

THE SISKIYOU MOUNTAIN ADVOCATE

**BLM timber sale update:
Heading backward as the climate collapses**

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

Due to the unending stream of timber projects proposed in our area, my quarterly *Applegater* articles have often focused on the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) timber sales in the Applegate Valley. I have been tracking BLM timber sale activity here for over 20 years. Rarely has there been a time when the agency is not proposing a timber sale in the Applegate River watershed. Often BLM is planning the next timber sale before implementing the preceding one and, increasingly, before even vetting the project through local communities or conducting sufficient public involvement.

BLM's current goal is, as it always has been, to get the cut out. To do this, they are increasing the already unsustainable pace, scale, and intensity of timber sale proposals. Many in the community feel that the BLM is using a strategy of minimizing environmental analysis and of either ignoring or eliminating public involvement processes and that those actions and attitudes will lead to both increased environmental damage and increased litigation, as legal challenges become the only means of meaningful public involvement.

For many months, the BLM has been planning the Big Ben Timber Sale in the Tallowbox Mountain/Ben Johnson Mountain area between Thompson Creek and Ruch. Despite numerous requests from the public, they have refused to release basic information on their proposal or to include the public in the planning process. Little is known about this project except that BLM intends to log approximately 700 acres and produce an estimated 3.5 million board feet of timber.

They have also designed and are getting ready to sell the Lickety Split Timber Sale



Whole groves of large old dominant trees are proposed for logging in Unit 13-6 of the Bear Grub Timber Sale along the popular East Applegate Ridge Trail.

in the Little Applegate River watershed, which would log bark beetle-impacted forests in the Lick Gulch watershed. But this project allows for logging more than dead standing trees. Monitoring efforts by Applegate Siskiyou Alliance have demonstrated that many large, healthy trees over 30" diameter are also targeted for removal. This timber sale would be logging off the resilient, genetically adapted trees that have survived the large climate-induced bark beetle outbreaks. It was approved using a categorical exclusion, eliminating many layers of scientific analysis, public transparency, and public involvement in order to expedite the logging operations.

Currently, the BLM has also approved the still pending Late Mungers and Penn

Butte Timber Sales in old-forest habitats surrounding the communities of Williams and Murphy. These projects were approved using the controversial IVM (Integrated Vegetation Management) Project authorizations, which cut out virtually all meaningful public involvement during the project design stage. Through this process BLM is attempting to fully design and tentatively approve large-scale timber sales in old-forest reserves before even notifying the public and without sufficient environmental review.

Additionally, the agency has also revived the controversial Bear Grub Timber Sale. After canceling the project last summer due to citizen protest, the BLM has brought Bear Grub back. The agency simply changed some of the

language in its analysis and repropose the timber sale in all the same inappropriate locations, in all the same mature and old-forest stands, and with the same damaging "group selection" logging proposals. Despite widespread community opposition to the Bear Grub Timber Sale, the BLM has refused to alter the project in any meaningful way and provided no process for public involvement before releasing their environmental assessment (EA) and repropose what they know will be a highly contested project.

The issue is this: while the climate worsens, land managers are repeatedly proposing carbon polluting timber sales and group selection logging that, according to their own analysis, will increase fire risks. No longer focused on "thinning" projects, the BLM is increasingly implementing group selection logging that will clear-cut between 20 and 30 percent of mature stands, often including the removal of whole groves of large, old trees. These old trees are important for carbon storage, fire resilience, and habitat, and they are being logged with less accountability, less public involvement, and less scientific analysis than at any time in the last 30 years.

The forests of the Applegate and southwest Oregon deserve better, and our communities should demand better. In this era of global climate change, we should be managing for solutions that store carbon, support watersheds, protect communities, maintain old-forest habitats, preserve our fragile watersheds, and increase government transparency. But the BLM insists on heading in the opposite direction.

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