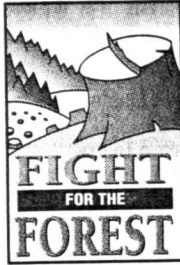


# Interior secretary tours forests

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■ **DETAILS:** Details of next week's forest conference have begun to leak out, and it appears that some members of the public may be allowed to observe.

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■ **On a visit to Oregon, Bruce Babbitt declines to make any predictions about the upcoming Northwest timber summit**

By KATHIE DURBIN  
of The Oregonian staff

MCKENZIE BRIDGE — U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt looked, listened and hiked through the woods but refused to predict the outcome of the April 2 Northwest Forest Conference Friday during a four-hour national forest tour.

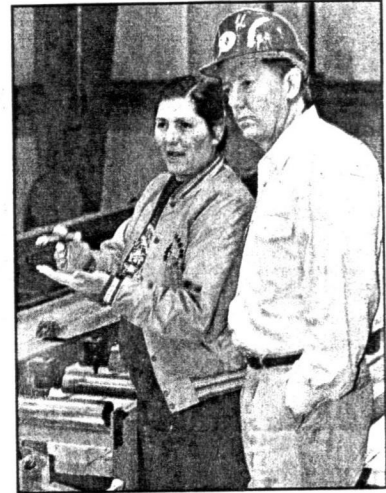
Pressed by reporters during stops at the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest near McKenzie Bridge, Babbitt would not divulge whether he favors banning raw log exports or ending the logging of old-growth forests.

In an interview with the Associated Press this week, Babbitt called it a "paradox" that logs were scarce for

Northwest mills, yet logs destined for Japan were "stacked to the sky, as far as the eye can see" at a Washington port.

Babbitt did say he has no ambition to annex the U.S. Forest Service, now in the Department of Agriculture, to the Interior Department — despite the prominent role he is playing in helping the Clinton administration find a solution to the region's timber woes. Those woes have been brought on in part by environmental restrictions blocking timber sales on national forests in Oregon, Washington and Northern California.

Babbitt's pre-summit tour of the Northwest will give him a crash course in the interests and values leading up to the impasse between environmentalists and the timber industry. The three-day tour will take him to Oregon



TIM JEWETT/The Oregonian

Tina Webb, an employee of Avison Lumber Co., describes mill operations to Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt.

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## Babbitt: Forests awe interior chief

■ **Continued from Page One**  
and Northern California.

Babbitt plans stops in Riddle and Medford on Saturday before going on to Eureka, Calif.

Babbitt, wearing a black leather jacket and hiking shoes, touched down on the Andrews Experimental Forest just before 11 a.m. after flying by helicopter over forests managed by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. He said he was awed by the sheer scale of Oregon's forest resource.

"It's a prodigious forest — rugged, productive, with endless capacity," he said, adding, "There's surely room for protecting diverse ecosystems" as well as producing timber to help the economy.

Asked his reaction to the aerial views of heavy logging activity in the Cascades, Babbitt chose his words carefully.

"As you see the clear-cutting from the air, what comes out is the need for research, the need for good forest practices," he said. "We have to keep the regenerative power of these forests going . . . The problem is, they've been ignored. There was an assumption it wouldn't make any difference because there would always be more timber over the next mountain."

Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management officials took Babbitt to three sites: a bridge over Lookout Creek, a site where scientists are measuring the long-term decomposition of logs, and a high ridge where a patchwork of logging practices is visible across the land-

efforts the administration makes to help timber interests will be based on the needs of a modern, evolving industry that uses every sliver of wood from a log and can use a variety of second-growth trees, not just old-growth Douglas fir.

Babbitt praised Bill Avison, the third-generation owner of Avison Lumber Co., for moderizing to allow it to use second-growth trees rather than old growth.

During the tour, Babbitt declared that a way will be found to both protect the ecosystem and assure a steady flow of timber to Northwest mills.

"My premise, and the operating premise of the Clinton administration, is that we find a balanced solution that will provide jobs and tim-

ber flowing back into the mills, and do a reasonable job of conserving environmental values," he said.

Late in the day Babbitt carried his message to Salem, where he took part in a series of meetings with Gov. Barbara Roberts, a group of state legislators and members of the Oregon congressional delegation.

Generally they were receptive to his talk of untangling federal agencies and reaching a decision on the issues before the year was out. However, at least one member of Congress, Rep. Bob Smith, R-Ore., was worried that people unrealistically might expect immediate results from the summit.

Foster Church and Dan Hortsch of The Oregonian staff also contributed to this report.