

are trying to protect old-growth timber and the Northern spotted owl, which is believed to depend on old-growth forest for its habi-

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# U.S. ecologist wary of old-growth plans

By ALAN R. HAYAKAWA

of The Oregonian staff

WASHINGTON — Both legislative proposals for preserving stands of old-growth timber will prove cumbersome and inflexible in practice, in the opinion of the U.S. Forest Service's leading ecologist.

Jerry Franklin, the agency's chief plant ecologist and a professor of ecosystem analysis at the University of Washington, applied his criticism equally to the proposal drafted at the Oregon timber summit in late June and to the counterproposal released last week by environmentalists.

Instead of using a rigid formula, Franklin said, Congress should set up advisory groups at each national forest. The panels, including a forest manager, an official of the Fish & Wildlife Service, conservationists and timber industry representatives, would be given basic objectives to meet in planning timber sales, and a charge to balance production against ecological effects.

Both legislative plans attempt to direct the Forest Service to refrain from fragmenting significant stands of old-growth timber by logging. Both implicitly incorporate a definition of old growth developed by Franklin while offering the first legislative recognition that such forests merit special protection.

One plan leaves some flexibility to federal agencies, the other relatively little.

The summit plan, proposed by the Oregon congressional delegation, would direct the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to minimize fragmentation of significant stands of old growth.

The environmentalists' counterproposal attempts to offer specific guidelines for timber sales in stands of timber smaller than 80 acres, greater than 300 acres, and those in between.

"There's going to be a problem in applying either approach without getting into all kinds of questions

over interpretation," Franklin said in a telephone interview from Seattle.

The Northwest congressional delegation is considering the two approaches as part of a timber compromise intended to continue log supplies to Northwest mills while offering interim protection to old-growth forests and the Northern spotted owl.

"It's very hard not to come up with guidelines not subject to differing interpretations," Franklin said.

Even if everyone could agree on definitions, "you need the opportunity to look at each situation and balance the trade-offs," he said.

"It may make sense in some situations to cut a little bit of old growth and leave a stand of younger forest. It may make sense to take a little bit off a larger stand.

"The teams would be given an objective — a floor of timber sales — while trying to retain ecological value" of forests as wildlife habitat, watershed and recreation areas.

"The teams could take it sale by sale on each drainage and weigh their advantages; they could call on their constituencies for their opinions," he said.

Franklin said that limiting the debate to old-growth forests fitting his strict definition also was counterproductive.

"There are forests that do not meet the old-growth definition that have a lot of ecological value, including spotted owl habitat," he said. "There is a lot of old growth that is pretty reasonable for timber sales."

The so-called "new forestry" techniques — ways of harvesting timber that are less destructive than clear-cutting — may create new options about where and what to cut, he said.

Franklin predicted that participatory, multivalued planning and management would dominate the next round of planning for the national forests — "if we can ever get closure on this one."

## Spotted owl gets forest home

The Associated Press

EUGENE — A Northern spotted owl that has been studied for 13 years is getting its own piece of forest after an agreement between the U.S. Forest Service and a timber company.

The agreement between the federal agency and Bohemia Inc. re-

than eight years over how to protect the owl. Both sides said they were satisfied with the agreement, but environmentalists said it wasn't enough to adequately protect the owl.

Bohemia has logged most of the sale, and intends to log the remaining trees as soon as possible.

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