

Scientists claim Forest Service brooks no criticism of logging

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■ Twenty-two of them take their case to Vice President Al Gore via a scorching letter

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The U.S. Forest Service routinely suppresses scientific information and intimidates professionals who criticize logging practices, 22 prominent natural resource scientists asserted in a letter sent to Vice President Al Gore on Monday.

The scientists urged Gore to re-establish public trust in the Forest Service and lead it "into a new era of science-based ecosystem management."

Many of the letter's signers are conservation biologists, who specialize in studying ways to restore dwindling wildlife populations.

The letter comes just a week and a

half before the Clinton administration's planned Northwest Forest Conference and on the heels of a new scientific report predicting that further logging restrictions will be necessary to preserve old-growth forest ecosystems. The Forest Service submitted the 500-page report to U.S. District Judge William Dwyer last Friday.

The scientists who wrote to Gore said two recent incidents illustrate their contention that the Forest Service was suppressing science that threatens resource extraction:

- The cancellation of studies on Idaho's Clearwater National Forest that warned additional planned logging in highly erosion-prone watersheds could do enormous damage to fisheries.

- Alleged reprisals against biologists on southeast Alaska's Tongass National Forest for reporting that new logging plans threatened the vi-

ability of several wildlife species.

The scientists also contended that the Forest Service requires scientists to provide an unrealistic burden of proof that a project will cause damage.

"Our state of knowledge is too limited and ecosystems are far too complex to satisfy a 'beyond the shadow of a doubt' management standard," the scientists said. Instead, they said, the burden should be on those who want to extract resources to prove that their projects won't cause unacceptable damage.

A Forest Service spokesman in Washington, D.C., said agency officials had not seen the letter and could not respond.

The scientists also attacked the way the Forest Service was budgeted, saying the system offers the agency incentives to put the sale of timber above all other uses.

"In effect, managers must extract resources in order to have budget monies available for other activities such as wildlife protection, stream rehabilitation and ecosystem monitoring," they said.

"We believe that this systemic problem in current Forest Service management is the largest single obstacle facing you as you steer the administration along a new path toward sustainable national resource management," they said. "Failure to correct these problems will undermine your every effort."

Among the letter's signers were Paul R. Ehrlich, population specialist at Stanford University; Dennis D. Murphy, director of the Center for Conservation Biology at Stanford; David A. Perry, forest ecosystem specialist at Oregon State University; Reed F. Noss, ecologist in the Department of Fish and Wildlife at Oregon State University and Arnold W. Bolle, retired dean of the School of Forestry at the University of Montana.