

The Register-Guard

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GUEST VIEWPOINT

State puts timber interests ahead of public health

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At today's peak urban prosperity, Oregon's children are the hungriest in the nation. Things could get worse anytime. Why?

Worldwide, deforestation is the leading cause of biodiversity destruction, soil erosion and carbon pollution. Whole watersheds are degraded; forests that produced food, fiber and medicine for thousands of years are replaced by chemical-dependent monoculture plantations. Deforestation and pollution are driving climate change and ocean acidification beyond humanity's ability to adapt.

Deforestation in Oregon, as elsewhere, occurs when constitutional and property rights are taken by a corrupted government. The power and money of the deforestation industries have turned most elected leaders into accomplices or cowards. Industry propaganda dominates the media, and plantation gates are locked.

In Western Oregon, deforestation and chemical monoculture are the dominant land use, with devastating effects downstream. The poverty, hunger, crime, disease and mental illness growing in rural Western Oregon signal the start of environmental and economic collapse caused by the deforestation industries, with their special immunities and tax privileges.

The state promotes chemical deforestation through the industry-written Oregon Forest Practices Acts, supplemented by laws giving forestland owners immunity against lawsuits and pre-empting pesticide regulations. Taken together, these laws transfer liability for pollution and chemical trespass caused in the normal course of deforestation from the operators to Oregon taxpayers. The state had to take away every citizen's constitutional rights of redress and equal justice to grant these liability immunities to the deforestation industries, taking citizens' property, human and civil rights as well.

The Oregon Supreme Court has declared aerial poisoning "ultrahazardous," but the forestland owners' liability immunities directly encourage reckless herbicide applications. The deforestation laws prevent citizens from suing for chemical trespass, the latest example being the dismissal of Hale vs. State of Oregon last year.

The clear-cutting, burning, eroding and poisoning practiced on state and private timberlands are used to minimize human labor through monoculture, like a Midwestern field of corn. Unlike cornfields, Oregon's mountains are some of the steepest and rainiest in the world. The exposed soils erode immediately, washing poisoned sediments down into our estuaries. The lost carbon acidifies our oceans. The phosphorus and nitrogen runoff feed toxic algae in the waters of the state.

An article in the Dec. 16, 2013, Register-Guard, "Forest spraying increases," reported that an analysis of spray records by Beyond Toxics showed that huge and growing amounts of poisons are routinely used. The data included numerous applications illegal under federal law, and even under Oregon law. These applications are typical of seasonal poisonings coordinated by the state. Untypically, they occurred in an area near Triangle Lake that is known to be under investigation for chemical trespass and contamination, with numerous visits by Oregon and federal agencies.

Some herbicide products kill when applied at a rate of 2 ounces per acre. The data

reviewed by Beyond Toxics showed that over three years, 20 tons of active ingredients were applied on 2,200 acres of private timberland, a rate of 18 pounds per acre. “Inert” ingredients are added to products to increase their killing power, but mixed products are not safety-tested. Effects of multiple lifetime exposures aren’t factored. A quarter of people are genetically susceptible to what’s called toxicant-induced loss of tolerance, where you get sick from poison exposure and never get better.

Triangle Lake area residents learned from the Oregon Health Authority that their aerial poisoning would continue, and that spring spraying has started.

On April 3, nearly six months after a neighborhood near Gold Beach was aerially poisoned, the families, their doctors and veterinarians were told what the products most likely were. The state said it had monitored the applications, but the mixes couldn’t be revealed because they were trade secrets — proprietary blends.

Last month, the Oregon Department of Agriculture spokesman said the list of chemicals used near Gold Beach wouldn’t be produced until the conclusion of several investigations. The Oregon attorney general ruled that the department must produce the list to protect health, but it refused until April 4.

The vast majority of Oregonians support protecting our land, air and waters. Creation’s most advanced carbon storage communities live in our forests, in the indigenous food webs that allow our forests to exist and adapt. Land use policies that maximize carbon storage and biodiversity protection mean healthy economies downstream. Protecting human and environmental health is directly promoting economic health.

Yet currently, state officials obey the deforestation industries, not the citizens and the constitution they swore to protect. We need government that serves us, not the polluters and poisoners.

John Sundquist of Coburg is a farmer, timberland owner and retired reforestation contractor. He serves on the board of Forestland Dwellers, but the opinions here are his own.

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