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NORTHWEST FINAL

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Forest Service faces big tasks

□ U.S. Senate approval of the timber compromise sets the stage for new pressures at the agency

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The one-year Northwest timber compromise approved by Congress means more logs for the region's mills and more protection for the northern spotted owl, but it also means a maze of new requirements and unprecedented pressures for the U.S. Forest Service.

The bill, which gained final Senate approval Saturday after passing the House earlier in the week, will release some old-growth timber from a federal court injunction into the pipeline, easing the threat of a critical log shortage for some mills by next spring.

But to satisfy environmentalists' demands for greater protection of wildlife and old-growth forests, it will force the Forest Service to shift gears in its timber sale program over the next 12 months.

Conservationists and biologists say the hard-won measure contains the seeds of a new, more ecologically sensitive approach to selling federal timber — one that protects wildlife, water and other environmental values and provides a dependable supply of logs to the forest products industry.

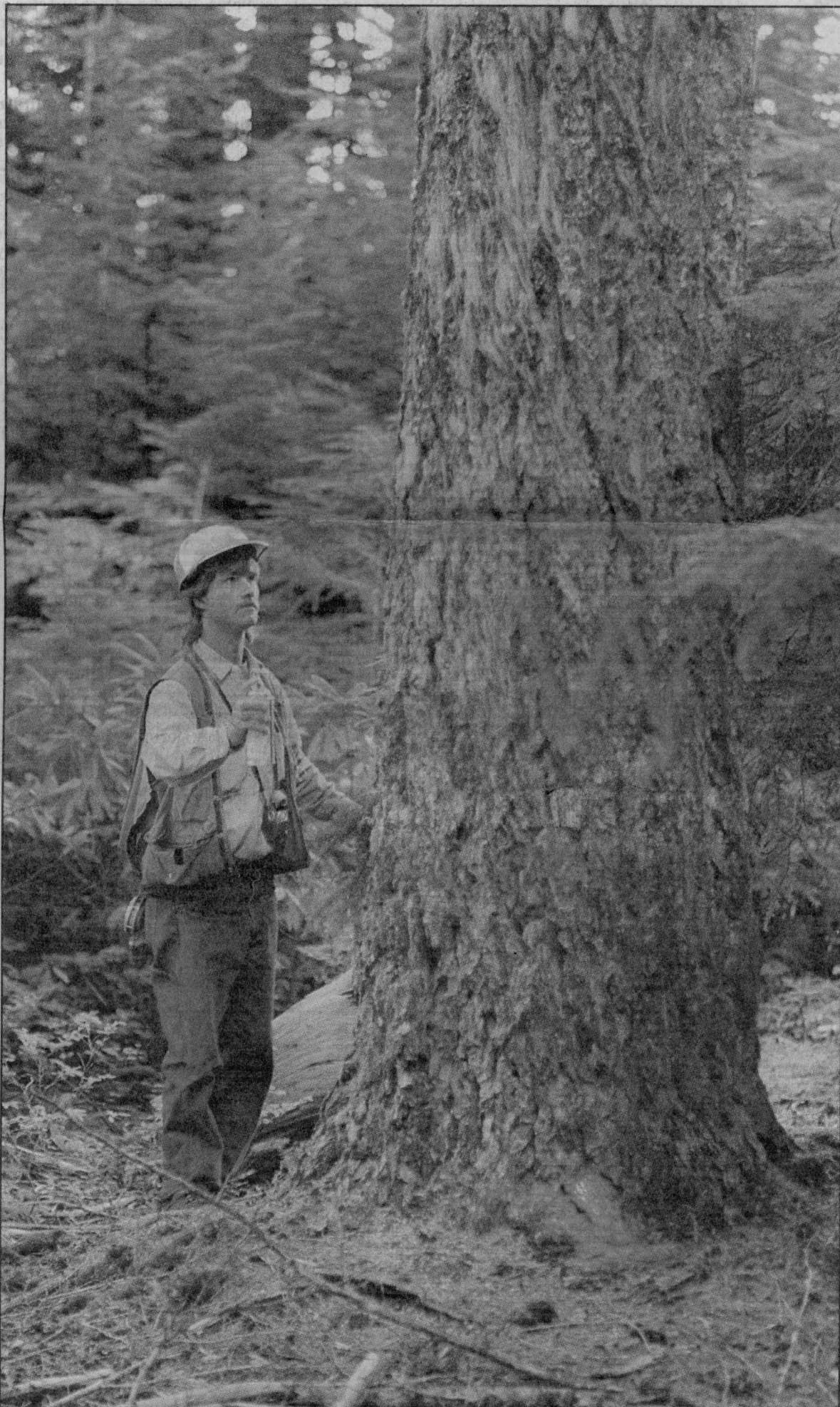
"Everyone agrees that this is a new mandate for the Forest Service to look at new ways of balancing the forests in the Pacific Northwest," said Rindy O'Brien of The Wilderness Society. "But it's not going to be an easy task for the Forest Service. It's not going to be business as usual."

"I think it could be a turning point," said Jerry F. Franklin, an expert on old-growth forest ecology. "Very clearly, Congress and the agency itself are going to reassess how they manage the national forests. I see the potential for us really to begin thinking about how we can integrate ecological and commodity values."

Timber industry officials, however, aren't conceding that the tide has turned against them in Congress.

"I don't think that everybody has recognized where we're going to get our forest products from," said Chris West of the Northwest Forestry Association, a timber industry group. "The national environmental groups aren't looking at the big picture. I'm optimistic that this will turn around."

West and other industry officials also are skeptical that environmentalists will give the plan a chance to



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Dan Michola, a U.S. Forest Service technician, marks a Douglas fir to be saved as habitat for wildlife.