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4. **FORESTS: Green groups want more protection for second-growth Ore. forest** (06/28/2007)

Arthur O'Donnell, *Land Letter* editor

More than 55 years after a series of wildfires burned through much of what is now known as Oregon's Tillamook State Forest, Northwest environmental groups are hoping to persuade state managers -- and private land owners -- to apply more conservation-oriented practices in order to maintain a more diverse habitat for hundreds of animals and plant species of concern. And to highlight the drive, this month they joined with other groups in a formal petition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the dusky tree vole under the Endangered Species Act.

In a report released June 18, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Oregon Sierra Club argued that despite an historic legacy of heavy logging and four successive disastrous wildfires from 1933 through 1951, the Tillamook rainforest "could once again thrive" with greater protections.



Oregon's Tillamook State Forest is made up of lands that had been severely burned or harvested. Environmental groups want to see added protections and logging restrictions to ensure a healthy ecosystem for wildlife. Photo courtesy of Tillamook Forest Center.

"Much of the area has grown back and is starting to reach a point of showing old forest characteristics," said CBD's Noah Greenwald. While the forest comprises about 500,000 acres, with 40 percent of the rainforest in question in state hands, Greenwald said that private landowners also have a duty to provide protection for imperiled animals and plants.

According to the report, the Tillamook rainforest was home to 215 "species of concern" including nine that are now considered extinct. Of those species of concern, the center said 71 (34 percent) are critically imperiled; 77 (37 percent) are imperiled; and 58 (29 percent) are vulnerable.

Topping the list is the dusky tree vole, a relative of the red tree vole, which spends its life in trees and benefits from old-growth forest features. Recent studies indicate the population of voles has declined and that it is missing from some historic habitats, said CBD's Greenwald. A major suspect is the continued logging in the region.

Don Fontenot of the Oregon Sierra Club, called the Tillamook region "a sacrifice zone for industrial forestry. Forest reserves and better forest practices are needed to save the tree vole and dozens of other wildlife species in the Tillamook," he said.

The state forest "is surrounded by industrial forest land," he told *Land Letter*. "This is an opportunity to create a stronghold for many species."

Among recommendations in the report, the groups urged state managers to create a system of reserved lands similar to those for federal lands under the Northwest Forest

Plan. In particular, they want to increase timber harvest rotation periods to 120 years, while maintaining both live and dead trees in cutting areas.

They said that the state's Forest Practices Act should be revised to require 100 year rotations on private timber lands, while increasing buffers alongside streams to 150 feet and requiring buffers on all streams, including non-fish bearing and headwater streams.

The report also recommended reducing road density to one mile per square mile. "These rules will not only protect species of concern; they will also benefit the tourist industry and ensure a high quality of life for coastal communities," the report concluded.

Counties depend on timber

Such changes might be a hard sell in the region, however. Timber harvesting is already under pressure by protections for endangered species, and county governments -- which turned over their lands to the state after the fires -- depend heavily on revenues from state-sponsored logging. According to Ross Holloway, district forester for Oregon's Tillamook District, more than 75 million board feet were cut under 15 state timber sales in 2006, raising \$19 million, about two-thirds of which flows back to counties.

"We call these working forests," said Jeff Foreman, spokesman for the Oregon Department of Natural Resources. "The land was largely deeded to the state by counties, and they depend on harvesting to support county services. We can't just set it aside."

Much of the logging serves to thin out the second-growth forest, which was overplanted with Douglas fir by volunteers eager to restore the lands that had been destroyed by fire and clear cutting. "What we need to do is to go on thinning. These trees are all 50 years old," he said.

The forest is under a "structured base management" that tries to build a more diverse base of tree types but allows for clear cutting and regeneration over 15-year periods. Last year, there were about 4,484 acres of clear cutting allowed in the Tillamook District forest. On the other hand, the district's reforestation unit planted over 2 million trees and restored 4,000 acres.

Illustrating the extraordinary public effort in taking over and restoring the Tillamook Forest, the state last year opened a Tillamook Forest Center with a 13,000 square foot museum and learning center. It is located "pretty much in the heart of the forest," said project leader Doug Decker. "This is a special place that evolved differently than other Oregon forests," he said.

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