

As I see it

# Forest plan serves as benchmark

By Mike Kerrick

**W**e've just completed our new Willamette National Forest Plan, and I am personally very proud of it. The new plan represents over a decade of research, analysis and interaction with you. It will guide management activities on the forest into the 21st century.

Managing the Willamette, a very large and valuable federal property, is really managing nature. Natural resources like wood, water and wildlife respond in predictable ways to management. Some say that there are three basic paradigms for humans' relationship with nature:

1) Humans dominate over nature — following this philosophy during the 19th century brought about the conservation movement;

2) Nature dominates over humans — where the forces of nature rule, such as the eruption of Mt. St. Helens or in wilderness where man is a temporary visitor; and

3) Humans live in harmony with nature.

I believe the third paradigm to be the one to generally follow — humans can live in harmony with nature, and we need to continue to learn how to do so. Over the past 40 years, especially the past 20, we have learned a tremendous amount about how the natural ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest work. As is the case with most sciences, we have a lot more to learn. We are fortunate to have the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest in the center of the Willamette. Much of what we know has come from this priceless research property.

I am in my 39th summer with the Forest Service. As an agency, we tend to measure the years by summers because that's when most of our stewardship activities occur — laying out projects, maintaining recreation facilities, protecting the forest from fire, and all the other activities that we do to manage and be good stewards of the land. Over the past 39 summers, I've witnessed a tremendous amount of change — most of it for the better. The new forest plan that we've just released represents another significant change. I think it is a real advancement from our past plan, and I'm very excited about implementing it.

You, the citizen owners of the Willamette National Forest, have helped us shape a new future for the forest — a forest that has more special places protected, a new look, and a management style that allows for more citizen participation in the development and design of projects. Let's take a look at each of these emphases.

**Special Places:** Special places on the forest represent 53 percent of the Willamette National Forest's land base — this land base holds 50 percent of the forest's old-growth inventory and is land from which there will be no scheduled timber harvest. These special places are varied and range from superlative old-growth groves to outstanding recreation/wilderness areas to special wildlife habitats.

**A Forest With a New Look:** We've incorporated the best available scientific information into our standards and guidelines, which will provide direction for the projects that we implement. These standards and guidelines will ensure that, while producing a significant output of needed forest products, our projects will be more environmentally and ecologically sensitive.

Examples of these new standards include: leaving standing live and dead trees and large woody debris in harvest areas to provide diversity in wildlife habitat; protecting riparian zones; and designing projects from a larger landscape perspective.

**A New Way of Doing Business:** Our pledge to you — the citizen owners of the Willamette National Forest — is a new way of doing business. We will:

■ Interact and participate with you as we design and implement new projects under the plan.

■ Seek opportunities to strengthen our ties and the value of the forest to local communities.

■ Seek your participation in monitoring activities and keep you informed of the results in our annual report.

■ Involve all interested parties in the opportunities and processes to change the plan over time.

I realize that the plan is coming out at a time when controversy surrounds us. However, it's important that we go forward with the new forest plan. It will serve as a benchmark from which to assess proposed changes. The plan will provide stability as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service develops a recovery plan for the spotted owl. Once that recovery plan is in place, we'll prepare an amendment to the forest plan.

As you can see, there's lots to do and lots of ways for you to become involved. I urge you to come by and review or pick up a copy of the new Willamette National Forest Plan. Copies of the plan are available at 211 E. Seventh Ave. If you have questions, please call us at 465-6521.

Mike Kerrick is supervisor of the Willamette National Forest.