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GUEST VIEWPOINT: Clear-cuts have a place in forest management in Oregon**(<http://www.registerguard.com/csp/cms/sites/web/opinion/24343004-47/clear-forest-forests-management-oregon.csp>)****BY FRED SPERRY**Posted to Web: **Saturday, Jan 16, 2010 11:34PM**Appeared in print: **Sunday, Jan 17, 2010, page G3**

Clear-cut? Selective cut? Conservation? Preservation? What's the most appropriate way to manage our forests?

Forests are at the core of Oregon's heritage and identity. They contain the headwaters of our rivers, spawning grounds for fish, habitat for wildlife, and awesome recreation. They provide jobs for our neighbors, funds for our schools and products everyone needs. It's no wonder we have strong feelings about how they're managed.

Forests are complex and dynamic natural systems, and any attempt to address their management in this limited space will be found lacking. Still, the discussion is an important one to Oregonians.

Recent guest viewpoints in The Register-Guard have focused on the sustainable management of forests, and specifically on clear-cutting. In other regions the discussion would be different, but for forests in this neighborhood it is appropriate that the discussion is centered on Douglas fir. It is far and away the most dominant naturally occurring tree species in Western Oregon, and it is valued for its superior qualities.

Bob Kintigh (Dec. 7), Mark Miller (Dec. 29) and Gary Kutcher (Jan. 4) all agree that Douglas fir grows best in full sunlight. Miller is correct when he states that even-aged management, which utilizes clear-cuts, is not the only way to manage Douglas fir. He offers a good description of some of the alternatives while acknowledging that clear-cutting is a "valid silvicultural method in the Northwest."

Like Miller, I recognize the value and legitimacy of alternative methods where they are consistent with the owner's objectives and where they are reasonable, based on topography, access and forest characteristics. But these methods are generally more costly, and the market premiums to which Miller refers are uncertain at best.

Kutcher would ban clear-cutting on state and private land and require that all harvesting be done by "selective logging." To propose such a policy fails to recognize the variation among species, soils, topography, climate and other local conditions. One thing all foresters and other natural resource professionals can agree on is that one method of forest management does not fit all.

The good news is that we don't have to choose between protecting forest resources and clear-cut harvesting. Historically, Douglas fir forests were naturally established following disturbances (fire, wind storms, etc.) that were much more damaging to water, soils, fish and wildlife than modern day harvest practices. Today, regardless of the harvest method, these resources are protected through best management practices, regulation and, oftentimes, compliance with certification systems.

If the unsubstantiated claims and misrepresentations that Kutcher makes were true, his argument against clear-cutting might be valid. Fortunately, they are not. Want to see for yourself? Tree farmers — large industrial and small family owned — welcome the chance to show people how they are managing their forests. With very few exceptions, those who take advantage of the opportunity come away from the experience knowing that Oregon's forests are being managed by knowledgeable and capable professionals.

Anyone who has visited Bob and Margaret Kintigh's tree farm — and hundreds have — would find it difficult to argue that their forest is not managed sustainably for multiple resources. The Kintighs have beautiful stands of large timber (which have been thinned several times); well-stocked, fast growing young stands of varying ages; an annual income from clear-cut harvests; and a resident pair of bald eagles that reproduced successfully each of the past three years. You aren't recognized as the National Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year without managing sustainably.

Wood as a building product is a wise environmental choice. Nature is continually making wood by taking energy from the sun, carbon from the air (carbon dioxide), and water and nutrients from the soil. Mills simply convert the wood made by nature into usable products.

Some, including Kutcher, discount the substantial economic contribution that a healthy forest products industry makes to our communities. We live in one of the most productive timber growing regions in the world. We need wood products, and we need the economic contribution the industry brings to our communities.

Clear-cutting is but one tool in a forest manager's toolbox. But it is an essential one, particularly when timber production is a primary objective. Across the landscape there are recent clear-cuts, old forests and every stage in between. In every stage of forest development there are plant and animal communities that thrive.

We don't have to provide every benefit on every acre, but we do need to protect soils, water, fish and wildlife. Through the diverse objectives and harvest methods of landowners — state, federal and private — Oregon forests are providing the full range of social, economic and environmental values that make this the great state it is.

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