SAVE OUR NATIONAL FORESTS!

A Citizens' Primer to Stop U.S. Forest Service Destruction

by Howie Wolke

I. AN AGENCY OUT OF CONTROL

The US Forest Service. To the uninformed, the name conjures up romantic images of diligent rangers roaming and protecting the woods they love. The Forest Service. To the unknowing, the image is that of a benevolent bureaucracy protecting wilderness and replacing the "rape and ruin" logging of the past with enlightened conservation. The Forest Service. It was their men of yesteryear — Aldo Leopold and Bob Marshall — who above all others invented what was to become today's National Wilderness Preservation System. The Forest Service. Shiled by the myth of stewardship, the illusion of competence, and the lie of alleged ecological responsibility.

In the United States of America today, this agency is the primary force behind the destruction of wilderness ecosystems and healthy habitat. The Forest Service (USFS or simply FS) is the epitome of all that is wrong with bureaucracy, from the Bureau of Reclamation to the Kremlin. The "Freddies" (Forest Rape Eagerly Done & Done In Endless Sequence) must be stopped, before they complete their methodical ruination of our National Forests.

Harsh words? You bet! But the Forest Service has earned those words wherever it manages forests, from the Appalachian hardwoods to the giant conifers of the Pacific Northwest. The steady deterioration of fish and wildlife habitat; alarming reductions in genetic, species, and ecosystem diversity; drastic losses in the opportunities for solitude and quality recreation; and the ugly spreading cancer of bare eroding earth are the legacy that — unless thwarted — the Forest Service will leave us for centuries to come.

It is up to private citizens to stop the bastard children of Gifford Pinchot from reducing the public forests to tree farms laced with an unending profusion of roads and clearcuts. To the agency's plans to continue the carnage, the time has come not just to say "No!" but to say "Hell no!"

II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

During the late 19th century, Americans gradually became aware of the wholesale "cut and run" destruction occurring throughout many of the nation's forests. As a result, in 1891, the US Congress passed the Reservation Act, which included the historic "Forest Reserve Clause." Under the Reservation Act, the President was given authority to withdraw lands from the public domain in order to protect them from the ravages of uncontrolled logging and mining. Under the Reserve Clause, Presidents Benjamin Harrison and Grover Cleveland began to withdraw public lands that would eventually become America's National Forests.

The first Chief of the US Forest Service was Gifford Pinchot. Between 1905 and World War II, the National Forest System grew to nearly its present size. During this time, the Forest Service bureaucracy also grew, but logging remained a secondary use (under the Reserve Clause) 99 million acres from the public domain, thus creating the bulk of our National Forest System. Roosevelt's withdrawal was probably the single most important conservation act in the young nation's history. The first Chief of the US Forest Service was Gifford Pinchot.

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ging. After the war, though, the FS began to emphasize logging over all other forest uses. Between 1951 and 1969, the annual cut increased more than eight-fold, from 1.5 to 12.8 billion board feet. Clearcutting became the pri-
mary logging method and intensive habitat destruction occurred throughout
the public forests. For example, in Idaho’s Payette National Forest during the winter of 1964-65, as a result of clearcutting, extensive roadbuilding along steep unstable slopes, at least 120,000 tons of sediment smothered the spawning grounds of about 50,000 Chinook Salmon in the drainage of the South Fork of the Salmon River. Similarly, al-
though smaller-scale disasters were occurring throughout the National Forests as new roads and clearcuts pushed ever deeper into formerly wild areas. By the 1970s, the FS had evolved into a bloated, inefficient bureaucracy dedi-
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Law public lands are open to virtually unrestrained mineral exploration and development. This law covers “hard rock” minerals such as copper, lead, and zinc. Under the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, exploration and development rights to fossil fuels and a few other minerals are auctioned off to private companies at the discretion of the government. The public has little say in how and where mining and drilling activities occur. For example, during the late 1960s and early 70s, Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) bureaucrats secretly leased about two million acres of Wyoming’s Bridger-Teton National Forest to oil companies. (The BLM manages the sub-surface rights on much of the National Forestland.) Altogether, oil leases cover nearly 18 million acres of the National Forests. Roads, oil rigs, pipelines, powerlines, processing plants, stripmines, timber sales, poachers, ORVs and the loss of wildlife habitat — often in previously roadless areas — frequently follow mineral leasing. There is a growing consensus that our public land mining laws are in need of major overhaul.

EXPLORATION ADMINISTRATION: The National Forests provide more recreation user days than do all the National Parks combined. The Forest Service often argues that big roadbuilding budgets and below cost timber sales are necessary because they “benefit” various forest users. The bureaucrats often cite recreation and administration as beneficiaries of continued wildland industrialization. Yet almost nobody except the loggers and bureaucrats want the roads and clearcuts. Wildlife biologists, hunters, fishers, pedestrians, bikers, skiers, hucksters, even many small-scale independent loggers are all saying “Enough!”

WILDERNESS: In 1966, legendary conservationist Bob Marshall directed the first National Forest wilderness inventory. Marshall identified 100 million of facto wilderness acres within the National Forests. Although Congress has protected only 66 million National Forest acres under the Wilderness Act of 1964, since Marshall’s inventory the Forest Service has presided over the destruction of more than 60 million acres. As we’ve seen, the Presidios are now liquidating about 1.5 million acres of “de facto” wilderness each year. Except where extremely steep slopes, alpine tundra, or...
The Destruction of FACTS WE ALL SHOULD KNOW

*The National Forest System consists of approximately 190 million acres. That is slightly smaller than the combined land area of Texas and Louisiana.

*Over 100 million acres of the National Forests are already roaded, logged, or otherwise developed to the extent that they have no remaining undeveloped tracts of 5000 acres or larger. (The Wilderness Act generally requires an undeveloped tract to be 5000 acres or larger in order to qualify for protection.)

*Only 17% of the National Forest System (just over 32 million acres) is designated Wilderness. Another 50 million acres are roadless and undeveloped but vulnerable to Fs mismanagement.

*The Forest Service is destroying about 1.5 million acres of this de facto wilderness each year.

*There are already over 350,000 miles of roads in the National Forests, not including other federal, state, and county rights of way. That is roughly equivalent to 31 times the circumference of the Earth.

*Less than 2% of the land area of the contiguous 48 states is protected as Wilderness.

*About 20% of the nation's wood fiber production comes from the National Forests.

*The Forest Service employs over twice as many civil engineers nationwide as it does wildlife biologists.

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*The Forest Service is building almost 10,000 miles of new road each year, at an annual cost to taxpayers of about half a billion dollars!

*For Fiscal Year 1988, Congress appropriated $172 million for Forest Service road construction. These "public works" roads are in addition to the purchaser credit roads which are another huge subsidy to the timber industry.

*The Forest Service clearcut a quarter million acres of forest in FY 1986.

*In 1985, below cost (and environmentally destructive) timber sales cost the American taxpayer approximately 600 million dollars, according to the OMB.

*In 1986 the Forest Service put 512 timber sales up for bid in Congressally-released Roadless Areas. This does not include sales in roadless lands that were excluded from RARE II, as those lands don't legally require Congressional "release" for development. It also does not include illegal timber sales in Roadless Areas not released by Congress. The FS has on many occasions attempted to conduct sales in areas not released, although Earth First! and other environmental groups have at least delayed many of these sales.

*Since 1986 we've lost almost two acres of National Forest for each acre that Congress has protected. Even since passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, we've still lost about an acre of wilderness for each acre protected by Congress.

*There are about 100,000 trail miles remaining in the National Forests. That's less than one-third of the total road miles, and in recent years National Forest trails have been neglected due to the Forest Service's focus upon road building. Trail mileage has decreased sharply.

*As of September 30, 1987, oil and gas leases covered 18 million National Forest acres. Over half the leased acreage is in Wyoming, Idaho, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada.

*At the end of 1987, Forest Service grazing allotments for cattle and sheep covered 101,372,771 acres.
The future of species such as Fisher, Marten, Wolverine, Lynx, Mountain Goat, Northern Flying Squirrel, Northern Bog Lemming, Northern Goshawk, Northern Spotted Owl, Harlequin Duck, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Rough-skinned Newt and various anadromous salmonoids depends in no small measure upon the future of our remaining unprotected National Forest wildlands.

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The Freighties plan to at least double the current figure of 350,000 Forest Service road miles during the next half century.

Throughout the National Forests, there are thousands of cut-over acres in which attempts at regeneration have failed. There, the environmental effects of clearcutting are at once blatant and subtle. Moreover, they vary depending upon geographic, topographic, and soil conditions. Due to the complexity of natural forest ecosystems, the consequences of drastic alterations such as clearcutting can never be fully understood. Clearcutting does not emulate any natural process. There is no biological justification for the practice. Clearcutting is purely economic. Clearcutting destroys the natural diversity of forest ecosystems and should be outlawed.

(OTHER KINDS OF LOGGING:

“Seed tree” cuts and “shelterwood” cuts are slight variations in the clearcutting theme. Seed trees are isolated mature trees that are already rare, Threatened, or Endangered. Because forests in the late stages of ecological succession generally contain a much lower portion of the total forest species, clearcutting is desirable (because of human activity), species such as Spotted Owl, Goshawk, Red Crossbill, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Woodpecker, Deer, Fisher, and Northern Flying Squirrels are generally adversely affected by clearcutting. These species, known to ecologists as “K species,” are being replaced by the generally more tolerant “C species.” The K species, those which rapidly colonize logged over or otherwise disturbed habitat, such as Deer, Squirrels, and Skunks, are examples of such species. After the trees are removed, work areas become barren and susceptible to erosion.

The actual tree-felling destroys roosts, dens, and nurseries for forest animals, and kills outright many of the slower mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. The newborn of faster animals such as deer are also killed. Slash burning, which often follows the logging, kills many small animals such as chipmunks.

In areas characterized by large blocks of contiguous forest, clearcuts fragment habitat, leaving only “habitat islands” of undisturbed forest, which are often too small to support the normal array of large forest species. Clearcuts and roads impede migration, thus reducing gene flow. This leads to inbreeding depression, genetic drift, and other genetic problems within the habitat island. Topographic and soil conditions that are rarely found in undisturbed forest create particularly vulnerable to local extinction due to habitat fragmentation.

Forest ecologists are only now beginning to understand some of the more subtle effects of clearcutting. For example, most North American forests depend upon a symbiotic relationship between various species of soil fungi (mycorrhizal fungi) and the roots of trees. Mycorrhizal fungi uptake of water and nutrients, and forest growth is stymied when the fungi are absent. Clearcutting destroys mycorrhizal relationships, and in some areas eliminates populations of animals which spread mycorrhizal spores. In heavily clearcut landscapes it may take many years for mycorrhizal relationships to become reestablished.

Mineral soils are extremely efficient at nutrient cycling. Generally, even in primeval forest sites, forests slowly build up a nutrient capital in their biomass, so tightly recycling nutrients that at any given time, the soil is relatively sterile. Natural disturbances such as fire, wind, and forest pathogens create openings for early succesion species (B species) without removing much of the nutrient capital from the site. Clearcutting, on the other hand, removes much of that capital. Although there is a paucity of studies, it seems probable that as the Forest Service increases its emphasis on “intensive” forestry (unnatural genetic selection, herbicides, frequent thinning, and short rotations), the nutrient capital on many sites decreases, and areas of low natural productivity, will be depopulated. Some scientists are beginning to suspect that acid rain is only one culprit in the drying forests of Germany.

Many of the new intensive tree culture, nutrition, and mycorrhizal de-
tion or elimination of various wildlife populations means an overall reduction in biodiversity on all three levels: ecosystem, species, and genetic. That means reducing the risk of extinction of forest ecosystems and in their ability to recover from natural and human-induced disturbances. Roads also provide avenues for exotic species to invade wild habitats. And roads kill directly, too. Many of the estimated one million animals killed annually on roads in the US involve road building and logging.

As the typical industrial forest in the Forest Service, a very old forest characterized by huge living trees, old growth stands (including dead trees), abundant deadfall (fallen logs), and occasional broken top trees and cavity trees (live rotting trees) is "overmature and decadent." That is, the annual increment of mature wood growth is very low, and the forest should be "harvested" and replaced with a faster growing young stand of trees.

But to a biologist, forests characterized by such components are "old growth," and today are invaluable. In pre-Columbia America, old growth forests were the rule and not the exception. Particularly in the East and the Northwest, old-growth forests dominated the landscape, sheltering an incredibly diverse array of plants and animals. Old growth forests were somewhat less abundant in the northern Rockies where more frequent lightning-caused forest fires resulted in a even more even mix of young and old forest stands. But even there, mature and old growth forests dominated much of the landscape. Pockets of old growth were even common in the central and southern Rockies along the western slope of the Sierra, and in parts of the Deep South.

Today, logging and other developments have destroyed most of America's old-growth forests. For example, along the western slope of the Washington and Oregon Cascades, biologists estimate that at any given time about 90% of the pre-Columbia forest was mature or old growth (20% of the total stands), and in young stages of lightning-induced ecological succession. Today, the figures are much reduced. Of the remaining forests of the forest is old growth (25%) of the National Forest acreage west of the Cascade crest is old growth, and 10% of the forest is old growth or recent clearcut. .

As we've begun to see, old growth provides primary habitat for many plant and animal species, and these are gener­ally unique to the species and have already be­come very rare. The Forest Service's current management of old growth is drastically reducing the diver­sity of species' gene pools, and in some cases completely eliminating rare or unique species. In western Oregon, for example, at least 45 species of terrestrial vertebrates (animals) which have a right to exist and evolve. North American animals which depend primarily upon old-grown are: Marten, Bobcat, Wolf, Black Bear, Red-tailed Hawk, Scrub Jay, Common Grackle, Red-tailed Hawk, Over­born Spotted Owl, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Pilotoode Woodpecker, and

As the wilderness and old growth de­pen­dent populations dwindle, biodiversity is reduced, and the rare are replaced by the common. As genetic diversity and species diversity plummet, forest ecosystems will continue to become less stable, more vulnerable to human dis­ turbances and environmental stochasticity, and more prone to invasion by exotic species such as Spotted Knap­weed (an invasive especially common in Montana).

Our National Wilderness declines, more watershed disasters will occur (floods, landslides, etc.), more poaches, roads will be cut, and more slob snowmachine trappers will penetrate the woods. Populations of already rare furbearers such as Marten will drop further.

For the next year, the destruction of a million and a half acres of de facto wilderness further exacerbates the ecological calamity, and against the de­struction of life processes which we havent even begin to understand.

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Although it would be impossible to name all of the de facto wilderness threatened, it is probably safe to say that everyone who lives near a National Forest can cite the destruction of a favorite wild and wonderful place, whether a favorite river North Kalmiopsis Roadless Area is familiar to many. The Allan Mountain (Old Growth) and Buck River Range (OYR) Roadless Areas are two of many I've come to know and love, and yearn to mourn as their wilderness is lost. Even the National Forest Roadless Areas in the Cascades, the Deception Pass Range, from this Forest Service binge; the large Wild­River-Kearsarge area in New Hampshire is being devastated by Federal

VI. LIVING: A BIOCENTRIC PROPOSAL FOR THE NATIONAL FORESTS

Forget multiple use. Scrap the Na­tional Forest Management Act and re­place it with a new charter for the pub­lic's forest areas, the road engineers, and the forest the public's interest. And force the big timber companies to prac­tice sustained yield on their private lands, where they have failed. If in their pres­ent form, the US Forest Service and the National Forest Management Act cannot be reformd. The agency, and indeed our entire National Forest Sys­tem, needs an overhaul.

Although there's a growing move­ment to replace current National Forest management in the US, there is little consensus, so far, on how this should be done. Part of the problem is

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and recognition given to the multiple benefits derived therefrom. As O'Toole has rightly pointed out, by the mid 21st century many abused lands will have recovered. Ugly croding road cashes will be covered with stabilizing vegetation. Damaged riparian zones will again be productive. Streams will be clear, and salmon will again appear. Because clearingcutting will be outlawed, streams will flow higher later in the dry western season, and associated springs and seeps will reappear. Wildlife populations will recover; particularly those of species that now are rare: wilderness and old-growth dependents.

A stable forest road system will avoid sensitive habitats and riparian zones. It will provide access to scattered areas of formerly managed timberland that stands of trees, not clearcuts. The forests of the Nation's wilderness Forests will be the latter. Forest roads will also provide access for firewood gathering, post and pole cutting, and roaded recreation such as picnicking and off-road driving. Because two-thirds of the Nation's roaded forest system will ultimately be Wilderness (mostly Wilderness Recovery Areas in the meaning of the National Forest System Act of 1978) and mostly be a "wilderness threshold" activity. Furthermore, for three major reasons the National Forest Service will readily be wild — much more so than today. The first reason is that wild life will have been reintroduced. Second, the second reason is that more wild country, hence a much lower population, than now. And, third, individual Wilder ness Recovery Areas will provide the core areas farther from roads.

Forest Roadless Areas. Too little wilderness remains. What does remain must be spared from the 1.5 million acre per year roadbuilding budget. 5. Designate two-thirds of total National Forest area as Wilderness. Little over 80 million National Forest acres are still wild today. This is about 44% of the 200 million acre National Forest System; 32 million of these acres are designated Wilderness, and a little over 50 million are de facto wilderness. To achieve this goal, wilderness restoration must occur on over 40 million acres of currently roaded and developed lands. The long-term National Forest Wilderness will cover over 125 million acres, with 65 million acres devoted to multiple benefits (note multiple benefits, not use).

6. Complete restoration of 100,000,000 existing roadless areas would increase the National Forest road system to a "more" quarter of a million miles. Road obilitation would employ many and would operate in conjunction with #5 above.

7. No new roads will be allowed. 8. No off-road vehicles will be allowed.

9. No new ski areas or other large resorts will be allowed.

10. Annual timber sale revenue will be reduced across the board by 90%. A legis­ lated one million board foot ceiling on annual National Forest timber sales would send the big mills packing, but leave enough commercial capacity for small local operators, post and pole cut­ ting, and firewood. (The Freddies currently sell 10-12 billion board foot annually. The Sierra Club and Wilderness Society haggles over whether the Forest Service should cut 11 billion or 9.5 billion board feet!)

11. For no clearingcutting will be allowed. Only individual or group selection logging will be permitted. Group selection will be defined as the complete removal of trees on areas of one acre or less.

12. There will be no logging within 350 feet of riparian habitats; no herbicides, insecticides, or fungicides will be used.

13. Retracted native species will be reintroduced. Gray Wolves, and Caribou will be returned to the River of No Return/Selway-Bitterroot, wolves to the Greater Yellowstone and Gila Ecosystems, Wolves to New Hampshire's White Mountains, and so on.

14. Domestic livestock grazing will be eliminated.

15. Natural, lightning-induced fires will be allowed to resume their historic role. Except where natural fires threaten private property, let them burn! Fires recycle nutrients, reduce fuel loads and thus reduce the potential for catastrophic crown fires, and improve habitat for many species of wild­ life. Western America's forests evolved with fires for millennia, and some species and ecosystems simply wouldn't survive without them. Smokey the Bear was wrong! (Human-caused fires are another matter altogether and in most cases should be squelched.)

16. All remaining old growth forest will be protected.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Organize a demonstration at your local Forest Service office on April 21, John Muir's birthday. Any action, even if you only have one or two people and a couple of postcards, will add to the pressure on the Freddies. Do it!

2. Write your Congresspersons and tell them that current forest management is not working in the National Forests. Support this 16-point proposal and specifically tell them to "allow no more roads" (cut the FS roadbuilding budget to zero) and to designate all remaining roadless areas as Wilderness. Also tell them that if a 90% reduction in National Forest logging cannot be achieved, you will support the elimination of all logging in the National Forests. (Address senators at US Senate, Washington, DC 20510, and representatives at US House of Representatives, Wash., DC 20515.)

3. Bring a hammer, whenever you walk in the woods.

4. Testify at hearings for non-com­ promise forestry positions such as in this 16-point proposal. Get "ordinary people not just the Earth Firsters, to do so, also.

5. Demonstrate at hearings and meetings to publicize Forest Service ecocide. Publicize the alternatives.

6. Distribute this flyer to a local Forest Service office (with various conservation groups and to individu­ als. (Order additional copies from Earth First! P.O. Box 587, Tucson, AZ 85702.) Prepare for a long battle, because radical change won't occur overnight.

7. Become active in a local Earth First! group and/or in your local Sierra Club or Audubon chapter or state-wide wilderness group. Encourage these other conservation groups to support the Earth First! National Forest Biocentric Management Plan and to engage in stronger action to preserve our National Forests.

8. Explore your local National Forest — the wild places and the abused ones. The effective ac­ tivists know firsthand of what they speak.