



## Public deserves an honest debate over logging and wildfires



*By Mark Turner*

I think it is high time that we had some serious discussions in this country, about how our federal forests are being managed. For far too long, environmentalists have been the ones setting the agenda, with very poor results. For over 20 years now, the most common way of dealing with issues on our federal forests, has been to do nothing. Now, that might have been all fine and dandy, 300 years ago, when there were hardly any people living here. However, with millions of people living and working near our federal forests, it's not really a viable option any more.

About a year and a half ago, I was in Southern Colorado. There, I had a chance to visit one of the few remaining mill owners/loggers. He showed me how they were removing dead and dying trees off private lands, to improve forest health. He also explained how the bug infestations got started in that area. He said that he was at a meeting, many years earlier, about addressing bug infestations that had gotten started on Forest Service land. He told me that, at that meeting, a well-known biologist told the Forest Service that, "if they didn't get the bug infestation under control then, that it was going to just keep spreading". You can probably imagine what the Forest Service's response was. They responded by doing nothing. So, subsequently, the infestations got worse and started to spread to adjacent private lands. This mill owner convinced me to drive up into the forest service ground and see for myself, what the conditions were like. The contrast was very pronounced. The surrounding private forest lands were reasonably healthy, however, the federal forests were in very poor health.

The Forest Service, however, is not the only Federal agency that are poor stewards of our public forests. Here in Oregon, the Bureau of Land Management is responsible for a considerable land base. These are called the "O & C Lands". In 1937, there was an Act of Congress that set these lands aside for, primarily timber production. Now, I always thought that an Act of Congress was something pretty important. Something that you couldn't just ignore? However, over the years, environmental types have managed to chip away at timber harvest levels, on these O & C Lands. So much so, that the BLM has adopted the same type of "hands off approach" that the Forest Service uses, for managing much of their land base. To the point now, that, I believe, that they are no longer even coming close to fulfilling their mandate through the O & C Act.

Subsequently, these forests are becoming just as unhealthy and fire prone as those managed by the Forest Service.

It doesn't have to be this way. I think we can look to other parts of the world that have learned how to manage their forests for the long run. Last year, at The American Loggers Council annual meeting, Ken Swanstrom, a former president of the ALC, gave a very fine presentation of a tour he had taken through the forests of Southern Germany. For me, it was rather eye opening. He said that during his tour, he saw some of the most beautiful forests he had ever seen. And the entire time he was there, he only saw three dead trees. There, they have been managing their forests for over 500 years. Foresters there explained that absolutely nothing was off limits to logging. They also explained how important of a tool logging was for forest health. His tour included a visit to the City of Munich's water shed. One of the largest untreated water systems in the world. The forester there told him that "well, everyone knows that if you want healthy forests and clean water, then, of course you are going to log". I wish more people in this country could understand that. Ken also told us that this part of Southern Germany produces the equivalent of 7 billion board feet of forest products annually. Contrast that with the Forest Service, in this country, who struggle to produce 3 billion board feet from all of their federal forests, throughout the entire United States. In fact, I was very surprised to learn that the country of Germany, because of their aggressive forest management policies, produces the equivalent of 21 billion board feet of forest products annually. While the entire United States produces 40 billion board feet. That, despite a land base that is 28 times larger.

Clearly, when it comes to forest management, we have a lot of room for improvement. One of the goals of the American Loggers Council, is to advocate for better management of our federal forests. I believe that the lack of management of our public forests is not only costing us in lost resources. But is also bad for the environment. In my opinion, the biggest losers from our failing Federal Forest Management Policies, are the forests themselves.

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*The American Loggers Council is a 501 (c)(6) not for profit trade association representing professional timber harvesters and log truckers in 32 states across the United States with headquarters near Hemphill, Texas.*