

Idaho forest history, 1975-2000

End of America's Timber Frontier

By John Osborn, MD

The following forest history was written at the request of the Idaho Wildlife Federation, August 2000. From 1988-2000 John Osborn edited the journal Transitions chronicling the historic transition underway in the Northwest, and is an author of Railroads & Clearcuts.

In Idaho it is still possible to walk among ancient cedars and pines.

When Lewis & Clark walked up the slope from the headwaters of the Missouri River that August afternoon of 1805 and stood on the Continental Divide first gazing over the mountains of the Columbia River country, the forests were intact. In this river ecosystem the size of France there was not a single clearcut, not a single logging road.

In the 200 years since Lewis & Clark, forests have been extensively clearcut. Tens of thousands of miles of logging roads have been bulldozed into Idaho's mountains.

As timber supplies have dwindled and the "timber pipeline" diminished to a trickle, eyes have increasingly turned to trees still standing in National Forests. Conflicts over these still-standing forests have erupted with appeals and lawsuits, logging truck convoys and rallies, a flurry of Congressional "riders" on budget bills, and the 1993 "Forest Summit" held in Portland, Oregon, hosted by President Clinton.

Many timber mills closed – especially those that had not retooled from handling large-diameter old-growth trees to smaller, second growth trees. Automation was one force at work. So too did the exporting of logs add to the competition for dwindling supplies of commercial timber in the region. For timber workers, their families, and timber-dependent communities, the 1980s and '90s were a period of economic dislocation.

Always in American history there has been another great stand of timber just on the other side of the ridge. So it was in New England,

and then the Southeast and Great Lake States. And so it seemed in the Northwest. But by the end of the 20th century what was on the other side of the ridge was not another stand of native timber -- but the beaches of the Pacific Ocean. The once seemingly inexhaustible forests of the North American continent had been logged from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. Thus did the timber frontier end for Idaho, the Northwest generally, and the United States.

The two most significant forces in the struggle over forests in Idaho both date to 1864: the Northern Pacific railroad (and its successor timber corporations) and the forest conservation movement. This essay focuses on the collision of these two historic forces in the forests of the Northwest – and especially in the part of Idaho north of the Salmon River -- during the last part of the 20th century.

ABE LINCOLN'S LEGACY -- 1864

Wars have a way of fundamentally changing nations. The Civil War changed forever the United States. In the West the war set in motion forces that President Abraham Lincoln and Congress could never have foreseen -- forces of history that would explode not in the battlefields of the South but in the forests of the Northwest over a century later.

During the 1850s tensions were building towards war on both sides of the continent. In the Washinton Territory war erupted in 1855 between the United States and Indian nations. In the nation's capital, Congress was bitterly divided along sectional lines and failed to reach consensus on such policies as building the country's "transcontinental" railroads.

With the onset of the Civil War, the Southern delegations left Capitol Hill in the hands of the Northerners. Not surprisingly, the first transcontinental railroads took the northerly routes.

The 1862 Pacific Railway Act created the *Union* Pacific Railroad. The 1864 Northern Pacific railroad land grant created what is today the BNSF. Both of these railroads – today the two largest railroads in the United States – were signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln

On July 2, 1864 – even as schemes were afoot to steal Idaho's territorial capital from Lewiston to Boise – President Lincoln (himself a former railroad attorney) signed into law the Northern Pacific railroad land grant. Congress and Lincoln created a new company, Northern Pacific Railroad, as an agent of the federal government for the purpose

of building a railroad, hauling the military and mail, and settling the northern plains and Pacific Northwest.

Lincoln's and Congress's mission was "to promote the public interest and welfare by the construction of said railroad -- and keeping the same in working order, and to secure to the government at all times -- the use and benefits of same for postal, military, and other purposes." Lincoln and Congress tasked this corporation with the challenge of building a railroad connecting Lake Superior and Puget Sound.

The area of the commonwealth covered by this law was breathtakingly vast: 40 million acres or 2 percent of the nation's land area. Looked at another way, the land grant roughly equaled Washington State in size.

The railroad grant lands are the "checkerboard estate." Congress granted the lands to the newly created companies in alternating one-mile sections. This gives the appearance of a "checkerboard". The rationale for the checkerboard was that all the land (both the alternating railroad and public squares of the checkerboard) would increase in value after the railroad was built, and would then be sold to homesteaders.

Lincoln, by signing the Northern Pacific grant into law, rolled out a jurisdictional checkerboard of railroad grant lands across the upper Mississippi, the northern plains, up and over the Rocky Mountain Front and the Bitterroots, across the Columbia River plateau, then up and over the Cascade Crest, and terminating at Portland and Tacoma. The Northern Pacific checkerboard estate was up to 120 miles wide and 2000 miles long.

While the public's land was a subsidy to the railroad corporations, the land was not a gift. The laws spelled out conditions the corporation had to meet. Congress retained permanent oversight and an escape clause – the grants could be amended or revoked.

The land grant laws were flagrantly violated. But the sheer scale of economic and political power the federal government gave to railroads and their successor corporations has allowed them to retain extensive holdings of the West's checkerboard estates. To this day there has not been a full accounting for what happened to millions of acres of public lands.

In the 1980s, 120 years after Lincoln signed the law creating the

Northern Pacific Railroad, great swaths of forests were clearcut in a pattern that looks just like a checkerboard – square mile clearcuts corresponding to the squares on the railroad maps.

In Idaho's St. Joe and Clearwater River country, clearcutting and roadbuilding on the checkerboard estate devastated streams and wildlife habitat. Abe Lincoln's legacy had gone awry.

CLEARCUTTING THE CHECKERBOARD ESTATE

Jolting along on Amtrak trains in the Northwest, it is interesting to reflect on what happened to the 40-million-acre checkerboard estate with which Congress and Lincoln endowed the Northern Pacific Railroad – the largest single subsidy in American history.

Northern Pacific has many corporate successors. Several of these are familiar to people in Idaho: Potlatch, Boise Cascade, Weyerhaeuser, and Plum Creek Timber Company.

The Weyerhaeuser family name is far more familiar today than Northern Pacific Railroad Co. The Weyerhaeuser fortune is based largely on the checkerboard estate – land intended for homesteaders.

Frederick Weyerhaeuser was one of the nation's "rags to riches" stories. A German immigrant who got his start in 1857 in Rock Island, Illinois, in a timber mill, he was a hard-working and respected businessman. Within half a century Weyerhaeuser emerged as the preeminent lumberman in America, controlling the rich frontier timber trade of the Midwest.

By the end of the 19th century the once vast pineries of the Great Lakes region were nearly cutover and burned out. Frederick Weyerhaeuser faced a choice. He had to move on to new timber frontiers in either the South -- or the Pacific Northwest.

As fate would have it, Weyerhaeuser lived in St. Paul and next door to one of the nation's preeminent railroaders: James J. Hill. Hill spent many evenings at the Weyerhaeuser mansion regaling the lumber magnate with stories of the rich forests of the Pacific Northwest. And Hill also held the key to those forests, for he along with J.P. Morgan controlled Lincoln's Northern Pacific Land Grant.

Historic decisions for the Northwest were ultimately made there at 266 Summit Avenue. On January 3, 1900, the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*

reported that 900,000 acres of the checkerboard estate in western Washington State had been sold to Weyerhaeuser.

Weyerhaeuser interests ultimately purchased titles to millions of acres of the railroad grant lands. Other lumbermen followed Weyerhaeuser to the Pacific Northwest, opening an era of speculation and a rush for the "green gold".

In 1900 Frederick Weyerhaeuser and associates incorporated Weyerhaeuser Corporation; in 1903, Potlatch Corporation; and in 1913, Boise Payette. In 1957 Boise Payette would be joined with Yakima, Washington-based Cascade Lumber to form Boise Cascade.

These three corporations -- Weyerhaeuser, Potlatch, Boise Cascade -- have enjoyed a close relationship that is readily explained by their common founder, Frederick Weyerhaeuser, and the Northern Pacific railroad land grant.

BLOCKING UP THE CHECKERBOARD: LAND EXCHANGES

Maps of corporate holdings still show some of the original railroad checkerboard. Beginning in the late 1800s and continuing through today, the companies worked to "block-up" the checkerboard -- mostly by exchanging commercially valueless lands for public lands with vast timber resources. Financial interests used several devices to execute land exchanges. Mt. Rainier National Park was one such device.

In 1999 the United States celebrated the 100th birthday of Mt. Rainier National Park. What was not remembered, however, was the national scandal created by the law establishing Mt. Rainier as a National Park. The bill, enacted in 1899, contained provisions allowing the Morgan, Hill, and Weyerhaeuser interests to exchange acre-for-acre up to a million acres of railroad grant lands in the Mt. Rainier region for rich public lands in any state through which Northern Pacific track ran. And since Northern Pacific track extended to Portland, the Mt. Rainier Park bill opened up Oregon to the Weyerhaeuser syndicate.

The 1899 bill created Mt. Rainier "scrip" that Weyerhaeuser agents used to lay claim to hundreds of thousands of acres of forests in western Oregon and north Idaho's Clearwater River watershed. As Congressman Thomson of Illinois later said, "Mountain peaks, barren hillsides, lava beds, swamp lands and other valueless holdings ... were released and the most valuable timber, coal and oil lands within the public lands were taken in exchange.... The bars were let down for

wholesale fraud and a national scandal resulted."

Weyerhaeuser interests incorporated Potlatch in 1903, partly using Mt. Rainier scrip. Potlatch was also the name used by the Weyerhaeuser syndicate for the company town built near Moscow, Idaho.

Potlatch the company, and Potlatch, Idaho, the town have had very different fates. In 1931 the company was merged with other Weyerhaeuser-associated companies and headquartered in Lewiston. Today, Potlatch Corporation is a billion-dollar company with extensive holdings in Arkansas, Minnesota, and north Idaho.

The company town of Potlatch, Idaho -- like so many timber towns in the Northwest -- underwent upheaval when Potlatch Corporation closed the mill in the early 1980s.

Frederick Weyerhaeuser did not buy all of the Northern Pacific land grant forests. Northern Pacific railroad also retained millions of acres of the checkerboard estate. In 1989 the logging arm of the railroad, Plum Creek Timber Company, was spun off as a free-standing company. But even before this, Burlington Northern Railroad Company had begun liquidating the forests of the checkerboard estate in Idaho, Montana, and Washington. The checkerboard pattern on the maps became a clearcut reality on forested watersheds.

At the end of the 20th century Abe Lincoln's Northern Pacific land grant -- like a long-forgotten land mine from the Civil War--exploded in the forests of Idaho with huge impacts not just on the checkerboard forests, but also on Idaho's timber communities and the National Forests.

"HELLACIOUS HOLE": OVERCUTTING & TRANSITION

"Hell, Robbie. We're on sustained yield. When we clean up the timber in the West, we'll return to New England, where the industry began," said a corporate executive with International Paper to forester and author Gordon Robinson.

Of those who warned against overcutting the forests of the Northwest, none was more notable than FDR's Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace. On the eve of World War II the Seattle Post Intelligencer carried an editorial by Wallace with this front-page headline: "Wallace Analyzes Forest Problems. Urges Northwest to Lock Barn Door before timber horse is stolen."

In 1940, long before the timber crisis erupted in the Pacific Northwest, Wallace wrote, "The Grays Harbor, Puget Sound, Lower Columbia, Klamath County and Deschutes districts in your region are headed directly toward trouble that hit Pennsylvania, the Lake States, and the Missouri Ozarks."

A half-century later during the 1980s, newspaper stories continued to document the devastation of forests in the Northwest. In Montana a 1988 series by journalist Dick Manning of the *Missoulian*, captured the gravity of the forest destruction with headlines such as: "Logging Outstrips Growth. Observers warn of effects on environment, industry".

Directors of companies that held title to the Northern Pacific land grant -- companies such as Plum Creek and Champion International -- responded to fears of hostile take-overs and desires to maximize profits by directing woodworkers to cut down the forests. And cut they did.

Newspapers chronicled the destruction, outrage, frustration, and desperation as the land grant forests were clearcut away. A sampling of the newspaper headlines across the checkerboard estate:

MONTANA

- Why did they have to trash these places?
- Clearcutting devastates trout hatch.

IDAHO

- St. Joe River clearcut criticized. Plum Creek's activities under fire from environmentalists, Forest Service.

EASTERN WASHINGTON:

- Plum Creek Timber Co. accused of overcutting.
- Plum Creek raped land.

WASHINGTON'S CASCADES:

- Where have all the Forests Gone?
- News of timber cut startles Roslyn. Residents concerned about impact of 250-square mile timber harvest.
- Burlington Northern is selling us down the river.

This most recent chapter in overcutting the Northern Pacific grant lands – coming on top of decades of unsustainable logging -- further depleted the Northwest's timber supply. A Champion International official noted:

If you look just at industry, you would say industry has overcut their lands, that they have removed their volumes too quickly,

that they have created a hellacious hole or gap. I don't think anyone would disagree with that.

Just as Frederick Weyerhaeuser had to move from the Upper Mississippi in the late 1800s, so too did large timber companies have to move from the Northwest in the late 1900s. This "hellacious hole or gap" from virtually unchecked logging of the checkerboard estate was the major force behind mill closures, flight of capital, and the regional economic transition of rural, timber-dependent communities.

The historic transition was described by the General Accounting Office in 1991:

...the U.S. timber industry has shifted its center of gravity to an expanding area of plantations and secondary forests in the Southeast. By 1986, the southern states accounted for 47 percent of the nation's timber harvest, compared with 25 percent from the Pacific coast states. And the latter's share is expected to decline further.

The transition was also evidenced by headlines in Northwest newspapers:

- Study: Industry fleeing Northwest
- South emerges as No. 1 wood-products region
- Weyerhaeuser considering Soviet venture
- Boise Cascade eyes deal with Russians

As corporations shifted capital and operations out of the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rockies during the 1980s and early 1990s, the region's newspapers also recorded the closing down of mills and the hardships facing mill-dependent families and communities.

- Funeral bells toll for mill town Everett
- Slipping away: Timber town watches helplessly as a way of life slowly disappears
- Vanishing Industry
- End of an Era: Potlatch Corporation sells off its logging equipment
- Champion puts Montana holding on the market
- Potlatch to close Coeur d'Alene mill

But even as Champion, Weyerhaeuser, Boise Cascade, Potlatch, and Plum Creek were shifting capital out of the region, there still remained one major source of trees: the National Forests.

THE NATIONAL FORESTS: why we have them

With the “hellacious hole” in timber supply on corporate lands, pressures mounted to make up for shortfalls from the National Forests. By the late 1960s evidence was growing that high cuts on the National Forests could not be sustained: the timber frontier in the National Forests -- as on corporate lands—was at an end. Despite the accumulating scientific and economic evidence, high levels of logging continued on many National Forests in Idaho. Unrealistic “top-down” timber targets collided with “bottom-up” ecological realities in the forests. Conflicts over forests were not new, and are part of a larger history that started during the 19th century and led to the creation of the National Forests System.

In an unusual symmetry of history, both forces — corporate and conservation — that collided in the forests of Idaho date from the same year: 1864.

The very year that Abraham Lincoln signed into law this new federal corporate agent, Northern Pacific Railroad Co., a book was published entitled Man and Nature. Its author, George Perkins Marsh, was an official with Lincoln’s State Department and served in the Kingdom of Italy. Marsh reflected on the destruction of forests underway in New England, connected this to what had happened in the Mediterranean Basin with overcutting forests and the fall of civilizations. Marsh then pondered whether the human species could long survive if the destruction of the world’s forests continued.

Man and Nature greatly influenced a New York physician, Dr. Franklin B. Hough, a pioneer in forest conservation and the founder of the U.S. Forest Service. While heading the census for New York State during the 1860s, Hough noted curious shifts in population: as forests were cut people moved on to new forests. With the support of the scientific community, he took his concerns to President Grant and Congress. Dr. Hough included materials in the Congressional record about the destruction of Michigan’s great forests, and growing fears about the fate of forests in the West.

In 1876 Congress tacked money onto a seed bill for the Department of Agriculture for studying forests. Dr. Hough was hired: the nation’s first forestry agent (and explaining why the Forest Service is in the Department of Agriculture). Dr. Hough’s reports helped to build the foundation for the nation’s forest protection policies. In 1891 Congress passed the 1891 Forest Reserve Act, giving to presidents the power to establish National Forests (then called “Forest Reserves”). The first National Forest was established soon thereafter near

Yellowstone National Park.

President Theodore Roosevelt is most closely associated with the National Forests. He established about half the current National Forest System (191 million acres), and held the first national and international conferences on conservation. Roosevelt's efforts to protect the forests were carried out by a close friend and forester, Gifford Pinchot. This Chief of the Forest Service had ready access to the Oval Office in the White House, and played a critical role in designating National Forests in Idaho and elsewhere in the West.

By the late 1800s and early 1900s agents for timber syndicates were traveling from the overcut forests of Minnesota and Wisconsin to survey and file claims on commercially valuable forests in the Northwest. At the same time the United States government, especially under President Teddy Roosevelt, worked to protect the public interest by establishing National Forests. Corporate interest and public interest inevitably clashed in the forests of Idaho.

Weyerhaeuser's purchase of Northern Pacific checkerboard estate in the Northwest ushered in a period of intense financial speculation -- a rush for "green gold". Land frauds were rampant. The Roosevelt administration launched a major investigation, issuing hundreds of indictments that led to the conviction of many prominent people -- including Oregon's Senator Mitchell. Idaho politicians were also implicated in the land frauds. Senator William Borah under investigation that threatened to end his budding political career, appealed to Roosevelt for help. Unlike Oregon's Mitchell, Idaho's Borah established his innocence.

Against the backdrop of the land frauds, and over the intense opposition of Republican Senators -- but with broad public support -- Teddy Roosevelt proclaimed tens of millions of acres as new National Forests. In one particularly famous showdown with the western Republican Senators in 1907, a "rider" was attached to the Agriculture bill stripping the President of the power to proclaim National Forests in six states: Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Montana, Colorado, and Wyoming. Between February 28 when Congress passed the bill, and March 4 when Roosevelt had to sign the bill, Forest Service officials worked nonstop to prepare the documents for Roosevelt. On March 4 just before midnight when Roosevelt signed the Agriculture bill, the president proclaimed 16 million acres of new National Forests in Idaho and the other five states. These were the famous "midnight forests".

Roosevelt outraged the western Republican Senators, but his actions to save the forests from the syndicates drew broad public support. Teddy Roosevelt left a legacy of a greatly expanded National Forest System and the U.S. Forest Service as the most respected and professional of all the federal agencies.

“MANAGING” THE NATIONAL FORESTS.

(i) Forest Plans

Shortly after establishing the first National Forests, conflicts emerged over how they forests would actually be managed, and who would manage them. In 1897 Congress passed the so-called “Organic Act” recognizing two uses for the forests: to protect waters and provide a continuous supply of timber. (There was far more concern at the time about a provision allowing land exchanges than about timber cutting.) Prior to 1905 the National Forests were actually administered by the Interior Department. The Northwest’s land frauds helped build public and Congressional support for transferring the forests to the fledgling Forest Service. In 1905 the Transfer Act shifted the National Forests from the Department of Interior to the Department of Agriculture and the agency founded by Dr. Hough.

Custodial care characterized the Forest Service’s approach prior to World War II. The yearly average cut for the entire system was about 1 billion board feet (BBF). [A “board foot” is a piece of wood 12 inches square and 1 inch thick; a loaded logging truck carries about 5,000 board feet of trees.] But with the war effort and the post-war housing boom, the Forest Service dramatically increased logging and road-building from 3.5 BBF in 1950 to 8.3 BBF in 1959. Rewards within the agency, including advancement, accrued to those who got out the cut. The agency became funded for, and driven by, timber production and road-building.

Clearcutting during the 1960s triggered a national outcry for reform. Public opposition in West Virginia prompted the Legislature to pass resolutions in 1967 and 1970, and a request for a moratorium on clearcutting by Sen. Jennings Randolph. In Montana, Senator Lee Metcalf in 1968 commissioned the University of Montana to study timber practices on the Bitterroot National Forests. The Bitterroot study, called the “Bolle Report” after its lead author Professor Arnold Bolle, noted the Forest Service’s “overriding concern for sawtimber production” and “economic irrationality” of aspects of the timber program.

Senator Frank Church (D-ID), chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, held investigative hearings in 1971 on timber practices in the National Forests. The subcommittee adopted the so-called Church Guidelines on timber practices directing where and how cutting should take place.

The federal courts ruling that clearcutting was illegal triggered the 1976 National Forest Management Act. This was the famous *Monongahela* case (Izaak Walton League v. Butz). In 1975, the Fourth Circuit Federal Court of Appeals reaffirmed a lower court ruling (that held clearcutting to be illegal under the 1897 Organic Act. This court decision prompted Congress to act, passing the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) in 1976.

NFMA was a revolutionary law. It required "forest plans" for each of the National Forests to guide all resource activities for up to 15 years. NFMA combined with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to disclose to the public the actual condition of the National Forests, and (at least ideally) to improve the quality of decision-making about the future of our National Forests. NFMA opened the door to citizen involvement in decisions that had previously been closely guarded by a timber-dominated U.S. Forest Service.

In Idaho, forest planning intensified rather than resolved conflicts over the forests. Failure by Congress to pass a wilderness bill for Idaho during the 1980s shifted decisions about the fate of roadless areas into forest planning. When forest Supervisors attempted to scale back the logging and road-building, Sen. McClure (R-ID), who largely controlled the Forest Service through his key positions in the U.S. Senate, threatened retaliation in the budget or had them removed.

The nation's worst abuses of political pressure to increase the allowable level of timber sold being set in the forest plans occurred in north Idaho. McClure shut down forest planning in north Idaho altogether until completion of a timber supply analysis. In 1987 McClure again held up the forest plans in north Idaho, directing the Forest Service to rewrite some of the forest plan decisions to his specifications. For example the Idaho Panhandle plan called for annually cutting up to 250 million board feet (mmbf) of trees, with an additional 30mmbf of pulp and salvage, and an automatic increase to 350mmbf at the end of the period covered by the forest plan.

After McClure permitted the Forest Service to release the final plans to

the public in the fall of 1987, conservation and sporting groups appealed all three plans for the north Idaho National Forests: the Nez Perce, Clearwater, and Idaho Panhandle.

In response to conservationists' appeal of the Idaho Panhandle forest plan, Forest Service officials opened their planning files for review. Documents revealed that this forest plan – taking ten years to finish and costing millions of dollars – had been composed around pre-assigned timber targets. The agency's planning files also contained concerns by Forest Service staff that these timber targets were far too high and unattainable. These concerns over the timber targets, however, went unheeded. Senator McClure's language was inserted into the final plan along with the inflated timber targets.

The gap between the political expectations and ecological realities loomed large in the forests of Idaho. The inflated timber targets in these forest plans were part of a larger problem described in the book A Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests since World War Two by forest historian Paul Hirt. There exists "a general cultural tendency to reject limitations on resource use," Hirt writes, "and to assume the optimistic regarding our ability to control nature and resolve social problems with environmental engineering. This is the conspiracy of optimism."

The conspiracy of optimism has collided with ecological realities in north Idaho.

Implementing forest plans based on unrealistic timber targets and Congressional budget assumptions set up a series of conflicts at the local, regional, and national levels. Resource specialists, rangers, forest supervisors and even regional foresters found themselves caught between top-down political pressures to cut and the bottom-up realities in the forest. This conflict erupted and drew national attention when the Bush Administration forced out the regional forester for Region 1 (North Idaho and Montana), John Mumma.

Mumma, in tearful testimony before Congress, spoke of the top-down political pressures and the bottom-up biological realities in the National Forests:

My supervisors and District Rangers in the Northern Region recognize that we cannot meet my timber targets.... I have failed to reach quotas only because to do so would have required me to violate federal law.

I am extremely disappointed that the political pressures I

have dealt with over the last few years in my region have now apparently resulted in the decision to remove me from the Northern Region.

Mumma was not alone – others, including Clearwater National Forest Win Green, suffered a similar fate. “Combat biologists” and resource specialists who found themselves standing between the trees and interests of the timber companies -- such as Idaho Panhandle hydrologist Al Isaacson -- were also forced out. Other professionals just left the Forest Service when they could rather than play a hand in the corruption.

Leadership in the executive branch and the Forest Service lacking commitment to professional integrity and scientifically based, economically sound management put the entire agency at risk.

Timber politics clearcut a swath through the professional ranks of the Forest Service. The esprit de corps and professional integrity that were the Forest Service’s hallmark under Gifford Pinchot suffered.

Forest plans, despite all their many flaws -- major data omissions, faulty assumptions, and flawed analysis – did disclose important information to the public about the condition of the national forests. The forest plans revealed that the standing trees in the National Forests were not sufficient to fill the “hellacious hole” created by corporate overcutting. For the National Forests, as on other land ownerships, the timber frontier was at an end.

(ii) Regional Plans.

In responding to controversy generated by continued logging of spotted owl habitat in old growth forests, newly elected President Bill Clinton hosted a “Forest Summit” in Portland, Oregon, in April 1993. As the cuts dropped on the “spotted owl” National Forests, conservationists were concerned that the timber program would shift across the Cascade Mountains and into the Columbia River plateau and Northern Rockies: an “eastside – westside” trade-off. Conservationists appealed without success to House Speaker Tom Foley of Spokane to encourage Clinton to include forests east of the Cascades in the Forest Summit.

During the Forest Summit participants spoke fleetingly of the connections between the “spotted owl” forests (generally west of the Cascade Crest) and the “east side” forests of the interior Columbia

River ecosystem. Salmon, for example, did not stop at the Cascades, but continued swimming upstream to spawn in eastern Washington and Oregon, and in Idaho.

Direct outcomes of the Forest Summit were the Northwest Forest Plan to manage the westside "spotted owl" forests and an economic assistance program to help timber-dependent communities with the economic transition.

In 1994 the Clinton Administration, with the support of Speaker Tom Foley and Sen. Mark Hatfield, announced a second regional planning process covering nearly 70 million acres of public land in the Columbia River ecosystem. Called the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Plan (ICBEMP, pronounced variably "ice bump" or "ick bemp"), the regional planning process has been under attack repeatedly by Senator Larry Craig (R-ID) and Rep. Helen Chenoweth (R-ID), among others. To date, the release of this second regional forest plan – the "eastside" equivalent to the Northwest Forest Plan -- has been delayed.

(iii) Timber Sales & Forest Watch

Forest conservationists in Idaho and elsewhere in the Northwest increasingly scrutinized proposals for individual timber sales that were based on the forest plans. This loose network of citizens became known as "Forest Watch". Serious deficiencies were repeatedly uncovered and, when appealed, acknowledged by the Forest Service. As more and more timber sales were withdrawn, the cut plummeted and eventually reached levels not seen since the early 1950s.

Forest Watch had an impact on logging levels in forests of the interior Columbia River ecosystem similar to that of the "spotted owl" lawsuits on dropping the cuts in forests west of the Cascade Crest. It is important to note that forest plans alone did not reduce the unsustainable levels of logging. Rather it was citizens scrutinizing the many individual timber sale proposals that flowed from these larger, programmatic forest plans and agency officials willing to withdraw timber sales under appeal.

The response of the timber industry to "Forest Watch" was to lobby to weaken or end entirely the citizen process for appealing timber sales. During the early 1990s a series of efforts in Congress and acquiescencfe by President Clinton culminated in 1995 with the so-called "Salvage Rider" bill. This "rider" suspended altogether the

appeals process – and citizen oversight of the National Forests.

As timber sales went forward, the extent of the subsidy to the timber industry became clearer to a Congress espousing fiscal responsibility. Logging of forests and the suspension of laws prompted public opposition including demonstrations, civil disobedience, and arrests. The salvage rider was not repeated in subsequent years.

The citizens appeals process, however, did not survive the 1990s unscathed. Public processes suffered -- as had professionals within public agencies – when they stood in the way of getting out the cut. Timber sale appeals also taught the Forest Service how to write more legally defensible documents. Some in Forest Watch pointed out that early in the 1990s the Forest Service was “caught with their pants down.” Repeated appeals often did not encourage Forest Service officials to improve the quality of decision-making, but rather taught the agency how to publish slicker, appeal-proof planning documents for timber sales.

(iv) Congressional budgeting

The Salvage Rider revealed a powerful arena for the timber industry: the committees in Congress that write budgets for the National Forests. Agency budgets largely drive what actually happens in the National Forest System. The public interested in what the Forest Service really does should look at its budget.

Although a growing body of science and economics dating to the 1960s revealed that the National Forests were being overcut, Congress continued to fund the Forest Service mostly to build roads and cut trees during the 1980s and 1990s.

Senior members of Congress from the Northwest – including Senators Jim McClure, Mark Hatfield, Larry Craig, and Slade Gorton – were prolific and effective in using the budgeting process to fund high levels of logging and road-building, and for sponsoring industry-friendly riders.

Congressional abuse of budgeting for the National Forests increasingly drew the attention of forest conservationists and some members of Congress starting in the early 1980s. The Salvage Rider of 1995 dramatically increased that interest, especially on the issue of loss to taxpayers and the biggest expense associated with logging: roads.

Roads to Nowhere – Congressional Budgeting

At the time of the Lewis & Clark expedition, not a single logging road or clearcut marred the forested watershed of the Columbia River and its major tributary, the Snake. In less than 200 years, all that has changed.

Logging roads are found in Idaho National Forests in abundance: over 4,000 road miles on both the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests. The Idaho Panhandle National Forests alone contains over 10,000 road miles. The highest road densities of any national forests in the nation are found on the Coeur d'Alene (one of the three forests comprising the Panhandle): *averaging over 11 road miles per square mile of forest*. There are places on the Coeur d'Alene where road densities exceed 20 and even 30 road miles per square mile of forest.

The Coeur d'Alene is of special concern because the clearcutting and road building have worsened floods events. Flood waters fan out over thousands of acres of wetlands covered with toxic mine waste dumped by upstream mining companies. During just a single day of flooding in March, 1996, the USGS estimated that the floods carried over one million pounds of lead from the toxic flood plain into Lake Coeur d'Alene, Idaho's second largest lake. Forest floods carry mining's toxic pollution beyond the lake, into the Spokane River and across the state line into Washington State.

In 1985 and in 1986, the U.S. House of Representatives held hearings on road-building focusing on the extent of the industry subsidy and environmental costs. The House subsequently passed budgets containing major reductions in the forest roads program.

The Senate, however, continued high levels of funding for roads. Differences between House and Senate budgets were reconciled during the yearly, autumnal meeting of the conference committee. In those meetings, Sen. McClure, supported by Sen. Mark Hatfield, used skill that he likened to being an Armenian rug trader and secured hundreds of millions of dollars for road-building.

In 1996 a budget amendment to cut the timber road subsidy passed by a single vote in the House. Unhappy with the outcome, Speaker Newt Gingrich had the measure revoted the following day. A 211-211 tie vote meant defeat – and the corporate subsidy continued.

In 1997 Reps. John Porter (R-Ill.), Joe Kennedy, (D-Mass.), and John

Kasich (R-Ohio) led another budget amendment to end the logging road subsidy. The vote on a weak substitute amendment passed, 210-209 – and the corporate subsidy continued.

In September, 1997, the road subsidy was debated heatedly on the Senate floor, Sen. Bryan (D-Nev.) used the destruction of the Coeur d'Alene National Forest in asking his colleagues to end the logging road subsidy. The vote was 50-50. With Vice President Gore unavailable to break the tie vote, the corporate subsidy continued.

In 1998 the Forest Service publicly acknowledged the 156 National Forests contained 380,000 miles of "system" roads, and revealed yet another 70,000 miles of "ghost" or nonsystem roads. The Forest Service estimated the maintenance backlog on these logging roads at \$8 billion.

Roadless Areas – Congressional Budgeting

National Forests in Idaho contain some of the most important wildland values in the United States – important habitat for fish and wildlife as well as the basis for Idaho's world-class outdoor recreational opportunities. Congress protected some roadless areas in the National Wilderness Preservation System, including the Sawtooth, Frank Church River of No Return, Gospel Hump, and Bitterroot. But most roadless areas in Idaho have no protection. The fate of roadless areas has caused ongoing public debate.

The Forest Service first provided administrative protection for roadless areas during the 1920s, then called "primitive areas". Agency regulations proved inadequate to protect some areas from pressures to build roads and cut timber. Efforts were begun to provide a higher level of protection for wildlands: statutory rather than administrative protection. In 1956 the first bill to create the National Wilderness Preservation System was introduced. Congress passed the Wilderness Act in 1964, creating both the system and adding certain areas to that system.

Although not required under the 1964 act, the Forest Service did its first comprehensive roadless area review and evaluation (RARE I). Deficiencies prompted a lawsuit, *Sierra Club v. Butz* that resulted in an out-of-court settlement requiring a full EIS before authorizing development of roadless areas. In 1977 Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Rupert Cutler ordered the Forest Service to undertake a second nationwide assessment, RARE II. Deficiencies prompted a

lawsuit, *California v. Block* that led to an injunction halting development of forty-eight roadless areas allocated to nonwilderness. During the Reagan Administration, the re-evaluation of roadless areas was assigned to forest planning.

Congress responded by passing wilderness bills, state-by-state, in 1984 in order to release nonprotected areas for further development and also further study for wilderness protection. Sen. McClure successfully stopped most state wilderness bills in the Senate, forcing major concessions in the House on a wilderness bill for Idaho. In this high-stakes poker game with the nation's wild lands, the Congress eventually passed wilderness bills for most of the affected states – except the adjoining states of Montana and Idaho: the core wildlands complex of the Northern Rockies. Efforts in subsequent years to pass bills for these two states also proved unsuccessful.

Many forest conservationists have advocated looking at the Northern Rockies wildland ecosystem as a whole – protecting the key wildland areas and connecting corridors for wildlife. This proposal, embodied in the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, is currently before the Congress.

Without an Idaho wilderness bill, the debate over the 9 million acres of unprotected roadless areas shifted to forest planning. Many roadless areas were assigned to the timber base in order for the Forest Service to meet the inflated timber goals of the forest plans.

In 1987, conservationists appealed the Idaho Panhandle forest plan, and requested a “stay” of ground disturbing activities for the 47 inventoried roadless areas. In March, 1988, the Forest Service granted the request (the only such broad-based stay ever granted during that period) and suspended development of roadless areas – temporarily. The Forest Service then severed the roadless issue from the other 24 major issues raised in the conservationists 500-page appeal of that forest plan. The agency's decision on the roadless issue was “fast-tracked” (in stark contrast, the Forest Service's decision on the other 24 appeal issues – also all denied -- took six more years). Following logging truck convoys and amidst loggers rallies featuring then-Chief Dale Robertson and Idaho politicians, the Forest Service ruled that its Panhandle Forest Plan adequately analyzed the Panhandle's forty-seven inventoried roadless areas.

Conservationists sought judicial review, and filed in federal court in December, 1988. The Forest Service's attorneys argued that forest

plans were really mere plans to do more planning ("programmatic documents"), and as such the agency was not required to disclose information sufficient for making final decisions about roadless areas. These decisions would be made later. In *Idaho Conservation League v. Mumma*, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the Forest Service's position. Subsequent legal decisions on other forests required the Forest Service to complete a full EIS before authorizing development activities in roadless areas.

As the Forest Service implemented the forest plans, roads and timber cutting units lopped off another million roadless acres in Idaho. Agency officials in Idaho had often learned to satisfy the procedural requirements of the law, allowing it to continue its conspiracy of optimism.

In 1998 the Forest Service proposed a moratorium on building roads into roadless areas. In 1999, President Clinton directed the Forest Service to undertake a comprehensive process (environmental impact statement) to protect roadless areas in the National Forest system. This process is currently underway.

(v) Understanding the Iron Triangle

Frederick Weyerhaeuser cautioned his associates about using their considerable accumulated wealth and power to influence political decisions. His son, F.E. Weyerhaeuser, wrote in 1906, "Mr. Weyerhaeuser is very positive in his demands that our representatives keep out of politics." Mr. Weyerhaeuser's sage advice at the beginning of the century went largely unheeded by the end of the century.

Protecting the National Forests from overcutting meant that the Forest Service, as under Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, was an adversary of timber corporations and their politician allies – especially the western Republican Senators. As the Forest Service became "production oriented" in the decades after World War II, this changed. The three – the agency, corporations, and politicians – came together in a triangular relationship that devastated the National Forest System, including in Idaho.

The "iron triangle" helps to clarify how corporations influence forest decisions.

The iron triangle is a concept examined by a former Washington, D.C., correspondent Hedrick Smith in his book, *The Power Game*. The iron

triangle is formed by three components: (1) corporations, (2) government bureaucracies, and (3) politicians.

The goal of the iron triangle is achieving mutual self-interest by locking-out the public. The quintessential iron triangle was named by President Eisenhower: the military-industrial complex. This iron triangle consists of armament industries seeking contracts, the Pentagon, and politicians seeking campaign money and votes. Smith points out that the political arena contains many iron triangles, including one for public lands.

The force that binds together the iron triangle is money, the "mothers milk of American politics". The timber industry gave Senator Larry Craig \$107,791 for his 1996 election bid, plus an additional \$173,123 in "soft" money. During the six-year period starting in 1991 the American Forest & Paper Association and related PACs gave Slade Gorton (R-WA) \$78,529; and Norm Dicks (D-WA) \$37,350. The Senators who voted for the road-building subsidy averaged \$27,337.

During this same 6-year period Congress voted \$458 million in road programs. Boise Cascade invested \$202,500 in PAC and soft money contributions from 1991-1997, and received \$18,894,511 in road credit subsidies; Potlatch spent \$185,966, received \$4,172,731; Weyerhaeuser spent \$510,834, and received \$7,460,715. These three large timber corporations deriving from the Northern Pacific land grant (itself the largest public land subsidy in American history) averaged about \$40 in returns for every \$1 invested in electing politicians.

The iron triangle has had a profound influence on decisions about forests. In one of the major lawsuits involving spotted owl-dependent old growth forests, Judge Dwyer recognized the corrupting influences of politics. Dwyer wrote,

[There exists] a deliberate and systematic refusal by the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service to comply with laws protecting wildlife.

This is not the doing of scientists, foresters, rangers and others at working levels of these agencies. It reflects decisions made by higher authorities in the executive branch of government.

John Mumma also experienced first-hand the power of the Iron Triangle when he was summoned to appear before Senator McClure, an encounter described by the *Spokesman-Review*:

Waiting inside McClure's two-story quarters were McClure

and Idaho colleagues Sen. Steve Symms and Congressman Larry Craig, Montana Sen. Conrad Burns and several aids.

McClure attacked.

Mumma defended the heads of his 13 forests and said environmental laws made it impossible to hit the timber sale targets Congress expected when it set the agency's budget.

"We were under fire from the moment we got there," Mumma said, calling the 'Republican gang bang' the worst meeting of his life.

"He lectured everyone in there like you wouldn't believe. He first intimidated, then put the guilt trip on. It was like watching the old dog teaching the new dogs how to chew out the bureaucrats, how to kick them in the groin and make them cower down to you when you make these demands."

Senator Jim McClure, who largely controlled the Forest Service during the 1980s by controlling its budget in the Senate, illustrates another facet of the iron triangle: revolving doors. In 1990 McClure retired from the Senate, walked through the revolving door between political and corporate power, and took his seat as a director of Boise Cascade Corporation.

In the early 1990s McClure's role in the Senate has been filled largely by Larry Craig. Senator Craig hired a timber industry lobbyist, Mark Rey, to be legal counsel for the Senate subcommittee overseeing forests. Craig's 1997 proposed legislation for "reforming" National Forest management was almost entirely based on the work of an attorney representing corporate interests, Steve Quarrels.

CONCLUSION

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," wrote poet and philosopher Santayana. Americans have very little sense of their history, including the national history of forest destruction and of efforts and policies to stop it.

The conflict over forests in Idaho (and in the Northwest generally) dates from 1864. Abraham Lincoln, by signing into law the Northern Pacific railroad land grant, created a 40-million-acre checkerboard estate and unleashed enormously powerful economic forces. In that very same year Man and Nature was published, laying the foundation for the nation's conservation movement and forest policies.

Although the law signed by Lincoln intended the railroad sell the grant lands to homesteaders, vast tracts of forests were sold instead by Hill and Morgan to Frederick Weyerhaeuser then living in St. Paul. The Weyerhaeuser syndicate incorporated Weyerhaeuser, Potlatch, and Boise Payette (later Boise Cascade) – all three major timber corporations linked by their founder and the Northern Pacific land grant. Millions of acres of the checkerboard estate also remained with Northern Pacific railroad (later Burlington Northern). Plum Creek, the railroad's logging has undergone restructuring to take advantage of tax loopholes.

Decades of overcutting the checkerboard estate created a "hellacious hole" in the timber supply of the Northern Rockies and Pacific Northwest. Responding to timber shortages, corporations began transferring capital to new timber frontiers – and reaching for trees still standing in the National Forests.

In the National Forests, a "conspiracy of optimism" has prevailed since World War II. The Forest Service pursued high levels of road-building and logging. Advancement and rewards within the system went to those who got out the cut. The Forest Service -- entrusted with sustaining the National Forests -- instead extracted most of the easily accessible stands of commercial timber and became the largest road-building agency on earth: responsible for more than 400,000 miles of logging roads.

Taxpayers have lost billions of dollars on this economic folly in the National Forests, and still face a road-maintenance backlog the Forest Service estimates at \$8 billion. In places like the Coeur d'Alene, the forests have been devastated.

By the 1960s reports were published forewarning that the high levels of cutting could not be sustained. Despite accumulating damage, warnings from scientists, and growing public outrage, levels of cutting remained high on the National Forests in Idaho until the 1990s. In forests like the Coeur d'Alene, the tortured landscapes bear witness to the entrenched power of the iron triangle and the conspiracy of optimism.

Forest Service resource specialists (combat biologists) who attempted to protect the forests were often transferred or lost their jobs. Forest supervisors were threatened and lost their jobs. Regional Forester John Mumma lost his job for failing to get out the cut from north Idaho and western Montana.

The battle between these two forces -- exploitation and conservation - - dating to 1864 has been fought over the decades and across the forested landscapes of the Northwest. Wilderness bills, individual timber sales, forest plans, ICBEMP, Congressional budgets, and most recently the proposal to protect roadless areas have been but skirmishes in this larger struggle over the forests. Man and Nature and the work of Dr. Hough in founding the Forest Service were driven by the larger concerns about the fate not just of the forests, but of the human species.

In Idaho it is still possible to walk among cedars that were seedlings not long after Jesus Christ walked the earth, and ponderosa pines that predate the Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock. In Idaho it is still possible to walk where Lewis & Clark walked and not see a clearcut or logging road.

In Idaho, the timber frontier is over.

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