



Cooper Spur Wild and Free Coaliti

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Forest Services' Scientifically Unsound "Fire Risk" Reduction Project

Working to preserve and protect the biological integrity and historic nature of the northeast side of Mt. Hood

The Forest Services' Scientifically Unsound "Fire Risk" Reduction Project

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By Ralph Bloemers

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Peter H. Morrison has worked as a forest ecologist in the Oregon Cascades for over 25 years. In that time he gained firsthand experience of the relationship between forests and wildfire. He has worked on many projects and authored numerous scientific reports relating to forests and fire ecology. Last summer, the Sierra Club joined in a legal challenge to the Polallie Cooper Logging Project. The Project consists of three timber sales on the north side of Mt. Hood near Cooper Spur that would clear the area in and around the ski area and the Inn at Cooper Spur of its largest, most commercially valuable trees. The Forest Service has billed the project as reducing the risk of fire on the north side of Mt. Hood. The plaintiffs' counsel engaged Morrison to conduct a comprehensive review of the current forest science literature and the Polallie Cooper Planning Area Environmental Assessment.

In his declaration, Morrison concluded that the proposed actions in *no way* reduce the risk of wildfire in the area. In fact, he determined that the commercial thinning activities such as those proposed *often lead to an increased risk of wildfire*. The thinning operations predominantly target large-diameter, healthy, and economically valuable trees instead of the young small ones that are more susceptible to fire. Slash left behind from bulldozers and chainsaws is seldom cleaned up creating additional fire hazards. Morrison recommends prescribed burning and selective thinning of small-diameter trees, and removal of the lower limbs of trees and brush, as far more effective alternatives to preventing stand-replacing fires.

Without the assumption that the proposed commercial thinning will reduce the risk of fire, it is exceedingly implausible for the project to be justified for anything other than commercial purposes. Morrison's analysis of the situation questions the validity of current methods and makes a strong case for the need of new methods based on accurate and current science. Morrison's report illuminates the fallacies of the current proposals coming from the Bush administration and Representative Greg Walden. While changes do need to occur in forest management, Morrison's declaration underscores that those changes should be guided by science and reason, not fallacies, superficial analysis, and economic gain. Otherwise the ultimate goal – protection of communities – does not stand a chance of being realized.

Contact Ralph Bloemers at ralph@crag.org, or Sandi Scheinberg at sandi@bark-out.org, for more information on the Polallie-Cooper logging project and what you can do to help stop it.