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Marc P. Peruzzi

*The University of Montana*

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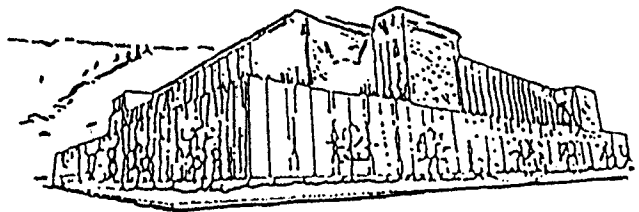
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**TIMBER AND TRAIL FEES:  
THE FUTURE OF NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT**

by

**Marc P. Peruzzi**

**B.S. Plymouth State College, 1992**

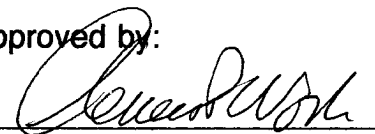
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**for the degree of Master of Arts**

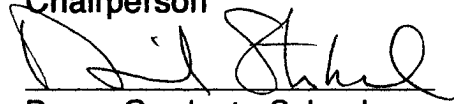
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Peruzzi, Marc P., M.A., May 1993

Journalism

Committee Chair: Clem Work

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clem Work', written in a cursive style.

The following environmental articles look at how the National Forests will be managed in the next century.

Journalistic, and written in the magazine article style, the first story, "Future Forests," employs the diverse forests of western Montana as case studies representative of most western forests under federal control. After giving a brief history of Forest Service management in regards to logging techniques, road building and fire suppression, the article delves into such controversial topics as forest health, prescribed fire, and "thinning" or selective logging. With these issues somewhat clarified, the article then attempts to determine the best course of action for future management.

Article two explores the complexities of the Forest Service's participation in the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program -- specifically in regards to trail fees. In addition to revealing some of the more powerful organizations behind the fee program, the article essays to assess the likely effects trail fees will have on low impact, non-motorized users, low income users, and actual trail systems. The underlying moral issue -- regarding the appropriateness of charging trail fees on National Forests at all -- is also addressed. The fee program is perhaps illustrative of the agency's switch in focus from its traditional "forests as agriculture view," to the new "forests as recreation destinations view."

Marc Peruzzi

Future forests

Professional Project

Section one

Dust billows out in a steady stream behind my jeep, skittering on the washboard of a dry dirt road. My black lab, still cool and wet from a swim in the lake we just passed, starts whining. We're in the woods and he wants out, so I pull over. I'm on the Lost Horse Creek road in the Bitterroot National Forest just northwest of Darby, Montana. This well kept road is the main thoroughfare through the Lick Creek Demonstration Forest where Forest Service scientists are attempting to recreate the open "park-like" stands of ponderosa pines that once dominated the landscape in the hot, dry mountains of western Montana. I'm here to witness their work by means of a self guided auto tour -- a newsprint brochure that, in conjunction with a series of numbered guideposts, essays to interpret for the layperson the effects of 150 years of white European management on forests that have evolved over millennia.

But my dog is whining and I'm tired of driving, so I stop before reaching the first guidepost. Before my door swings shut behind me he's gone, leaping off the road over some purple-flowering knapweed, disappearing into a field of four-foot-deep grass thriving in full sunlight beneath sienna-hued ponderosa pines which tower more than 140 feet. He runs in high-speed circles, invisible in the tall grass which parts and collapses under the force of his chest. Leaping and snatching at fronds he reappears, porpoising through the sea of grass. I step off the road and follow him into the glade.

This small open stand of trees -- perhaps 300 square feet -- is not an official stopping point on the auto tour, but it most closely resembles the pre-European ponderosa pine forest: tall grasses, bright sun, and widely spaced trees that grow straight, tall and thick. Two tall men might be able to wrap their arms around the biggest tree here. Jigsaw shaped scraps of bark slough off the trunk and collect in piles at the base. A vanilla scent escapes from the fissures in the four-inch-thick bark that is warm, almost hot, from the rays of the July sun.

I'm drawn towards a big stump near the western, uphill edge of the clearing. It's a monster, twice again as large as the biggest tree standing. An old bottle of Coors left here pours air into the hollow center of the stump, which is old and gray and beginning to soften. But in the dry conditions of the glade it has refused to rot, possibly dating back to the original Lick Creek timber sale of 1906. Curious, I look for another stump this size and age; the closest is more than the length of a tall pine away, in the deep woods outside the glade. The Coors bottle hoots and whistles in my hand as I walk uphill and enter the thicket. Here, fifteen-inch-thick douglas firs wrap their dead lower branches around the waists of ponderosas in a skeletal embrace, their trunks mere inches apart. The grasses are gone, replaced by what fire ecologists refer to as fuel lode, the dead logs and branches of a douglas fir forest. Twenty yards further in, travel becomes difficult. I stoop and scramble to move ahead. The forest is a gray maze of standing dead douglas fir. I feel as though I'm walking in a box of strike-anywhere matches.

This standing tinderbox is our forest legacy. Foresters call it a climax forest, which means it can only survive as long as natural disturbances like fire and bugs are absent. It was created over time by European settlers who killed or drove off the Indians who had periodically burned the forest floor,



augmenting lightning fires and maintaining grassy understories. With the Indians on reservations, the settlers logged the big trees and let douglas fir grow in their place. A century of increasingly sophisticated fire suppression ensured that the ponderosa stands would be infiltrated by shade tolerant, quick-to-burn firs which act as fire ladders, allowing flames to jump to the forest canopy of the normally fire-resistant ponderosas. The result is often a burn of such high intensity that every tree is killed and the soil is baked into a water repellent crust. With so much fuel available today in Montana's low elevation forests, fire suppression has become a less and less realistic answer, it is too costly both in terms of tax dollars -- \$900 million in 1994 alone -- and human life. The Forest Service believes it has the solution: selectively log the overly crowded forests, effectively weeding out the encroaching firs, and then burn the forest floor, all in the name of forest health. "Log our forests in order to save them?" environmental groups like the Sierra Club cry. "Never." The Forest Service, they claim, is just using forest health as an excuse to "get out the cut," the unofficial policy of the agriculture agency for a century. The healthiest forests, environmentalist point out (correctly), are the ones that have never been "managed."

Walking back out of the woods, pondering forest health, I cross Lick Creek. It's a small stream and I'm over it in one big step. The water is clear as a window and cold, even in midsummer. As I bend down to immerse my right forearm -- swollen from a recent bee-sting -- my dog bolts back to the road, after something. I follow and meet Bob Maine whose female chocolate lab has caught the eye of my amorous male. Bob is here with a friend to fish and pick morel mushrooms, a wild delicacy that grows best in recently burned areas. He asks what I'm doing walking around the woods with a notebook, and I tell him

I'm studying trees and logging. He eyes me warily, thinking me some industry lackey, and asks if I want to see the surrounding woods clear-cut. "No." I say, "I'm just trying to figure out what's best for the forest." Without hesitation he responds: "Don't you think nature will just take care of itself?"

Lately, it hasn't had a chance. Our National Forests have been intensively managed for the past century. The Forest Service's 10 A.M. policy, adopted after the great fire of 1910, mandated -- with great success -- that all fires be extinguished by the morning after they were reported, regardless of the cause. As fire-suppression increased, so did logging, at unsustainable rates. From the mid 1950s through the late 1980's, Montana's national forests provided between 40 and 60 percent of all trees cut in the state, 75 percent of which came from the forests of western and northwestern Montana. And then, finally, in 1989, that number began to drop dramatically. The decline in National Forest logging was due to a number of factors. Chief among them was the increased effectiveness of environmental litigation in defense of endangered and threatened species. But perhaps equally as important a reason for the decline came not from environmental concerns, but from monetary ones. The Forest Service's timber program only operated in the black three times in the agency's history and the recession had forced a reevaluation of congressional appropriations. As elsewhere, the 40,000 miles of logging roads built or paid for in Montana by the Forest Service to access hard-to-reach timber were constructed at a loss, and such losses were no longer acceptable. By 1994, Montana's National Forest timber harvest had returned to pre -1951 levels, where it has remained.

The combination of congressional hawks, eager to cut such blatant federal subsidies, and an ever more powerful environmental movement willing

to fight timber sales in court, would probably have been enough to reduce the National Forest harvest even further had it not been for a loophole big enough to drive several hundred thousand log trucks through -- salvage logging.

On December 4th, 1995, a powerful wind storm touched down adjacent to Lolo Creek, in the Lolo National Forest where Lewis and Clark once traveled. Mile after mile of heavily timbered forests were laid flat, in seconds. With almost surgical precision, the furious current of wind cut swaths through the forest, stacking logs atop one another as neatly as in a lumber yard. Elsewhere, tributaries of wind split from the main flow and circulated in small depressions, tossing logs helter skelter upon one another in an exponential version of pick-up-sticks. A few feet away, entire forests stand like grim sentinels around the fallen trees, showing no sign of damage.

The wind has killed some trees -- 1,500 acres worth to be precise. America needs wood products. If the trees are removed before they rot, maybe fewer living trees will need to be cut. When most people think about salvage logging it is this type of scenario they envision, and surely this is what salvage is meant to be. Missoula District Ranger Dave Stack devises salvage plans for the blowdown, taking care to avoid damaging the watershed. Eight million board feet of dead timber are removed, 5 million board feet are left on site. It is the only time Stack will sell logging rights under the highly controversial salvage rider which, critics claim, takes the public out of the decision-making process regarding the use of public lands. To the environmental strongholds of Missoula and Bozeman, salvage is now nothing more than "logging without laws." Stack, however, is conscious of, and unwilling to jeopardize, his long-time productive working relationship with both the timber industry and environmentalists. This, despite the fact that a now infamous memo acquired by

the Associated Press stated bluntly that, "as long as one board comes off that would qualify as salvage ... it should be called salvage.'

Other forest supervisors in Montana have not been as careful as Stack and pushed to sell green timber as salvage. In July of 1995, Flathead Forest Supervisor Joel Holtrop, under the guidance of Regional Forester Hal Salwasser, reissued a sale of green timber in roadless lands between the Great Bear Wilderness and Glacier National Park as salvage. The timber sale would have been hotly contested by environmentalists, but they didn't get the chance. The rationale given for the emergency clear-cutting, which was to be strung between a series of avalanche chutes, was the presence of root fungus in the area. According to a Montana Wilderness Association editorial in the *Missoulian*, however, when Dr. Art Partridge of the University of Idaho, "the Northern Rockies' foremost expert on soil fungi," visited the site he said that soil fungi were at natural levels and that the clear-cuts posed a far greater threat to forest health.

Such questionable salvage sales eventually led Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman to issue a directive ordering a temporary end to salvage sales in roadless land, and an end to the reissuing of formerly proposed timber sales as salvage. In his words: "Whatever the intentions were, the rider created a scenario of great distrust between the environmental community, the timber community and the Forest Service."

Some of that distrust, however, can be attributed to the ever-changing vernacular of the Forest Service. Sometime during its transition from "getting out the cut" -- a reflection of that agency's roots in the German school of forestry in which no fire is good, and fast-growing trees are best -- to "ecosystem management" -- a policy designed to recreate diverse, sustainable forests that

can support more uses than timber harvesting -- the language of the Forest Service changed. "Salvage" replaced "harvest," "thinning" replaced "selective logging," and "clear-cuts" became "fire-breaks." All of these careful euphemisms were "prescribed" as "treatments" in the name of the the most widely misunderstood and misappropriated forestry term in recent years, "forest health."

A 1994 report in *American Forests* best defines the view held by many of the more traditional foresters, both in and out of the Forest Service, who see a need for large-scale intensive management to solve the forest health "crisis" -- their word. A healthy forest is defined as "a condition of forest ecosystems that sustain their complexity while providing for human needs." In an unhealthy forest "visual evidence may be lacking but the onset of major ecosystem setbacks are assured by the existence of conditions that inevitably lead to large, stand-replacing wildfires." Such stand-replacing forest fires are unacceptable to foresters schooled in a more agricultural approach to forest health -- the "Old Guard" as the Sierra Club calls them -- foresters who have strong ties with the timber dependent wood products industry. So they make blanket statements about the effects of high intensity fires on the landscape, including the claims that such fires can superheat streams and soils, killing trout and creating water resistant surface layers. Without immediate intervention, according to the report, "there is a great danger that over the next century this region's forest legacy will be a series of large, uniform landscapes recovering from wildfires and other widespread ecosystem setbacks."

Battle-weary environmental groups, both nationally and in Montana, cynical and vigilant after countless salvage sales slipped through the democratic process, view the forest health crisis as -- in the words of Howie

Wolke of Big Wild Advocates, an environmental group based in Conner, Montana -- a "Forest Health Sham." It is, that group claims in its literature, one of the big lies of ecosystem management, and it's being used as "a brash politically expedient opportunity to log and road much of our remaining wildlands and native forest."

In response to what it considers an impossibly contradictory policy of logging for forest health, the Sierra Club recently approved a new course of action which calls for an end to all logging on National Forest lands and launched a new campaign entitled "STOP THE CHAIN SAWS AT THE SOURCE!" which targets the politicians responsible for this "national scandal." Chief among those targeted is Senator Larry Craig, the Idaho Republican known for his pro-timber position. Craig recently drafted the National Forest Restoration Act, which would weaken environmental safeguards in the name of forest health. The club's Bitterroot Mission calls on its members to write their congressperson and voice opposition to any legislation that advocates logging for forest health. Sherm Janke, who runs the Sierra Club's Montana Chapter, says the Club's new policy is "an expression of people's frustrations with mandated logging by Congress."

In this instance, the views of the environmental movement may not be that extreme. More moderate critics of the Forest Service's forest health policy, including scientists and retired Forest Service personnel, argue along similar lines. Barry Flamm a former forest supervisor on the Shoshone National Forest who served as the Forest Service assistant chief for environmental coordination and on the President's Council on Environmental Quality, is one such person. Retired and living on Flathead Lake, Flamm is now a vocal critic -- specifically in regards to forest health -- of the agency for which he worked for twenty years .

Unlike many in the environmental movement, Flamm is an ardent supporter of the ecosystem management approach with its focus on forest health. Yet he fears that it can be disguised as a way to continue old practices. "There have been some changes," he says, but "I still find a tendency to refit the past methods."

And it is those past methods such as road-building, fire-suppression, clear-cutting, and high-grading -- in which commercial loggers cut the high value ponderosas and western larch and left low-value firs standing -- that Flamm points to as the cause of the current forest health problem. "Poor forestry practices have had a dramatic effect on forest health," Flamm says, but, "the greatest threat has been overharvesting." The side-effects of that overharvesting, and the likely side-effects of landscape-scale thinning operations, are what Flamm and other scientists consider the real forest health crisis. Those side-effects include: habitat fragmentation, watershed damage from increased erosion off newly constructed or reopened roads and the decline of sensitive species like native trout. Despite their official policy of ecosystem management, Flamm says, the traditional Forest Service view of forest health is young, fast-growing trees. "Too often the description of forest health is based on a narrow view of tree health."

That is the moderate position. The environmental far left is more cynical and tends to see the issue this way: The timber trinity -- Congress, the Forest Service, and the wood products industry -- in the wake of a greatly reduced national forest timber harvest, are scrambling for votes -- through jobs -- appropriations, and cheap timber, respectively. The fact that all three of the above-mentioned groups have suddenly become concerned with the health of Montana's forests, which they have diagnosed as ill while prescribing logging to

save them, is in no way a coincidence, they say. Large, high-intensity forest fires are unacceptable to the trinity, who would rather see a log sawn into 2 x 4s than have it burn in the forest. But dense forests of douglas fir are also unacceptable; the costs of fire prevention are too high, and the value of the trees too low. The trinity therefore, the Left claims, is using forest health as an excuse to cut down existing forests, with the intention of replacing them with evenly spaced fast growing trees of greater value. A favorite analogy among silviculturists is to think of this as "thinning a row of carrots." It is not a favorite metaphor of environmentalists who tend to view our public lands as more than just so much agriculture. They, like Bob Maine, believe that the forests can take care off themselves.

But can they? Beyond the hyperbole of the timber hungry who label every forest as sick, and speak of an approaching sylvan apocalypse, and the zero-cut policies of some environmental groups who would end all attempts at management regardless of the fact that Native Americans managed the lands for at least 8,000 years, there is sound scientific evidence that our forests are indeed in need of help, albeit because of our own misguided hand. The Forest Service's research division, a fairly autonomous scientific endeavor, has identified three health problems in the Northern Rockies: white pine blister rust (a disease introduced from Europe in the early 1900s), mountain pine beetle infestations of lodgepole pine forests, and the stand conversion and subsequent high-intensity burning of ponderosa pine lands.

Blister rust has killed 90 percent of the western white pines that once dominated the mid-elevation forests of northern Idaho. Douglas fir has replaced them in most of their former range, but here again, as in former ponderosa forests, the firs are poor substitutes, susceptible to root diseases before



reaching maturity. Although plant geneticists are trying to develop blister rust resistant white pines, the prognosis for a widespread reintroduction of the species is not good -- blister rust is adaptable and able to overcome most resistance.

Seemingly devastating bark beetle infestations, or the threat of hot, stand-replacing wildfires are often used as excuses to clear-cut stands of mature lodgepole pines. But fire and bugs are, in fact, natural occurrences, crucial to healthy lodgepole forests. Before the age of fire suppression, there were seldom any lodgepole forests more than 350 years old, even on the coolest, wettest sites. Fire completely cleared stands on average every 150 years, allowing the fire protected seeds, sealed within closed cones, to be released, recolonizing the site and ensuring perpetually young stands of lodgepoles. Bark beetles guarantee this happens even in the most fire-resistant sites. When a lodgepole pine forest lives beyond 200 years or more, its growth rate slows. Shortly thereafter, beetle populations escalate dramatically and the forest is left standing dead, to dry and become fuel. The cycle continues.

If bugs and fires are natural components of lodgepole forests, then what is the health problem? Well, technically speaking, there isn't one. But, Professor Ronald Wakimoto, a fire ecologist at the University of Montana, says, our society, which values both green forests *and* timber, has created a problem. "We might not like the outcome of bug killed trees and massive fire," he says. And those first fires will indeed be massive. Fire suppression has created a homogeneous landscape of old growth lodgepole pines where before there was a mosaic of recent burns, young forests, and bug killed trees. Without natural breaks, fire advances unhindered, as it did in Yellowstone in 1988. For an example in Montana, Wakimoto describes the conditions along the North

Fork of the Flathead River which forms a border between Park and Forest Service managed lands. The policy at Glacier Park was to grow the biggest fattest lodgepoles so tourists could look at them. The policy of the Forest Service was to grow the biggest fattest trees for the mills. By so doing managers designed a landscape ripe for a huge fire, which is what happened. In the end, Wakimoto says, “we killed those trees in massive numbers. ... A natural process, but the conditions were set by mismanagement.”

Although clear-cuts could be used to recreate the mosaic landscape of natural history, to do so in the name of forest health would be wrong. Lodgepole forests are healthiest when left alone and are quite able to sustain themselves. Furthermore, clear-cuts are not always effective antidotes to fire. Slash, the small dry scraps of economically worthless timber left in the wake of commercial logging operations, is an excellent fuel source. Barry Flamm, in a letter to the *Missoulian* : “Clear-cuts dominated nearly 40 percent of the largest fire area in western Montana in 1994 -- the 15,000-acre Little Wolf fire. According to Forest Service officials, the fire speed doubled and tripled when it hit the fine unshaded fuels of the clear-cuts, quickly spreading to the adjacent stands.” Prescribed fire of the forest floor to remove the residual fuel-load is also not always effective. To burn all the slash, dry conditions are needed, but that’s too risky. So, even in a perfect scenario in which the slash is piled and burned, the result is a clear-cut that may or may not burn depending on the weather -- certainly not fireproof.

To summarize: No amount of logging can help the health of western white pines at this time. Lodgepoles pine forests aren’t unhealthy, they’re just long overdue for a good burn. These are fairly self evident facts which most foresters recognize. Timber sales in the name of forest health, however, often

don't jibe with the science. A recently proposed timber sale advertised in local papers for public comment -- a blur of bureaucratic buzzwords -- claimed that commercial thinning would be done as a proactive step to restore forest health by recreating open park-like stands -- in a lodgepole pine forest. But lodgepole pines grow as close together as pickets in a fence. The stands don't resemble parks in the least. Thinning a lodgepole pine forest doesn't make it fireproof or healthier, but it does ensure two harvests, a harvest of small diameter trees today, and a harvest of large diameter trees twenty years from now. Forest health is a complex issue, but the fact that loosely spaced trees grow straight, fast and tall is Silviculture 101. "Thinning is done to produce a harvest of crop trees," Wakimoto says. "The end-all is the harvest."

The Forest Service intends to treat 3 million acres a year by the year 2005. By "treat," they mean thinning followed by prescribed fire. If the science of forest health dictates that that not occur in white pine or lodgepole forests, then where? Wilderness? No. Wilderness areas haven't been hurt by mismanagement and are off-limits anyway. High elevation forests of mixed conifers? No, those forests traditionally burned infrequently at high intensities, our fire suppression hasn't hurt them much, they're also just long overdue for a good burn. The cooler, wetter forests of northwestern Montana, like the Kootenai? No again. They also burned infrequently at a high intensity.

Incidentally, the Kootenai is in a health crisis, but its symptoms are severe habitat fragmentation and watershed degradation, the result of its history as a "working" national forest. Perhaps the best example of the results of unsustainable clear-cutting, the Kootenai is now a patchwork ecosystem. The official policy for years was to cut all but 10 percent of the old-growth forest -- defined as more than 150 years old. The only appropriate prescription for forest

health there would be to obliterate the countless logging roads that spider web through the forest. That rules out most of Montana's forests except for the warm, dry, low-elevation sites where ponderosa pine once thrived. Forests that you could ride a horse through at a gallop. Or, as Forest Service documents refer to it, "the forest of the old west."

Ponderosa pine forests are definitely an out of whack ecosystem. But, are they in a state of crisis? Perhaps, most would agree, however, that the crisis occurred years ago when the easily accessible sites were roaded, high-graded, clear-cut and prevented from burning. The forest health problem which resulted from such mismanagement is indeed dire, but Montana is lucky in that its trees grow more slowly than in southern latitudes. There, the ponderosa forests have been infiltrated not by the ten to twenty-inch firs found here, but by eighty to 200-inch trees. In Montana, at least, there is time to weigh decisions carefully. The current health problem took 150 year to develop, the diagnosis may not yet be complete, but the prescription has been written.

To see the effects of that prescription I have to get to the fourth guidepost on the Lick Creek tour, so I leave Bob Maine, load up the dog, and drive on. Guidepost four is referred to as the Early Photo Site, because a series of photos has been taken of this hillside periodically since 1907. In the original picture, two suspender clad foresters wearing wide-brimmed hats wade through chest-deep grasses beneath a virgin stand of ponderosas. In a photo from the late '30s, the big trees are gone, replaced by small douglas fir. By the late '50s a mixture of trees occupy the site; the understory is still fairly uncluttered. In 1989, the understory is so thick that visibility is less than ten yards, it is a climax forest. Fire could easily kill every tree standing.

I park, cross the dusty road, and enter the showcase of the Lick Creek Demonstration Forest. Only the stumps remain of the douglas fir that thrived here in the absence of fire. With their removal, vistas have opened and peaks are visible through the open stand of skinny ponderosas. Ankle deep grass, young and tender, interspersed with Indian paint brush, thrives on the recently burned forest floor. The forest of the Old West? Not quite. Only a fool would gallop a horse through here today. There are small stumps everywhere, scorched, but not incinerated. And although great care was taken, pockets of unburned slash still litter the ground. None too subtle clues reveal the hand of management. Each tree standing has been marked twice, once with a spray-can of blue paint and once with fire, a forest of black and blue trunks. It's ugly, and there's no mistaking that you're standing in a logging site. But in twenty years the black and blue bark will have long since sloughed off the trunks. Subsequent fires will remove the residual stumps and slash, providing vital nutrients, allowing grasses to grow rapidly. No longer fighting for water and sunlight, the ponderosas will also thrive. This will be the quintessential park-like stand, ideal for a family picnic or a commercial harvest, whichever the public demands more. Sitting on a douglas fir stump surrounded by widely spaced ponderosa pines and the granite peaks of the Bitterroots, it all seems quite plausible.

But can the Forest Service pull it off? The notion that they can is rooted in Aldo Leopold's philosophy of intelligent tinkering which ventures, through management, to get desired results from a natural ecosystem. But history has shown that, in practice, the Forest Service's tinkering has been at best short-sighted, and at worst willfully corrupt -- the policies of fire-suppression, clear-cutting and high-grading were all justified at one time as logical steps that

maintained forest health. Now the agency must prove to the public that landscape-scale thinning and prescribed fire operations, most of which will be commercial, are in the best interest of the entire ecosystem and aren't just a back door to increased logging.

Which is probably why most official Forest Service rhetoric mentions only thinning -- specifically thinning from below, meaning the removal of small diameter understory douglas fir. This, despite the fact that most silviculturists and fire-ecologists would agree with Charles Keegan, the director of forest industry research at the University of Montana's business school, when he says that thinning from below is "at best a stop-gap measure which ultimately could lead to an unsustainable ecosystem."

In fact, Keegan takes issue with the language of the Forest Service: "To use the term 'thin' as a term for forest health would be an error." That's because thinning only deals with one component of health in a ponderosa forest, the fuel ladder created by encroaching douglas firs, but it fails to deal with the other result of fire-suppression, an over-abundance of full-size ponderosa pines. When fire is present, it not only removes encroaching firs, but thins ponderosa stands by killing trees that have developed cracks in their protective bark. Without fire, those trees survive and create overpopulated sites. Wakimoto concurs: "If there's any problem in forestry, we just have too many damn trees in a lot of places."

Which means that selective logging is a more appropriate prescriptive term for forest health because some big trees must be cut along with the firs in order for sunlight to again reach the forest floor. Many of those big pines would have succumbed to fire long ago, maintaining a wide spacing. Now they must be "mechanically removed" in order to create the forest of the old West. In some

cases, silviculturist Carl Fiedler explains, ponderosas are so grossly overstocked that even if the firs are removed, there won't be sufficient sunlight for pine regeneration. Which means the stand is no longer self-reliant. Thinning, followed by routine prescribed fire will remove the shade tolerant trees but there won't be any young pines to replace the older trees. The very structure of the forests must be changed for a long term sustainable ecosystem. And to do that, Fiedler says, one must "treat the whole stand."

Without the revenues generated by timber sales, the Forest Service would be hard-pressed to fund the yearly treatment of 125,000 acres prescribed by the Columbia River Basin Environmental Impact Statement, which is used as a guide in Montana and Idaho. Unfortunately, the small-diameter products of thinning are still of little value to the industry. But, if scientists are right, then hundreds of millions of board feet of extremely valuable timber needs to come off those sites as well. And those valuable trees, Fiedler and Wakimoto say, can pay their way out of the stand and at the same time, pay for the treatment.

To the Montana wood products industry, which has been harvesting private lands at often unsustainable rates since the decline of federal timber sales, that is surely good news. "If the prescription were implemented," Keegan says, "it would probably result in a net increase in the volume of timber products." Which means revenues. "The notion that they(F.S.) will need huge subsidies to treat these acres is not one I agree with." By undertaking a comprehensive management prescription, Keegan says, which includes not just thinning and prescribed fire but selective logging as well, the treatment not only pays for itself, but adds a benefit: "The removal of more valuable trees allows for more expensive logging." And more expensive logging means lower impact logging, like the kind done at Lick Creek.

To the environmental movement, the science of forest health is far more palatable than the sham. Although the Sierra Club's Sherm Janke is, in his own words, "bound by the no-logging stance," with careful semantics he does concede that selective logging -- a term he seems to prefer over the euphemism thinning -- could be appropriate in certain cases. "Selective cutting is generally the way to go as opposed to clear-cutting," Janke says. But selective logging is only appropriate -- he hesitates to even say desirable -- when it's done to push our over-managed forests, with their monocultures and climax species, back towards a state of sustainable biodiversity. "When we talk about forest health, we talk about a diversity of species, and with a tree farm, you don't get that."

Selective logging, thinning from below, and prescribed fire appears to be the only way to avoid that tree farm landscape. If the ponderosa pine lands were clear-cut -- forgetting for a moment the devastating side-effects of such logging -- the only way to regenerate the native pines would be to plant them. Likewise, if we do nothing, Wakimoto and others contend, the stands will burn and young trees will need to be planted because the seed base will be gone. Ponderosa seeds are heavy and fall close to the tree, they can't blow in from other sites, and they aren't fire-dependent like lodgepoles. Furthermore, replanting ponderosa seedlings doesn't guarantee that in thirty years there will be a young forest. The seedlings need a wet spring in order to survive and then fire could wipe out the entire young farm at any time within the next ten to twenty years. In a natural ecosystem the elements allow pine regeneration seldom more than once in a 100-year period. But, Wakimoto says, "we do it once in a 100 years and expect to get trees."



Of course blanket statements about pine regeneration after intense wildfires don't always apply. Fuel load, temperature, drought and wind are not equal in any two fires, and the big trees can be incredibly resistant. "In some areas," Fiedler says, "the pines would probably come back quite well. Even a stand replacing fire doesn't kill all the trees." And in some cases, Wakimoto says, "it may be best to just light a match so that disease and bugs won't feed off an abundance of succulent stumps."

But to do nothing means that we are changing factors through our own passivity. Fuel loads will continue to build because unprescribed wildfires in ponderosa forests will continue to be unacceptable, located as they are in the low elevation so-called urban interface areas. Eventually those sites will become so infused with large diameter firs they will be unrecognizable, and those sites will remain susceptible to fire every July and August. And they will burn. If that is allowed to happen, Fiedler asks: "Where will the old growth pines be 200 years from now"?

So where to begin? Here, at least, there is some semblance of consensus, the urban interface areas, long ago roaded and logged, where wildfires pose the greatest threat. The roadless areas should remain untouched: "We have such a huge part of the landscape to nibble on that is already roaded," Fiedler says. "In my view that's where we have to start." Flamm says, "So much of our forest land has already been roaded that I would not advocate any more." Adds Wakimoto: "Roadless lands override thinning, there are plenty of other places to do the work."

The sheer acreage of previously roaded lands in need of treatment is so staggering as to make building roads elsewhere a foolishly costly operation. If this fact isn't enough to deter new road construction then consider this:

Roadless areas, like Wilderness areas, don't even need treatment. The cumulative effects of fire-suppression and logging have not altered the landscape beyond sustainability. Both of these facts coincide perfectly with the present politics. The Clinton Administration has proposed drastic cuts in road-building budgets for the coming year, from \$56 million this year to \$4 million in 1998. Timber companies would no longer be reimbursed with timber for the cost of road construction.

Just before crossing Lost Horse Creek and leaving the demonstration forest, I stop at another logging site. This one is a work-in-progress, and the dead trees are still on site, those of some value stacked neatly by the road. Awaiting the match, slash is piled twenty feet high in a small depression, hidden from the view of the occasional passing motorist. The big pines left standing reveal their life-long struggle for light in the twisting, arching curvatures of their trunks. It is a disquieting landscape, the great trees appear frozen in some unspeakable agony, squeezed indirectly by the hand of man.

For now, at least, the age of reckless clear-cutting and subsidized logging on our national forests is over. The Forest Service's old guard of timber sale planners will relinquish control of the agency to the biologists and ecologists who don't look at the forest in terms of board feet. But before the forest of the future can be the forest of the past, a prescription must be filled, a silvicultural catharsis of sorts: logging for forest health.

Marc Peruzzi

## Trail Fees

### Professional project section two

A roadside trailhead parking lot off New Hampshire's route 49 is all but deserted. Smart's Brook trail, barely three miles inside the White Mountain National Forest, is normally a popular pull-off for mountain bikers and hikers on their way to the resort town of Waterville Valley. The trailhead acts as a hub, linking up as it does with a wide network of gradually rolling singletrack loops with distinctly New Hampshire-esque names: The Yellowjacket Trail, Chickenborough Brook, Sandwich Notch, Greeley Pond. Locals from surrounding towns and college students from nearby Plymouth frequent the spot to ride its heavily used singletrack, but not today. The few cars parked here in the shadow of June's green-leafed hardwoods have been ticketed with Forest Service literature that "requests" payment of a new trail fee. Most cars, fresh off the interstate, roar by at highway speeds.

Three thousand miles away, on the Okanogan National Forest, in Washington state, a family tradition has been broken. Cathy Hjorth is not camping with her children this summer. Disabled and using a wheelchair, Cathy can't afford the new user fees. The volunteer program -- exchanging work for passes -- requires strenuous manual labor for three dollars an hour. It doesn't apply to Cathy.

A few hundred miles to the southeast, the Oregon Forest Service has approved and implemented a plan to run whitewater raft trips through Hells Canyon on the Snake River. At a cost of \$1,750 per trip, the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest will generate some sizable revenues for itself. Although the fee includes some natural history talk by the guide, the trip is being marketed as an adventure.

It's early summer 1997, and the National Forests mentioned above, along with 47 others, are participating in the Recreation Fee Demonstration Project, a national pilot program intended to generate revenue by charging the users of public lands. But for the environmentally minded non-motorized user, the implementation of user fees is setting itself up as a classic Catch-22. If you support the fee system, your dollars may end up paving scenic byways. If you oppose it, you risk alienating local land managers and losing powers of influence.

Although other land managing agencies are involved in the RFDP, all -- excluding the Bureau of Land Management -- have long histories of charging fees. Since the BLM is a relatively small player in terms of recreation visits, the biggest changes will be felt on the National Forests. And any additional revenues would be eagerly greeted by the Forest Service, which was allocated only \$281 million dollars for recreation in 1997. This, despite the fact that total agency funding for the same year was \$3.5 billion. For an agency that routinely sees 800 million visitors a year, the appropriations are hardly commensurate. Under the bylaws of the RFDP, 80 percent of net revenues -- net because the cost of fee collection must be deducted -- must be reinvested in the site where they were collected. The remaining 20 percent can only be used at another RFDP site. In the case of the White Mountains, where the entire forest is considered one site, all the funds will stay there to be used -- purportedly -- to complete backlogged maintenance projects that the recent fiscal crunch no longer allows.

It all seems reasonable enough, the people who recreate on public lands helping to pay for their upkeep. It's an easy sell, and a tough thing to oppose without appearing petty and hypocritical. But there is a small, vociferous

opposition attacking the RFDP for a number of reasons, the more obvious being that the cost of a few stealth bombers would be more than sufficient to cover most of the backlogged maintenance. And then there is the subtle, but perhaps more powerful, argument that if the Forest Service becomes efficient at procuring funds, then future appropriations will be cut accordingly, ultimately leaving users with the total bill for the mere survival of recreation management. Others charge that the government's partnership in the RFDP with the American Recreation Council -- a consortium which boldly claims that it represents the recreation interests of the public, but in reality represents almost exclusively the motorized sports and RV industries -- is a thinly veiled attempt to, in the words of one environmental organization, "motorize, privatize and commercialize" America's public lands and facilities for the benefit of corporations and wise-use supporters. Some question the basic tenet that it's ethical to charge people to walk or ride on public lands, their lands, especially, they add, when most of those lands haven't been protected from subsidized logging and mining.

A year has passed since the fee program was implemented in the White Mountains, It is Spring 1998. Visitor numbers rebounded after initial confusion regarding the fee system waned, and the trailheads are busy again. There are still no facilities at Smart's Brook: no outhouses, no trash cans, no guided tours, it's just a paved roadside spur, as it will likely remain, as, many believe, it should. A wooden bridge was rebuilt over the brook five years ago, but otherwise there's little evidence of recent trail maintenance. In fact, if a tree falls across the trail here, it's more likely to be dragged out of the way by a bicyclist than bucked-up by a Forest Service trail crew. These trails just don't cry out for huge amounts of maintenance, this is New Hampshire, the land of hard wood and harder ground. Some of these trails, which parallel cold brooks, outdate

the surrounding forest which was cleared at the turn of the century. But what little maintenance they do need hasn't been done: A few waterbars for better drainage, some sections of trail rerouted around mud holes, and, in the wake of last Winter's ice storms, downed trees to be cut.

Many of the 133,000 miles of trails in our National Forests need similar amounts of maintenance. Most of them won't get it, even with the increased revenues provided by the RFDP. The White Mountain National Forest generated \$430,000 in recreation fees in 1997. That money has already been spent, not on the backlogged maintenance projects the agency likes to talk about -- although a small amount of money did go there -- but on the salaries of seasonal employees, mostly front desk people at visitor centers. Remember, the entire WMNF is considered one site, so the user fees collected there went not to trail maintenance, but rather to the operation of visitor centers, at which parking and information are still free.

This type of scenario, in which recreation fees are funneled into high-profile visitor centers and scenic by-ways, has raised concerns among non-motorized recreationalists and environmentalists. They may disagree about which trails need maintenance, but they're unified in the belief that recreation fees should be used only for trail maintenance. This, however, might not be economically realistic, because even when trail systems fall into horrible disrepair, they remain popular with hikers and mountain bikers. The trails may be harmful to the environment due to erosion, but popular none the less. If roadways and restrooms deteriorate further, however, visitation will plummet, and with it revenues. And that, Mark Lawler, the National Forests Committee Chair of the Sierra Club's Cascade Chapter, contends, will lead to economic competition which will ultimately result in environmental negligence. "There are

insidious rumblings going on that everything will be geared to making money,” he says.

Through September, 1997, Lawler notes, two-thirds of recreation fee revenues in Washington State came from the Mount Saint Helens National Monument Parkway. Other land managers, he fears, will seek to emulate that success and become “bent on paving scenic byways with viewpoints.” Lawler worries about what this means for remote National Forests that aren’t capable of producing large revenues from motorists. Forests in central Idaho, for instance, that may have even greater trail maintenance needs, due to topography, climate, proximity to trout streams etc., but lack big revenue generating facilities, could be left to languish or be shut down completely.

Not everybody sees competition between land managers for recreation dollars as a bad thing, however. Gary Sprung, the communications director for the International Mountain Bicyclist Association, a group that advocates shared access to trails and low-impact mountain biking, considers the competition healthy. Land managers who provide good services, he says, will reap financial rewards. But Sprung, like most non-motorized trail users, equates good services with good trails. No money, he says, should be spent on new facilities. Whether or not this is an economic reality has yet to be determined, but Sprung has no problem with Forests closer to population bases generating more money. “The public lands near cities *need* more money.”

All this talk about competing for recreation dollars and profitability may sound uncharacteristic of an agency that, for the majority of this century, has been in the business of selling timber at below market values. But looking at forests as a recreational commodity is actually just a new slant on the agriculture agency's core philosophy -- a reflection of its early ties to German

schools of forestry -- that forests are a commodity to be cut, sold and regrown as quickly as possible. Facing a continued decline of federal timber sales, which despite losing taxpayer money kept the agency awash in appropriations, the Forest Service is now eyeing the revenue potential of the 800 million recreation visits the land it manages receives annually. Higher-ups are practically salivating with the possibilities. Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Jim Lyons, in a 1996 speech at the Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation in Pocatello Idaho, compared those visitor numbers with Disney World's paltry 40 million, and declared recreation to be the future of the Forest Service, and the Forest Service the "Microsoft" of the recreation industry. Forest Service Chief Michael Dombeck reiterated the agency's new position in December of 1997: "It baffles me that the Department of Agriculture tracks the value of soybeans, corn or wheat to the penny by the day, yet, rarely is recreation and tourism on federal lands understood as a revenue generator. Instead it has been perceived as an amenity -- something extra we are privileged to enjoy. Fortunately, that's beginning to change."

Dombeck's comments have hardly raised a ripple in the vast environmental community which is all too happy to see timber die a slow death in favor of recreation. Even the Sierra Club, the indefatigable watchdog of the Forest Service, has remained silent, allowing individual chapters to oppose or support the new fees at their discretion. Thus far, with a few exceptions, the dominant stance has been no stance at all. Apathy towards the fees is high, as the Club continues fighting road-building and deforestation. "So far," Lawler says, "the discussion has been mainly esoteric and philosophical. ... The Sierra Club just has so much else to do."



Scott Silver, executive director of Wild Wilderness, hopes to change all that. Silver is an environmental movement of one. Although he claims 300 “supporters,” Wild Wilderness has no actual members. A new breed of solitary environmentalist using the low-cost weaponry of internet sloganeering and bumper-sticker rhetoric to fight a crusade against trail fees for low-impact users, Wild Wilderness was originally formed to protect the rights of high-altitude backcountry skiers by keeping snowmobiles out of roadless areas. Silver’s focus shifted to trail fees when he perceived a possible threat to the organization’s mission statement; protecting the rights of of low-impact recreationalists who don’t need and don’t want developed trails or facilities, people who want their wilderness wild. The RFDP, Silver alleges, is the “thin edge of a very thick wedge,” which ultimately will result in commercialized, privatized and motorized federally controlled public lands. Lands that Silver says *are an amenity* which should be paid for with tax dollars, not sold as a commodity to the highest bidders, who will undoubtedly, in his opinion, be the motorized sports and recreational vehicle lobbies. “If managed poorly,” Silver writes on his website, “or managed primarily as a cash generation tool, then a shift to ‘Industrial Recreation’ is hardly an improvement over the old Forest Service.”

It’s not just that Silver thinks non-motorized users like stream fishermen, hikers and equestrians are being unfairly targeted by the new fees, although that’s part of it. He was quick to point out in a phone interview that, “of the twenty-five different user- fee trailheads in the Deschutes Ranger District, his home forest, only one allows motorized transportation.” Silver sees something more malignant brewing in Washington, DC, away from regional Forests and unbeknownst to the public. The fact that low-impact users are paying

disproportionally is merely foreshadowing. The Challenge Cost-Share Partnership into which the Forest Service and the American Recreation Coalition have entered, Silver asserts, is a vehicle for the ARC to push its agenda. And the ARC, Silver says, has positioned itself perfectly. In exchange for covering much of the implementation costs associated with the new fee program, the ARC gets to, according to a Forest Service press release, offer “assistance in the evaluation of the demonstration projects.” Which ultimately, Silver says, means the ARC will “assist Congress in crafting the Permanent Recreation Fee System which will certainly follow.”

Although this may appear perfectly benign to people unfamiliar with the ARC, for Silver it's anything but. In his view, the ARC's potential influence is enormous, and he points to a number of facts to support his charge. First and foremost is the ARC's apparently deliberate misrepresentation of itself. The organization claims to represent a large diversity of recreation interests; its website resonates with images of hikers, birdwatchers and windsurfers enjoying public lands. Its list of members however, doesn't include any of the above or, for that matter, a single environmental group or grass roots backpacking organization. Mountain bikers are represented not by IMBA, but by the National Off Road Bicycling Association, which, ironically, is primarily a racing organization that normally concedes access issues to IMBA. Who is on the list? Dozens of personal-watercraft, ATV, motorbike, Jeep, and recreational vehicle organizations. “The original founder of the ARC,” Silver points out, “was David Humphreys, who, at the time, was also the president of the RV Association.”

With more than 100 such members, including many of the manufacturers and retailers of motorized sports and RV equipment, the ARC carries significant

monetary clout. ARC tax records show expenditures of \$1,000 per month on lunches with Congressmen. And that is just part of a luncheon program which budgets \$13,274 a month and targets influential politicians and up and coming land managers. The ARC also pays its people well -- foremost among them Derrick Crandall, the current ARC president. According to the ARC's 1994 tax returns, Crandall's salary was \$149,392.

So why does the ARC support fees? Critics see it like this: Most campgrounds and boat launches already charge fees for use of facilities. And most motorized trail users already pay user fees by means of permits called "green stickers." Traditionally those fees went back to Washington and regional land managers waited, often in vain, for the money to come back in the form of appropriations. If those old fees are incorporated into the new program, at least 80 percent must stay on site, which means cleaner campgrounds and better boat ramps. The problem, besides the possibility of environmentally more needy areas being financially ignored, critics like Lawler and Silver say, is that motorized users and the more than 70 million RV enthusiasts will be buying influence with local land managers -- opening up more lakes to jet-skis, more trails to ATVs, and more campgrounds being equipped with RV friendly "full hookups." All of which ties in nicely with the ARC's other main directive: creating a system of National Recreation Lakes.

Silver likes to use the example of motorcycle clubs affiliated with the ARC. Initially the clubs were very gung-ho about trail fees, Silver says, until they had to pay them. "Then the motorcycle clubs said no, 'we support user fees for hikers, not for motorcycles. We already pay enough.'" Most forests now accept "green stickers" and other motorized vehicle permits in lieu of user fee passes. Whether this is an example of ARC influence is of course debatable,

but the fact

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remains that non-motorized users are paying the majority of new fees.

Another example of non-motorized recreationalists paying more: Most official recreation fee literature draws a distinction between entrance fees -- paying to enter public lands -- and user fees -- paying to park at trailheads or use facilities. For the non-motorized recreationalist, the distinction is subtle to the point of absurdity. But for the hordes of touring RV enthusiasts the distinction is crucial, and one which the ARC strongly favors. You don't have to pay if you simply drive through public lands, which is all many RV owners do, but if you park your car, you'd better cough up. The reality is that most trailheads and trout streams on federally controlled public lands are far too remote to feasibly walk or even bicycle to from state or private lands. If you want to use the National Forests, even just for a walk, you most likely will have to drive there first, park and pay, but touring RVs pay nothing. ARC influence? Again it's endlessly debatable.

Linda Feldman, a Washington, D.C. based recreation staffer for the Forest Service who has been deeply involved in the RFDP, denies the existence of any improper influence from the ARC. "To single out one group or another is not something we're doing," she says. "We're trying to make sure everyone is involved."

For the Sierra Club's Lawler, however, the implications of ARC influence are obvious. "I think it's really obscene. This is definitely the fox in the henhouse." Gary Sprung of the International Mountain Bikers Association sees it differently; acknowledging ARC influence, but finding no fault. "I think it's true that the ARC doesn't represent the full spectrum of recreationalists, but that's their prerogative. I'm more concerned that other groups don't get involved." Groups like IMBA and the Sierra Club which, despite vocal disapproval from

supporters in the Los Angeles area, still find their memberships divided and their leaders, in Sprung's words, "sitting on the fence."

The lack of a unified opposition to the RFDP seems rather odd in light of the universal fear among interested parties -- including the ARC -- that the new fees will almost certainly replace future appropriations, ultimately resulting in higher fees. Question number 45, from the WMNF's Frequently Asked Questions handout, is a rare example of agency straight shooting on the subject. Question: "If this program is successful, will Congress make additional cuts in funding for recreation programs?" Answer: "Although it is unknown what Congressional action will occur in the future, budget projections suggest that appropriations will continue to decrease." Inside the Beltway, Feldman gives a more bureaucratic reply: "Ask Congress," she says. Others, like IMBA's Sprung, are more forthright. "It is a very real political possibility," he says, adding that Representative Hanson of Utah has already proposed exactly that. "The House Resource Committee has voted against it, but today's congressman cannot control tomorrow's." Lawler is even more direct. "Guaranteed," he says, "They will be cut. It happened to the National Park Service in 1987, even after Congress swore up and down it wouldn't."

Given such a consensus, one naturally wonders why there is such a lack of opposition. The answer lies wrapped in another, more subtle, consensus. Advocacy groups and environmental organizations alike believe that user fees might buy them something more than the mere completion of backlogged maintenance projects. The ARC thinks fees will buy better campgrounds and more trail access. IMBA would swap fees for their constituents' biggest desire, more shared use of hiking trails. The Sierra Club, according to some of its scant literature on the subject, would gladly swap fees for environmental protection.

And all would swap fees for a stronger hand in land management decision-making. Those desires aren't falling on deaf ears; the Forest Service is listening. "We're letting our visitors choose which projects get done," Feldman says. "Money talks," Sprung grudgingly admits. "But that doesn't necessarily make it right."

If money talks, what happens to Kathy Hjorth and the millions of low-income, urban and rural Americans who have, for the better part of this century, always recreated affordably in the National Forests? This is the esoteric and philosophical debate alluded to earlier. Is it right to make people pay to hike, ride, or pitch a tent at a campsite without facilities? Pay to use their National Forests? In New Hampshire, the "Live Free or Die" state, local politicians are challenging this theory. "The term 'double taxation' has come up a lot from folks in-state," Alexis Jackson of the WMNF says. Lawler echoes that concern: "I would just as soon their whole fee program just go away. The irony is that (Low-income users) are paying enough taxes already, but those funds get pulled into extractive subsidies. Whether there is an actual conspiracy or not, the bigger question is whether the fees are appropriate at all. We've got to get recreation appropriations back up and running. It's just the cost of a couple of fighter planes."