted by environmental lawsuit(s).

Medford BLM has a problem in that they exist in between laws and regulations, and decades of budget cuts. Moreover, much of what Medford BLM proposes is simply a legal or regulatory requirement. First and foremost among the laws is the 1937 O&C (Oregon and California) Act. O&C mandates timber production, both harvesting and growing. BLM has no choice but to work within the laws and regulations. All of this becomes our problem too.

The SOS Environmental Analysis is over 200 pages long. Due to the limited space available, I am unable to provide an in-depth analysis of the issues; however, I have written a paper about the SOS and more. If you email me at the address below, I'll send you a pdf copy of my report.

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Electric vehicle charging in the Applegate Valley

BY SAM DENNIS

As more people drive electric vehicles (EVs), it is increasingly common to see them in the Applegate Valley. A frequent question is, "Is there anywhere in the Applegate to charge an EV?"

Any location with electricity can accommodate an EV charger, so Applegate residents do most of their EV charging at home. However, the Applegate offers few options to visitors.

Currently, there are only three dedicated EV chargers in the valley, located at Troon, Wooldridge Creek, and Quady North wineries. These are Level 2 chargers that can deliver six kilowatts of power, which will add about 20 miles of range per hour. All three chargers are free while you do your wine tasting. This scarcity of EV chargers offers a great business opportunity for owners of stores, restaurants, and lodging. EV drivers are always thinking about their next charging stop, and having a charger can help a business get discovered.

Over my eight years of driving an EV, I have found many out-of-the-way shops and restaurants only because they were located close to a charging station. When looking for lodging, I routinely search to see which ones have EV charging.

If your business is considering installing EV charging, it is essential that the speed of the charger is compatible with the amount of time people typically spend at your location. For example, a location where people might spend 20-30 minutes, such as a coffee shop or bakery, really needs a high-speed direct current fast charger that can deliver 100-plus miles of range in that amount of time. That same fast charger would be overkill for a hotel, where people will be parked overnight, and a lower-cost Level 2 charger would be adequate.

Currently, federal and state governments, as well as Pacific Power, offer financial incentives for EV charger installation, so now is a great time to amp up your business.

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Amendment of the Northwest Forest Plan

BY CHERYL BRUNER

The amendments of the US Forest Service's (USFS) Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP), as seen on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), are not all good.

The NWFP was enacted in 1994 after concerned Northwest citizens raised the alarm about the decimation of old-growth forests and ecosystems and the consequent loss of habitat for endangered species from decades of industrial old-growth logging on federal lands.

Under orders by President Clinton, the NWFP was created to conserve forests with trees at least 80 years old. This 30-year-old comprehensive document for wildlife and habitat conservation has helped save our coho salmon, provide clean drinking water, and mitigate climate change.

Now, in light of added concerns about biodiversity and increased effects of climate change, it is important to strengthen the NWFP's protections for old-growth forests.

Some of the amendments suggested by the USFS look good, such as collaboration with the tribes, but some are misguided: changes that will increase logging in our mature and old-growth forests and decrease protection for imperiled species.

You may submit comments on the DEIS until March 17, 2025 by visiting fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fsbdev2_026990. There, you can sign up for informational webinars, submit a comment, and view the entire DEIS. The following are some points to strengthen your argument about the need for protecting our remaining old-growth and mature forests.

- USFS should assess all forests. To combat climate change, safeguard biodiversity, reduce floods and erosion, protect drinking water, and decrease fire risk, all forests with trees 80 years old or more should be preserved. Water usage illustrates the importance of prioritizing the continued existence of mature forests that will develop into old growth. Approximately 80 percent of Oregonians obtain their drinking water from forested areas. Studies have shown that streamflow is reduced by 50 percent in 40-year-old plantations versus 110-year-old forests and that this reduced streamflow persists throughout the year. Old forests also provide the purest water. Prohibiting the harvest of mature and old-growth stands will preserve streamflow and summer flows.
- Ask USFS to deemphasize wood extraction and to focus instead on biodiversity, climate mitigation, recreation, the economic benefits of clean water, and quality of life.
- Point out that USFS has the funds to restore forests and watersheds by decommissioning roads, repairing existing roads, and reducing road construction. Protecting wildland-urban interface communities from fire is more effective than logging and thinning forests. USFS funds used for these latter purposes could be redirected to educate communities about fire issues and to create defensible space 60-100 feet in the home ignition zone. Thinning forests destroys the understory vegetative layer, damages the soil, increases problems with wind damage and erosion, releases carbon, and destroys wildlife habit. Logging, thinning, and using fire suppression to prevent and treat fire outside of communities are not scientifically supported as the most effective tools in fire-prone areas.
- Tribes should be included in decision-making.
- Ecosystem management must be based on scientific research *in the specific localities.*
- USFS should conduct a landscape analysis of water quality and quantity, air quality, climate, recreation, presence of rare and sensitive species, habitat connectivity, and cultural use prior to implementing proposed forest changes.

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