

Study: Mimic nature to save forest

By LANCE ROBERTSON

The Register-Guard

CORVALLIS — The future of Pacific Northwest forestry may lie in protecting plant and animal diversity across entire regions rather than in limited reserves, a new report suggests.

Such an approach to forest management would emphasize timber harvest and land management practices that mimic the patterns of nature, according to an analysis by David Perry, a forest ecologist at Oregon State University.

This could be the best way to protect individual species and assure survival of the forests, Perry said. This approach might ultimately mean less timber production, Perry conceded.

The report, presented recently at a conference of the Society of American Foresters, argues that ecological, silvicultural and climatic concerns make any other approach risky.

At a time when we are facing significant uncer-

tainties — in where climate is headed, in how ecosystems work — the economic gains of the homogenized forests may no longer be worth the risks," Perry said in the report. Like any prudent investor in time of great uncertainty, foresters must become more conservative in their manipulations of the forest.

Traditional clear-cut methods of logging have come under intense criticism as contributing to declines in native forest wildlife species and fostering other environmental ills, such as erosion and sedimentation that harms streams and fish habitat.

Several bills pending in Congress would set aside large tracts of forest as preserves for the threatened northern spotted owl, old growth or other species.

But rather than focusing merely on spotted owls or creating wilderness reserves where lands are left untouched, Perry's report suggests managing an entire region — for example, Western Oregon — as an ecological whole.

Any management of small sections of land should

be viewed against a larger context that includes all state, federal and private land, Perry said.

While that might cost jobs, the trade-off would be protection of plants, animals and better forests that survive in the long term.

The study made no predictions about declines in timber harvests.

With this concept, Perry said, tracts of young and middle-aged trees would exist as islands within an old growth system, rather than vice versa. This shifting mosaic of young, middle-aged and older forests would closely resemble time-proven natural patterns, he said.

The tools to accomplish this include some of the so-called new forestry methods, Perry said, in addition to much longer tree harvest rotations.

I think we can manage forests on 200-year rotations that nurture a full range of species diversity," Perry said. We have a hell of a lot of options that we're not exploring as well as we should."

Steamboat Creek study to begin

WE SHIP

The Umpqua National Forest is conducting a study on whether or not Steamboat Creek should be added to the list of Scenic Rivers.

Waterways in the wild and scenic rivers system receive special protection for scenic values, wildlife and fisheries and fish habitat.

Steamboat Creek is located in the North Umpqua National Forest. The 1988 Oregon Waters Act requires the U.S. Forest Service to study the creek for possible inclusion in the list of Scenic Rivers.