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Discussion in Eugene highlights clear-cut differences in opinion held by timber executive and environmentalist



Todd Payne, Seneca Family of Cos. CEO, and Chandra LeGue, Western Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild, exchanged differing opinions about clear-cutting and aerial herbicide spraying during a Thursday panel discussion held by GreenLane Sustainable Business Network in Eugene. (Dylan Darling/The Register-Guard)

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Two hours of talk didn't bring a timber executive and an environmentalist any closer in their beliefs about clear-cuts and aerial spraying.

But Todd Payne, CEO at Seneca Family of Companies, and Chandra LeGue, Western Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild, both said they were

glad to be part of a panel discussion Thursday hosted by the GreenLane Sustainable Business Network.

“I’m hopeful that it is a start to a new dialogue that we can have,” said Payne, who oversees Seneca Sawmill Co. in Eugene, as well as Seneca’s tree farms and wood-burning power plant.

GreenLane — a nonprofit organization that has about 100 Lane County businesses, groups and agencies as members — hosted the discussion.

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The talk drew about 75 people to the Eugene Public Library.

Mark Miller, a forester with Trout Mountain Forestry in Corvallis, and Lauren Grand with the Oregon State University Extension Service in Eugene, joined Payne and LeGue on the panel.

The panelists took questions about what is bad and good about clear-cutting, or the removal of nearly all trees in a timber stand, and aerial spraying, or helicopters dropping weed-killing chemicals on forestland after a harvest.

“Ecologically, there are no benefits to aerial spraying,” LeGue said.

Payne countered, “It’s a prudent tool for us to control competing vegetation.”

He said aerial spraying is particularly valuable in staving off invasive plants such as Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry.

Aerial spraying recently has been a hot topic in Lane County. Local activists tried to put a ban on aerial spraying of herbicides on the May ballot, but in

March a Lane County Circuit judge ruled that the proposed measure was too broadly written.

LeGue and Payne also disagreed Thursday when it came to clear-cutting and the effects of the long-controversial logging practice.

LeGue said that clear-cuts adversely affect the Northwest spotted owl — the federally protected species at the core of timber debates in the region for decades — and other forest animals.

“They have a really hard time in a landscape that is fragmented,” she said.

Payne said that Seneca harvests using a blend of clear-cutting and selective logging, following state guidelines.

He added that the company plants a mix of tree types following a harvest, to create what the company deems a healthy forest.

Seneca manages 170,000 acres of timberland and produces 650 million board feet of lumber per year. The companies employ about 450 workers.

Seneca’s involvement with GreenLane stirred controversy last fall when Seneca Senior Vice President Casey Roscoe earned a spot on the organization’s board. GreenLane members voted Roscoe, granddaughter of Seneca founder Aaron Jones, to the post. She started in January.

Roscoe, who was in the audience for the discussion, said she feels Seneca operates sustainably and adds a different perspective to GreenLane’s leadership. “We all live in our echo chambers,” she said. “We all know what our sides think.”

Ephraim Payne, development and events manager at Beyond Toxics, said he also earned a spot on the board last fall. But Ephraim Payne, no relation to Todd Payne, resigned from the board, and the Eugene-based nonprofit group pulled out of GreenLane because of Seneca's involvement.

"We feel they (Seneca) are in a greenwashing campaign," he said, "to put a sustainable face on unsustainable practices."

The panel discussion Thursday came in response to debate about Roscoe joining the board, said Allen Perkins, a GreenLane founder and board historian.

GreenLane [started in 2009](#) . Perkins said all sorts of businesses, including timber companies, are welcome to join the eco-focused organization.

"We don't want to preach to the choir, in essence," Perkins said.

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— Casey Roscoe, Seneca Sawmill Co.

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