

# The forest management

Life



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Forest management is the maintaining and management of not only the trees in the forest, but the streams, habitat, watersheds, and even the decaying trees or logs on the forest floor. Managing our forests is not only important to the wildlife, but to our future economy and way of life. We need to continue to save the Oregon forests and help the ecosystems within them because human beings are also part of the ecosystem. By using forest management, it can help certain species of wildlife. Some species of birds, such as the pileated woodpecker, which need large snags to build nest cavities(7).

But the worst possible approach to maintaining a wide diversity of species would be to manage every acre of the forest the same way. Any change in forest habitat creates " winners" and " losers. " As forests go through natural cycles of growth, death and regeneration, species may inhabit or be absent from a given area partly in response to natural changes in the structure of trees and other forest vegetation(4). The same occurs when forest stands are managed by humans. Unless future credible research indicates otherwise, effort should be made to manage a wide range of forest structures.

Maintaining diversity would be best served by using a broader range of management tools. Those would include harvesting on federal land - not simply thinning - and increasing the commitment to old-growth attributes on private forest land through techniques such as retaining large trees and snags. As long as federal lands are substantially committed to providing late successional habitat, private forest land can be substantially committed to

younger, intensively managed stands, provided critical habitat characteristics are available.

The federal lands make up more than 50% to 60% of the forests in Oregon(3). Because timber harvest is now dramatically reduced on federal lands, those lands represent a sizable, well distributed pool of both old-growth forests and forests that could become old-growth, providing habitat to those species associated with forests with old-growth characteristics. While a large portion of federal land is committed to sustaining species that need old-growth, the difficult question remains, how much is enough?

Leaving these forests completely unharvested invites unacceptable, large-scale insect infestations and catastrophic fires(6). Because federal lands comprise nearly 50 to 60 percent of Oregon's forests, practices on these lands have a major impact on forest-dwelling vertebrates(2). These lands are well distributed throughout the state. Private land ownership accounts for approximately 40 percent of the state's forests(5). Of this private ownership, over half is in industrial ownership and the rest is held mostly by small woodland owners(7).

Since 1992 harvesting on federal lands has dropped sharply. In contrast, many industrial private lands are intensively managed(6). Oregon law requires prompt replanting, and stands are often fertilized and thinned. This split ownership, in addition to diverse management practices on private lands, results in a wide range of habitat conditions. No species studied appears immediately threatened by forest practices in Oregon(3). In fact,

many species are abundant. While that finding appears hopeful, it does not ensure that these will not be future problems.

Current practices may not be adequate to keep the present range of species in the future. While some species thrive in the habitat provided by younger forest stands, a considerable number of species either requires, or reproduces better, where large live trees, large cavities, and large pieces of downed wood. The Oregon Forest Practice Act currently requires that some trees be retained after harvest. But the question is: how much is enough? Will trees being retained be sufficiently distributed to meet the future habitat needs of all vulnerable species?

For example more than 60 species are associated with downed wood such as; fallen decaying trees or logs, 14 of them considered at risk(8). One species would be the rough skinned newt which live in and around decaying wood. Few studies to date have focused specifically on intensively managed stands where old-growth characteristics, such as large snags and large pieces of decaying wood, are most likely to be in short supply. However, research is looking toward this need.

Harvest levels in the future will likely be at least 40 percent below what could be cut on a sustainable level(1). That's because of reduced exaggeration on timber production on federal lands. In the past, federal land provided half the states timber production, but in 1996 provided only 17 percent(2). That is the lowest level since 1934, in the depths of the Great Depression. An understanding of Oregon's timberland and its importance to the state's economic and social well being, particularly in rural areas.

In Oregon, reforestation is mandatory and carefully spelled out in the Oregon Forest Practice Act, which governs all management related activities in Oregon's privately owned forests. Private lands must be replanted within two planting seasons of harvest, and within six years of harvest, the site must be certified as free to grow, meaning the trees have topped the brush and can grow successfully. If the replanting job fails, the state can compel compliance with the act through civil penalties, including civil court action and fines of up to \$5, 000(3).

More than 90 percent of harvested forested acres are replanted to stocking levels that meet or exceed what is legally required. So in order to help our forests, we need to continue with what is being done today. The hard work that is being put into saving the forests habitat, the streams, and the trees themselves may not show in the short-run but will have dramatic effect in the long-run. Wood products remain an important component of Oregon's robust economy and contribute to the long-awaited diversification of the state's economy.