

Afterthoughts:

They knew, they always knew.

Now I'm going to get myself into trouble with some people, inside and outside the timber industry.

When I started this project I had an open mind: I was neither a supporter of the timber industry nor an environmentalist. My goal was to record the facts. My position over the past 12 years has not changed—not even now.

In a college anthropology class I learned about the “anthropological perspective.” In short, that perspective says don't judge, record. I found fault with that perspective then and I do now. If scientists can't judge who can. I'm no scientist, that's for sure, but I can judge—judgment based on many hours of study, good logic, and two great eyes. Logging practices, in general, have devastated our forests—private and public (and the fault is not always that of the logger).¹

As I learned more about the history of the timber industry I became aware that from an early date those involved in timber harvesting knew that they were over cutting. No, the average farmer, clearing his land, did not realize that his burning of acres and acres of trees was contributing to a future problem. But the “industry”, (however you want to define it) knew that harvesting practices in the new land were—at best—imprudent.

Several people have told me things like, “There were so many trees that no one ever dreamed that we would run out.” Some people thought that way but those that should have known better did. Fortunately for me, I've found plenty of evidence to support my clam that THEY KNEW. Here is just one—and a late one at that. It comes from the 1935 issue of the *Rand McNally Ready-Reference Atlas of the World* (Rand

McNally & Company, Chicago, 1935, 1936, 1937). A friend knowing of my work sent me a photocopy of the following excerpt—which isn't out of context (thanks for the tip, Tim). On page 121 of the *Atlas*, in a description for the United States, is stated:

Forests. The merchantable timber of the great original forests of the United States has been reduced by more than one-half up to the present time. The rate of cutting is 36 billion board feet a year, which is four times the annual growth....

Another source dates from 1802—yes, 1802. Alexander von Humboldt, after visiting the United States, wrote:

By felling trees that cover the tops and sides of the mountains, men in every climate prepare at once two calamities for future generations: the want of fuel and a scarcity of water... When forests are destroyed as they are everywhere in America by the European planters....

Humboldt was a scientist and a keen observer of nature. David McCullough, in *Brave Companions*, (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1992) writes a short and very interesting biography of this man, for whom the Humboldt Current is named (Humboldt did not discover the current, only honored by its naming). Humboldt's writings should have had an impact on logging; they did not.

So when former president Clinton, whom I do not like or respect, and with whom I seldom agree, sets aside 40 million acres of roadless forest lands I could only cheer. This action, if it sur-

1. Evidence of good logging practices can be found right here in Crook County. But on the whole, the industry's track record is not good.

vives, like that of Theodore Roosevelt, is in the *public's* interest—not the timber industry's but the public's.

Ok, so I have opinions. I kept those opinions out of my writing about the history of the timber industry. If I made an opinionated statement within the body of this book I hope I marked it as such. Fair enough?

A net cast too wide?

No, not wide enough

After writing the above opinion in the fall of 1999, I made it a point to make several visits to the forests around Prineville (both national and private)² and I was appalled by what I saw: a forest unwell. In my opinion, I claimed that the timber industry was responsible (and it appeared that I meant everyone in the industry was equally at fault). This was a short-sighted, and incomplete, statement. It is not the *entire* timber industry that has caused the devastation of the forest; there are some companies that work very hard to protect the forest.

These industry protectors of the forest range from independent loggers (gypos, in woods talk) to timber operators, to timber land owners, to large corporations. Some of these folks are my friends and I've unthinkingly cast aspersions on their performance and motives. For this I apologize; it was not my intent to blame the many for the actions of the few. When speaking of an entire industry, such as the timber industry, it is hard (if not impossible) to be precise. But precision in reporting the history of the timber industry is the over-riding concern in writing this manuscript.

It was also unfair of me not to list others responsible for the forest's condition. In doing so, I will offend even more of my friends (and so it goes). But it must be said that radical environmentalists ("environmentalist whack-os, as Rush calls them) share a large portion of the blame for the forest's conditions; they have become junk

yards and fire hazards. Not all environmentalists are whack-os, but many are and they seem to be the ones that get the attention—and the action.

Congress is also to blame. On the other hand, the Forest Service is probably less to blame than anyone (although not all of their policies and practices favor forest health). The FS has been caught in the middle of a war; a war between the industry and the environmentalists. A war, by the way, that no one is winning and the American public is losing.

The industry wants more timber harvested from the forest. The environmentalists want no timber harvested from the forests. Caught in the middle is the Forest Service. Timber industry lobbyists pressure Congress (by influencing individual members) to direct the Forest Service to offer for sale timber that the FS would rather not sell (while legal complications originated by environmental groups prevents the Forest Service from doing a job they were trained to do). The outrageously high rate of harvest seen in the 1980s is a prime example. Everyone knew the harvest rate was too high. Not everyone supported that rate but I know of no entity other than environmentalists and the Forest Service who tried to hold the rate down. Perhaps the "silent majority" was silent at the wrong time—again. Lack of opposing forces allowed the industry's pressure to prevail.

While I firmly believe this to be true I can tell you that I have no personal knowledge that so-and-so woke up one morning and said, "I'm going to ruin the forest today." Just as I'm sure that my great uncle, Orrin Mills, didn't say, "I'm going to destroy the range today." Yet Orrin's grazing practices (and those of his father before him, and the people who came after him) did just that. On the other hand, I do *know* timber land owners who work very hard to harvest their timber in a responsible manner. I personally know loggers who walk off the job when asked to cut in an irresponsible manner. But I also know of (but not personally) sawmill operators who geared up to take every legal (as opposed to matur and ready

2. No trespassing was committed.

for harvest) tree from their forest land. When the last legal tree is gone the company will be gone too. The “cut-and-run” mentality did not die in the forests of the Lake States.

The war being waged over the public's forests is difficult for a lot of people, not just those within the industry. It seems to early to declare a winner in this war. As the war continues I want you to think of something: Would we have automobile seat belts today if consumer protection groups had not forced the issue? Would the automobile industry have implemented these life-saving devices on their own? What about air bags? What about safe gas tanks? Is the organization that conducts crash tests wrong in pointing out how ill-equipped new vehicles are to withstand even minor crashes? Who is going to protect “we the people”?

In this respect, we owe the environmentalists and consumer groups some thanks. Yes, they have, in some cases, gone too far, but without their intervention what would the forests be like today? How safe would automobiles be? Is it maybe a rule of life that the pendulum must always swing in a wide arc, back-and-forth, back-and-forth; left-to-right, liberal-conservative?

Back to blame (there is enough for everyone): “We the people” share some of the blame which I too quickly placed directly on the shoulders of the timber industry. We seem to judge our success as a nation and a race in purely economic terms. If the new housing start count is not marching in an ever upward direction (and that takes timber, lots of timber) we feel, as a society, like failures. Is an ever expanding economy necessary for success (whose success?)? For survival? For profit? In this respect most citizens are also to blame for the sad conditions of the forest. The silent majority is everywhere, not just within the industry itself.

Those of you who know me know that I'm more than willing to admit when I'm wrong. If I'm wrong here show me. Just as I've done in the past I'll not only recant but I'll set out to prove the case in the other direction. I await further education.

NOTE: The second part of this chapter first appeared on my web site, www.oregongreengold.com, in response to reaction to the first part which appeared in the fall issue of *Timber History News*, a newsletter that I produced for a time.



A lumber ship of long ago. Appeared in the 100th anniversary brochure of the Edward Hines Lumber Co. which was sent to me by Mr. Hines (number II I think).