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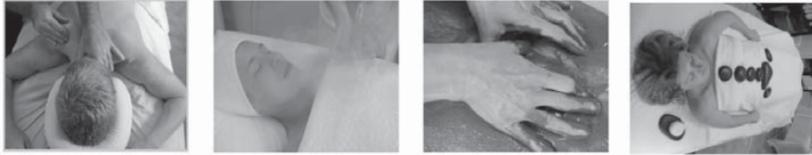
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MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

Make the pledge

BY CHRIS BRATT

As a long-term advocate on behalf of preserving our forest environment, it's always a treat to know you have some community support. I feel my views are even more valid when people who everyone respect for their knowledge and professionalism on forestry issues confirm my convictions about protecting our natural resources on public lands.

So I gave a huge cheer a couple of months ago when two of the most respected professors of forestry science in the Northwest asked the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) "to make a pledge that it will not cut old-growth trees" (trees that exhibit older characteristics and are generally older than 120 years). For many of us working for decades to protect what remains of these most significant and irreplaceable trees, the opinion of these renowned forest scientists was unusually good news. I certainly agree with the professors when they state: "This one commitment could take an incredibly contentious issue off the table, avoiding a battle that the BLM is not likely to win."

Norm Johnson, Professor in the College of Forestry at Oregon State University and Jerry Franklin, Professor in the College of the Environment at the University of Washington stated that the next forest plan for BLM-managed lands in Oregon should make "a clear statement that old-growth trees will no longer be cut" and that this guidance, "would ease the path to a long-term solution" (for all disputed issues). They also propose that the BLM use more "sophisticated" and "comprehensive" approaches in all the activities the agency undertakes. They suggest that (tree) diameter and age based rules (i.e.: 80 year age limit on thinning in reserve areas) also be on the table and be designed following a four-step process:

1. "Have scientists and managers design and test the protocols that will be used."
2. "Give agencies deference to implement the protocols."
3. "Monitor the degree of success in implementation."
4. "Use independent review by scientists, managers and stake holders to suggest improvements."

Presently, the future of BLM's Oregon Forest Plan remains in doubt. The maneuver by the last Bush Administration to revise the Northwest Forest Plan (BLM's forest management plan for the past 15 years) and begin again to clear cut Oregon's remaining old growth forests, has been put on hold. The Obama Administration has withdrawn the highly controversial Bush Revision scheme and instructed the BLM to return for the time being, to the Northwest Forest Plan with

its protection for certain stream side reserves and old-growth forest stands.

The sad part of the failed Bush Forest Plan Revision was that it wasted millions of dollars and years of staff time on an outdated and irresponsible planning model. An even sadder result was the support by BLM managers throughout the Revision process that again placed the wishes and needs of commercial interests (logging) ahead of other users and the long-term health of the forest.

Although complicated, this turn of events has fostered opportunities

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for the BLM to turn over a new leaf. Hopefully, this time around they will avoid the political heavy-handedness from the timber industry and the Department of Interior hierarchy and develop more balanced and ecologically sound public forest plans using the ideas recently outlined by Johnson, Franklin and others. The days of inflated timber production to unreasonable and two unsustainable levels must no longer be the driving force for BLM's on-the-ground operations. Rather, timber production must be a byproduct of retention and restoration forest management activities. Will BLM hear the call from an influential and respected part of the academic community proposing a new forest management model? I hope so. Not only would the proposed plan of Franklin and Johnson be scientifically credible, it could potentially provide long-term solutions to the many social and economic problems confronting the BLM at this time.

If the BLM accepts the challenge and rids themselves of their own skewed priority of political decision making, they will have a good chance to regain some measure of technical and environmental credibility. And, if the BLM wants to be successful at practicing forestry and preparing forest plans that are not obsolete before they can be implemented, they must take the Johnson/Franklin proposals seriously and make the pledge,

BLM will not cut old-growth trees.

If you would like the BLM to take that pledge, let them know. For more details on conserving old-growth trees and old-growth forests, please see: www.cof.orst.edu/cof/fs/PDFs/JohnsonRestorationAug15_2009.pdf, or call me.

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