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**Fall 2002**

Cover Image: Biscuit Fire Data courtesy of the Siskiyou National Forest

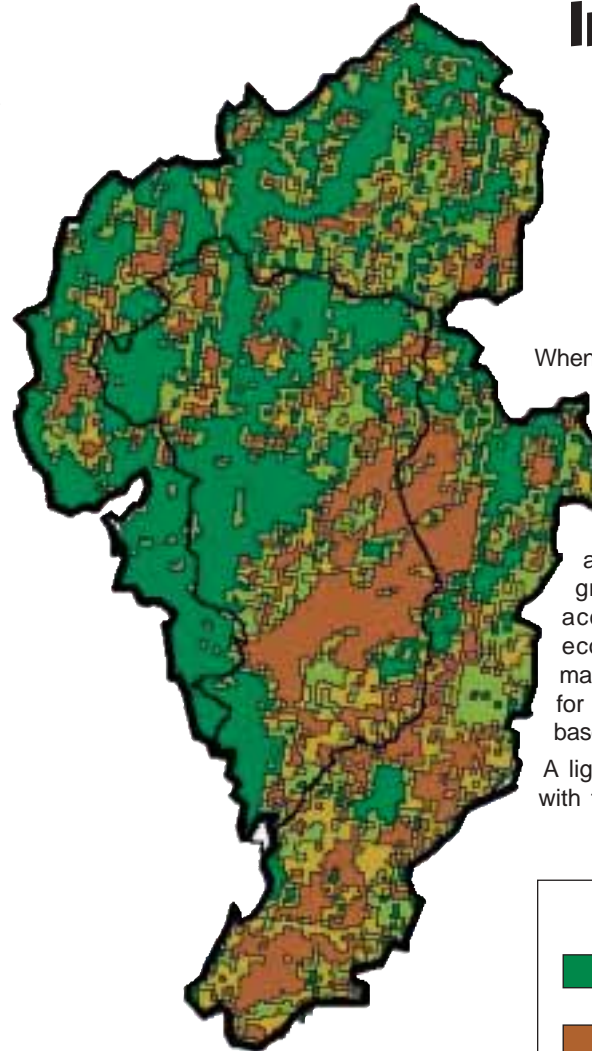
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# KS WILD NEWS

klamath-siskiyou wildlands center

Fall 2002

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## In the Wake of Fire: Salvage Logging Proposals on the Horizon

By Liz Crosson

When large fires occur across the landscape, we are inundated with crisis messages. We become accustomed to hearing that “fire has destroyed thousands of acres” and that “emergency rehabilitation is taking place on the ground”. A fire event in ecosystems adapted to fire is often misnamed a “fire crisis” when it does not actually require urgent human activities on the ground. In fact, a report from a team of highly acclaimed scientists strongly recommends an ecologically conservative approach to post-fire management and states “there is generally no need for urgency, nor is there a universal, ecologically-based need to act at all” (Beschta et al, 1995).

A lightning storm on July 13 of this summer left us with the Biscuit fire in the Siskiyou National Forest.

...continued

### Biscuit Fire Burn Severity



...continued from page one.

By the time it was contained, the fire perimeter totaled approximately 500,000 acres, although the fire burned in an irregular mosaic pattern as expected in forest ecosystems. The map included here shows that 60% of the Biscuit fire actually remained unburned or burned at a low intensity. Forest Service officials have already begun meeting with the timber industry to discuss the potential of logging the "destroyed forest". So far, they have identified 4,000 acres of commercial timber in the moderate to high burn severity class where they will focus salvage efforts in the Biscuit fire. And that's not the end of it. In the next few months, we can expect salvage logging proposals by the log truck load.

## Gearing Up for the Salvage Scam

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are preparing proposals to log in burned areas, also called 'salvage logging'. They hope to log not only in the Biscuit fire area, but also the Timbered Rock fire area and other 2002 fire areas in southern Oregon and northern California. Private industrial landowners such as Boise and Fruit Growers Supply have already begun salvage logging these fragile post-fire areas. Under the guise of 'restoration,' public land managers hope to log in key watersheds, on steep slopes, in botanical havens and in critical habitat. Post-fire salvage activities are treated differently by forest management agencies and may be exempt from regulations regarding clearcutting, allowable timber sale quantities, soil protection and water quality standards as well as other state and federal forest plan standards.

## Land Managers Pose Poor Excuses for Salvage Logging

### Myth #1:

#### Post-fire logging aids in the recovery of forest ecosystems.

Salvage logging on post-fire landscapes threatens the recovery and long-term stability of forest ecosystems. Some of the most fragile soils are found in these recovering areas due to loss of duff layer and dying root systems that provide soil stability. Post-fire logging, which usually includes tractor logging and road building, causes severe erosion and damage to already disturbed soils. These activities also often result in increased sedimentation into nearby streams, directly affecting water quality and fish habitat. The ecological benefit of dead standing trees (snags) clearly outweighs the ecological destruction caused by their removal from fragile soils.

### Myth #2:

#### Burned trees left standing would be better used in the wood products market.

Large burned and dead trees create important nesting and denning habitat for many forest species, including the northern spotted owl, black bear, three-toed woodpecker and Pacific fisher. Dead standing trees also maintain soil stability for decades, as trees slowly decay and fall while new growth is reborn on the forest floor.

It is clear that salvage logging is commercially driven, without full consideration of the ecological consequences. The Forest Service and BLM will continue to use appropriated funds for 'restoration' improperly until policies are changed from encouraging the over cutting of public lands. One solution would be legislation that ends the incentive based public land timber sale program and redirects funds towards true restoration activities and job opportunities in the woods.

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2. Be sure to sign your name and indicate the date on the enrollment form.
3. Return the completed form with a check for your first month's gift to:  
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KS Wild is establishing the KS Wild Endowment Fund. Tax deductible donations to KS Wild, a 501 (c) 3 non-profit, will go entirely towards protecting the wild places of the Klamath-Siskiyou Ecoregion.

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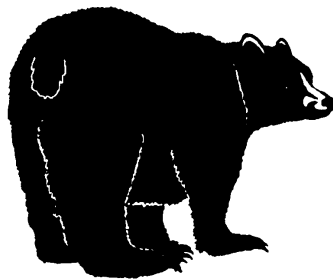
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## Myth #3:

### Salvage logging eliminates future fire hazard.

Although the Forest Service and BLM repeatedly claim that post-fire logging reduces large woody fuel, no studies can be found showing a reduction in fire intensity as a result of logging an area that had been previously burned. In fact, preliminary Biscuit Fire analysis shows that areas in the 1987 Silver fire that were salvage logged, showed extremely high fire intensity in the 2002 Biscuit fire.

Salvage logging increases fire severity by reducing canopy cover and creating hotter and drier conditions. This increases the growth of highly flammable grasses and shrubs. Common logging practices also tend to leave woody fuels such as branches, twigs and needles, which are deemed the primary determinants of fire severity. Large down logs store huge amounts of water and may prove helpful in controlling a fire situation.

## What You Can Do

Prepare yourself for the upcoming proposals from the Forest Service and BLM to salvage log thousands of acres in southern Oregon and northern California:

- Review current information on the detrimental effects of salvage logging.
- Comment on proposals released this fall and winter.
- Write letters to the editor of your local papers regarding the issue.
- For more information check: [www.kswild.org](http://www.kswild.org), [www.fire-ecology.org](http://www.fire-ecology.org)
- Visit fire areas and witness natural recovery mechanisms in action.

## Sources

Beschta, et. al., "Wildfire and Salvage Logging: Recommendations for Ecologically Sound Post-Fire Salvage Management and Other Post-Fire Treatments on Federal Lands In the West." Oregon State University. March 1995.

Hanson, Chad. "Getting Burned by Logging: Forest Service Abuse of the National Fire Plan in the Sierra Nevada." The John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute. 2000.



## KS WILD ACTION UPDATE!!!

### SIERRA CLUB, ET. AL. V. U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE —

We won!!! On October 29, Oregon District Court Magistrate Hubel agreed with conservation groups that the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's "study" on the effects of cougar predation on elk could result in significant cumulative impacts to the local cougar population and that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required. This study, funded mainly by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, would have included the killing of up to half the cougar population in two study areas in Oregon.

Filed by Brenna Bell, Staff Attorney for KS Wild, and Lori Cooper, Staff Attorney for the Siskiyou Project, this lawsuit will prevent ODFW from killing any cougars until it has fully studied the results of such killing on the cougar populations and the biodiversity of the project area.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit were the Siskiyou Regional Education Project, the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, the Animal Protection Institute, the Fund for Animals, the Humane Society of the U.S., the Sierra Club, Umpqua Watersheds, Cascadia Wildlands Project, and Al Thieme, an Oregon elk hunter and a conservationist.

# Blinded By the Smoke: D.C. Politics, Fire Hysteria and Forest Defense.

**By George Sexton**

Washington, D.C. is a very long way from the Klamath-Siskiyou bioregion. While this summer's forest fires have sparked a healthy and lively local debate about such issues as fire suppression, post-fire "salvage" logging, and the impacts of forest practices on fire behavior, none of those issues are driving the myriad of legislative proposals on the table in our nation's capitol. Instead, both major political parties are exploiting this summer's forest fires in order to weaken environmental laws and bash members of the other party. Congressional members of both parties are proposing to silence public input and eliminate the ability of citizens to challenge illegal timber sales on federal lands.

## Remember the Salvage Rider?

Here in the State of Jefferson, a good number of us remember the last time the timber industry and its friends in the Forest Service and BLM were unconstrained by environmental laws or public involvement in the timber sale planning process. During 1995-96, the Salvage Logging Rider allowed the Forest Service and BLM to log with impunity under the guise of "salvaging" for "forest health."

Through the Salvage Rider, Congress authorized the agencies to ignore public comment, circumvent the appeals process and lock the courthouse doors for two years of lawless logging. The result? Ancient trees that had stood since before the halls of Congress were constructed were clearcut in the Sugarloaf and China Left timber sales near the Oregon Caves National Monument.

The only silver lining to the infamous Salvage Rider was that it resulted in a public relations nightmare for the Forest Service and the timber industry. Enough so that there has been a seven-year lull in congressional attempts to weaken forest-protection laws through anti-environmental riders.



**China Left fell victim to Congress' Salvage Rider—this is what remains.**



**This is what the Medford BLM calls fuel reduction.**

forests are born of fire and will burn again. The Medford BLM can choose to remain entrenched in management styles that have created the current degraded forest conditions, or it can recognize its role in creating these problems and plan projects that work to restore the damage done to our forests over the past 80 years. KS Wild, along with many rural communities that are surrounded by BLM forests, supports restoration.



## **KS WILD ACTION UPDATE!!!**

**DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE, ET. AL. VS. NORTON** — Seeking to ensure a future for one of the rarest wilderness wildlife species in the lower-48 states, KS Wild and a coalition of other conservation groups filed a lawsuit on October 8, asking a Federal District Court in Missoula, Montana to compel the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to consider new legal protections for the wolverine.

In July 2000 the conservation groups petitioned the FWS to list the wolverine as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA requires that the FWS make a preliminary finding on a petition within one year of submission. But the FWS has failed to take any action while threats to the wolverine have mounted.

# Medford BLM: 5 Timber Sales Guised As Fuels Reduction

**By Brenna Ball**

In the wake of this summer's fires, the cry to reduce fire danger by "thinning" forests has echoed from the west coast to Washington, D.C. In an August visit to southern Oregon, the president applauded the forest management practices of the Medford Bureau of Land Management (BLM), confirming that they are an agency promoting the president's agenda: using the fear of fire to justify logging mature and old growth forests.

In late September, the Medford BLM offered five timber sales at auction to the highest bidding timber company. These timber sales were all touted as "fuels reduction projects." Collectively, the five sales would have resulted in 1000 acres of mature and old growth trees being clear-cut, 10 miles of new roads, and increased fire danger in the urban-wildlands interface. Four of the five sales sold, with logging scheduled to begin next spring. The controversial Ferris Bugman timber sale in the Middle Applegate Watershed, which includes construction of seven miles of new roads and extensive thinning in un-entered forest stands, did not sell.

Many of these timber sales do include prescribed burning and non-commercial thinning, which can be positive steps toward restoring the natural fire regime. Unfortunately, these potential benefits are undermined by logging of fire-resilient mature and old growth trees, construction of new roads, and an increase in surface fuels created by tons of logging slash.

KS Wild and other conservation organizations have repeatedly requested that the BLM separate its effective fuels reduction projects from its commercial timber sales. In the Butte Falls Resource Area, the Medford BLM has begun this important step. This gives the public the right to oppose controversial timber sales without interfering with thinning projects that may actually enhance the health of the forest. However, the other resource areas have not followed this lead.

The BLM claims that because the average diameter of logged trees is relatively small, the timber sales will have few harmful environmental impacts. For example, the BLM is constantly reminding concerned residents in the Williams Valley that the average diameter of trees marked for logging in the Scattered Apples timber sale is only 12.6 inches. However, this number does not reflect the fact that while less large and more small diameter trees would be logged, the ecological importance of the older trees is much greater.

Current BLM rhetoric asserts that thinning is necessary for all forest types and will always result in decreased fire hazard. However, the scientific information coming out of the debate on forest management for fire prevention dispels the myth that thinning is the panacea for all causes of increased fire intensity. Much of the reason for the current high fire risk is past management practices, including clear-cutting and high-grading of native forests, conversion to even-aged tree farms, fire suppression, and road building. While thinning may be helpful in some fire-suppressed forest stands, thinning alone will not restore the natural fire regime of the forests.

In the midst of ever-increasing information and controversy, it is tempting to seek a "solution" for wildlands fire. But such a solution does not exist. The Klamath-Siskiyou

## Democrats Sink to a New Low.

Senate majority-leader Tom Daschle recently threw open the door to a new wave of attacks on public involvement and environmental laws by attaching a little-known rider onto the last Defense Bill which exempted portions of the Black Hills National Forest in his state of South Dakota from all environmental laws. Daschle's anti-environmental rider was a calculated blow to the environment meant to help the struggling primary election campaign of another South Dakota Democrat friendly to Daschle.

## Republicans Respond in Kind.

Using the Daschle rider as their example, Senate Republicans immediately attempted to exploit this summer's forest fires to eliminate environmental laws designed to

### Where There's Smoke There's Fire: Big Timber Money And Bush's Healthy Forest Initiative

Long before this summer's forest fires, the Bush administration was developing proposals to increase logging on our public lands. To see what the Bush forest policy is designed to accomplish it may be helpful to "follow the money."

Here's a sampling of donations to the Republican National Committee during Bush's 2000 election campaign by Oregon timber companies obtained from the Federal Election Commission:

**Freres Lumber Co. Inc., Lyons: \$100,000**

**Hampton Lumber Sales Co., Portland: \$100,000**

**Roseburg Forest Products., Roseburg: \$100,000**

**South Coast Lumber CO., Brookings: \$100,000**

**Sun Studs Inc., Roseburg: \$100,000**

**D R Johnson Lumber Co., Riddle: \$90,000**

**Superior Lumber Co., Glendale: \$50,000**

**C & D Lumber Co., Riddle: \$25,000**

**Stimson Lumber Co., Portland: \$10,000**

### What Does the Money Buy?

The Administration has consistently opposed funding for National Fire Plan projects such as local community assistance designed to empower local communities to implement responsible fuels reduction projects. Last fiscal year the Administration proposed cutting over \$600,000,000 from the National Fire Plan. Instead of supporting genuine fuels projects, the Administration is proposing to hand over our forests to the timber industry by scaling back environmental studies and eliminate appeals of logging projects through its "Healthy Forest Initiative". Bush's big timber campaign contributors must be very pleased with the payback from their investment.

ensure public participation in the timber sale planning process on federal lands. Senator Larry Craig of Idaho and Senator Domenici of New Mexico introduced a rider on the Senate interior bill that would eliminate the appeals process for many timber sales and keep federal courts from halting illegal federal logging projects, in effect applying the Daschle rider to the entire country.

## Dangerous Bill Introduced in the House.

Not to be outdone by the partisan politics of the Senate, both parties in the House have been competing with one another to see who can appear to be “tough on wildfire” by eliminating environmental laws. Currently one of these bills, the McClinnis bill (H.R. 5319) has gotten out of committee and will receive a floor vote in the House.

H.R. 5319 would undermine the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by forcing the agencies to only consider one logging alternative. It would also weaken public involvement by requiring time limits on citizen appeals and judicial review that render the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act unenforceable. The good news is that Peter Defazio opposed H.R. 5319 in committee. The bad news is that Democrats Mark Udall (CO), Neil Abercrombie (HI), Cal Dooley (CA) and Brad Carson (OK) supported H.R. 5319.

## So What’s Going to Happen?

Something bad. Probably something very bad. It’s disturbingly clear that both parties are much more interested in playing politics and influencing the outcome of the midterm elections than in the science or ecology of forest fires.

Fortunately all is not lost. The calls and letters that our congressional delegation have been receiving have made a huge difference. There is a growing awareness (even in D.C.) that large, old trees are fire-resistant and that dense young plantations often burn hot and fast. It is also widely acknowledged that the Forest Service and BLM have a long track record of targeting big, old trees for logging and creating dense young plantations.

## A Blessing in Disguise.

To some extent the evisceration of our environmental laws and the elimination of public input is a red herring. The massive patchwork of clearcuts and logging roads that defines much of the federal forest land in the West were accomplished under existing environmental laws. And while public participation is a time-consuming exercise for federal timber planners, it is unheard of for public comments to actually impact what the agency does on the ground. Perhaps by simply eliminating public participation and environmental laws, Congress will once and for all show the American public that their public lands are being managed by and for the timber industry.

## Take Forest Defense Personally.

It’s a good time to get familiar with your public forests, because you can be assured that whether or not our environmental laws survive this congressional session, the BLM and Forest Service have a timber sale planned near you. For information on federal timber sales in the K/S bioregion, check the timber sale database on the KS Wild Website. <http://www.kswild.org>.



these claims, although a forest defender identified the suspect vehicle as a pea green Forest Service truck. The public and the media are currently locked out of public lands, thereby making it difficult to witness the activities of RFP or the Forest Service. Protests and acts of civil disobedience continue within and outside of the closure area. Several people have been arrested for violating the closure on public lands.

A meeting this summer between RFP, the Forest Service, Congressional representatives and environmental groups indicated that the North Winberry sale in the Willamette National Forest would be removed from the replacement volume program. Activists have been living in the trees at Winberry for over three years. RFP indicated at that meeting that they would move forward with the RRNF replacement sales, including Peak and Silver-Sturgis.

In early October, Senator Ron Wyden sent a letter to the Under Secretary of Agriculture Mark Rey, asking that that remaining old-growth replacement volume sales be pulled (citing Blodgett in the Umpqua National Forest and Silver-Sturgis in the RRNF), and second growth plantation volume be offered to the purchasers instead. Mark Rey helped to write the infamous salvage logging rider of 1995 and is a former timber industry lobbyist. Senator Wyden noted that proceeding with controversial timber sales, like Peak, will result in further polarization.

Conservationists have identified alternative plantation volume for all remaining controversial replacement volume sales. Unfortunately the Forest Service has yet to honestly consider these viable options. Unless the public stands up and demands justice for public lands, Allyn Ford, owner of RFP, will continue to sacrifice the Rogue River National Forest for his private profit.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Call RRNF Supervisor Scott Conroy and ask that the Forest Service offer plantation volume to RFP instead of Peak and Silver-Sturgis. (Phone: 541.858.2200, Fax: 541.858.2220)
- Call Senator Ron Wyden and thank him for his efforts to end the replacement volume boondoggle. Ask him to continue to work with the Forest Service to identify appropriate replacement volume for RFP. (Phone: 541.858.5122, Fax: 541.858.5126)
- Visit the Silver-Sturgis timber sale



## KS WILD ACTION UPDATE!!!

**KLAMATH-SISKIYOU WILDLANDS CENTER V. MEDFORD BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT** — KS Wild filed this case in July in Medford’s Federal District Court, alleging that the Bureau of Land Management’s Medford District violated the National Environmental Policy Act by issuing single Environmental Assessments for three timber sales that border each other: the Indian Soda, Conde Shell and Deer Lake Timber Sales. By analyzing these timber sales as separate projects, the BLM avoids a finding that they will have a significant impact on the environment which would require them to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement, more rigorous than an Environmental Assessment.

The timber sales are in the South Fork Little Butte Watershed, one of the most important watersheds for threatened Coho salmon in the south Rogue, and would degrade thousands of acres of forest while logging up to 40 million board feet of timber. .

# Peak Timber Sale Update: Roseburg Forest Products Logging in the Headwaters of the Rogue River

**By Lesley Adams**

The notorious replacement volume saga continues as Roseburg Forest Products (RFP) began logging the Peak timber sale on September 23, 2002 in the Rogue River National Forest (RRNF). KS Wild has been working with Headwaters to challenge this sale in court. The 9th Circuit will hear an appeal in early December, but an injunction was denied, allowing RFP to cut the whole sale before the appeal is brought to court.

Peak is located in the upper Rogue River watershed between Crater Lake National Park and the Rogue-Umpqua Divide Wilderness. This sale is clear-cutting 55 acres and commercially thinning 210 acres over a total of 660 acres. This area is home to the elusive Pacific fisher, peregrine falcon and spotted owl. The area is full of sensitive wet meadow and riparian areas, as well as highly erosive soils.

The replacement volume scam has drawn harsh criticism since its inception during the 1995 Salvage Rider. The Forest Service was directed to replace cancelled timber sales from the Siuslaw National Forest after the marbled murrelet was listed as an endangered species. The Siuslaw sales were second growth no older than 80 years. The 'replacement' sales were supposed to be "an equal volume of timber, of like kind and value." In reality, RFP has been offered old growth in the Cascades and Siskiyou.

Mazama Forest Defense (MFD) announced two tree-sits at the Peak timber sale in July. An hour before logging began in September, the Forest Service declared a 700+ acre closure on the entire area, including roads leading to, but not within, the timber sale. Four days into logging, tree-sitters reported that old-growth trees were being felled within 15 feet of them. Videotape taken from the tree-sit clearly shows big trees being felled dangerously close to non-violent protesters. Tree-sitters also reported harassment and gunshots fired by Forest Service officials. The Forest Service denied



**Protesters make one last attempt to end old-growth logging at Peak.**

# Born in Fire: The Ecology of Fire in the Klamath-Siskiyou

**By Joseph Vaile**

The one phrase that best describes the Klamath-Siskiyou's (K-S) ancient and primeval forestlands is: "Born in Fire." For thousands of years these forests have lived with the rejuvenation offered by forest fire. Certain tree species only seed after close encounters with a flame, and many plants and animals have evolved with frequent burning. Native cultures lived harmoniously with fire and even used it as a management tool. Until the people of the K-S learn to embrace fire as a part of the ecosystem, we will continually conflict with this critical natural process.

Fire takes on many forms in the varied forests where it is an agent of change. For the most part, its appearance on the land depends on the weather, moisture, wind, and slope. But the factor getting most attention is fuels; or the plants, shrubs and trees that burn in a blaze. Ecologists recognize four general tactics plant and animal species use to persist in the face of fire.

In some old-growth forests, fire typically under-burns and leaves large trees singed but alive. These forests resist fire; the large, old trees generally survive a fire event. The oldest trees—with thick bark built up over decades—have the best chance of surviving when it comes time to burn. Ponderosa pine, Sugar pine, and Douglas fir are a few of the species that frequently survive a fire event.

Another strategy is to endure fire by keeping most of your growing parts tucked in the soil away from the flames. Pacific madrone and oak species common to the K-S are known to exhibit this property. In the area burned in the 2001 Quartz fire (Little Applegate Valley, southern Oregon) many madrones can be seen spouting from the standing harmed or dead trees. While individuals die in the fire event, the species thrives in the post-fire landscape.

A third strategy to species use to coexist with fire is to evade it. This is where individuals die off but its seeds survive and populate recently burned areas. Some forests are adapted to a regime of "stand-replacing fires", in which entire areas of the forest burn completely. For example, lodgepole pine stands historically often have a life cycle that ends at about 100 years of age—in fires that kill most all the trees. And sap on the Knob-cone pinecones is so thick it needs a hot fire to burn in order to expose the seed.

The fourth strategy species use is to invade freshly burned areas. They don't survive a fire, but they have widely dispersed seeds that revegetate freshly burned areas. They are known as "pioneer species" that rely on the time just after a disturbance (like fire) to proliferate without much competition from other plants. Species that utilize this strategy are blackberries and many small forbs and shrubs.

Species not evolved to endure fire fall into a fifth category. These species tend to avoid fire. Not all species are adapted to fire, and some must live in environs where fire is an infrequent visitor. Many wet habitats in this region rarely burn. Areas near creeks and rivers where the forests are always cool and wet only experience fire every few hundred years. Species like cedars and true firs fall into this category.

What survives a fire in this region is also highly dependent on the local habitat (microhabitat) and the proximity to the coast. This was very evident in the Biscuit Fire where areas near the creeks did not burn as intensely as the ridges, and areas near the coast did not burn much at all. Over 40% of the Biscuit Fire area did not burn at all and much of the rest of it burned lightly.

Much like living in a large river's flood plain, those who live in fire prone forests live in the "fire plain". Knowing more about fire will help us not only to respect its importance, but also to learn how to remain safe from forest fires in the future. We, too, can successfully coexist with fire, much like the plants and animals of the K-S have for millennia.



# The Death of a River— Klamath Fish Kill at 40,000

By Regina Chichizola

After gathering its waters in a high-altitude basin of lakes and marshes on the east side of southern Oregon's Cascades, the Klamath River flows through deep, forested canyons and valleys as it winds its way to the coast. It takes in the Shasta, Trinity, Scott and Salmon Rivers before it reaches the ocean in northern California. It is the second largest river in California, and is home to many threatened and endangered species. In the past it has sustained one of the most productive fisheries in California, providing food and livelihoods for native American tribes and commercial fishermen. Now over 40,000 of the Klamath fish are dead, and this powerful river might never be the same.

Last year the Klamath tribes, coastal fishermen and environmentalists filed a suit charging that the upper Klamath farmers were not leaving enough water for the Klamath sucker and downriver salmon. Due to a severe drought, water allocations were lowered and many farmers protested. This year, under the Bush administration's new 10-year plan, all the water the farmers wanted was awarded. The results include the biggest fish kill the North Coast has ever seen.

"The fish kill is a lot worse than everybody thinks", said Walt Lara, a representative of the Yurok tribe, in an interview. "The whole Chinook run will be impacted, probably by 85-95%. These are the beautiful chrome-bright fish that are dying not fish that are spawned out." The diseases killing the fish are gill rot and "ich", both caused by warm water and lack of oxygen. Rep. Mike Thompson, D-St. Helena, downplaying 500 pounds of rotting Klamath fish, on a hot Washington, D.C. day called the Interior Department's policy "gross mismanagement", and called for more water to be released from the dams to the river. Now more water has been released, but only for two weeks. However, Fish and Game warns that if flows are again reduced in two weeks, the steelhead trout and Coho salmon that are about to come up the river could also be wiped out.

Currently, 95% of the deaths are Chinook salmon. "These Salmon represent thousands of jobs, millions of dollars and priceless resources that are being destroyed due to the Administration's failure in the lower salmon basin", said Thompson. Thompson also said that biologists and federal agencies are denying the die-off is a result of lack of water to cover up a tragic situation. "No one has ever seen a problem like this, and it may well turn out to be a natural phenomenon," said Mark Limbaugh, from the Bureau of Reclamation. However, Fish and Game biologist, Paul Werst admits the die-off was foreseeable, and warns the death rate will drop for no other reason than we are out of fish.

Some who deny the fish kill is linked to water allocations are continuing to try to get the Klamath Basin salmon de-listed. "The Fisheries Service is guilty of using junk science to advance a political agenda. Our rivers and streams are teeming with salmon, yet farmers have been pushed into bankruptcy, businesses are closing, and a way of life is being destroyed while government officials explain away listing fish that aren't really endangered at all." said Ross Brooks, of the Pacific Legal foundation.

However, 40,000 dead salmon disagree, and many of the residents of southern Oregon and northern California are wondering why a whole ecosystem and way of life are being destroyed in order to serve a narrow vision of "progress." Salmon are considered a "keystone" species, in that their presence—or absence—in a river system has profound effects throughout the complex web of relationships that comprises an ecosystem. The health of wild salmon runs is a reflection of the integrity of the entire watershed. The Klamath River fish kill is a symptom of a system being stressed to its limits and beyond.

When decisions are being made regarding an entire ecosystem, it only seems prudent to include all groups with a stake in the results. When the pre-determined outcome is that the interests of one group, in this case Klamath Basin agricultural water users, are considered more important than all others, it should come as no surprise when the system becomes unbalanced. The tragically visible evidence of this imbalance—thousands of dead salmon—should be a wake-up call to the fact that the current management strategy is not working. It's time to come up with an approach that balances human needs with the survival requirements of all the species that depend on this beautiful river.



**Some of the Salmon that died in the Klamath River as a direct result of a poor policy.**



Photo: Northcoast Environmental Center