

Modern forestry and the environment

EMILY HOARD The News-Review Mar 19, 2017



Though both claim to want what's best for the environment, conservation groups and timber companies often find themselves at odds over the impacts of modern forestry practices in Oregon.

John Talberth, founder of the Center for Sustainable Economy, referred to the methods of large timber companies as "Wall Street forestry," that leads to deforestation.

"I think it's important to understand the economic entities that are primarily responsible, and thus the focus of the reform efforts, and these are large international investment corporations who are beholden to their Wall Street investors and not the needs of Oregonians," he said during The State of Oregon's Forests event, hosted by Umpqua Watersheds Wednesday night at the Douglas County Library.

He said corporations like Weyerhaeuser uses tactics that are harmful to communities, workers and the environment, and their interests are aligned with delivering quick returns to their investors instead of encouraging the economic sustainability of Oregon.

Casey Roscoe, senior vice president of public relations for Seneca Jones Timber Company, however, said modern forestry practices account for environmental and public concerns. She said Seneca Jones has been family-owned for three generations and has a long-term view of its management.

"It is definitely not looking at making decisions based on quarterly earnings, it's purposely making decisions based on having pristine forests, wildlife, air and water for generations to come," Roscoe said.

With locations in Roseburg and Eugene, Seneca Jones has planted 38 million trees on its tree farm since it started. Roscoe said if the trees were laid end-to-end, it would cross the U.S. five times.

"We're incredibly aware of our carbon footprint and the environment," Roscoe said, adding that Seneca Jones founder Aaron Jones was an environmentalist that saved millions of acres through the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. "We create an organic product, and it's the only renewable buildings material on earth."

According to Talberth, tree farms don't have the characteristics of forests because they don't support habitat or protect soil quality, but Roscoe said timber companies are required to manage for wildlife habitat on their tree farms.

“It’s law in Oregon for every acre you cut, you have to leave two trees down, and two living trees up,” Roscoe said. “On top of that, we have our lands open to the public. Our family is a family of hunters, fishers and lovers of the outdoors. We assume all Oregonians are, and we embrace and love thinking of them being able to come out to our lands.”

The Center for Sustainable Economy is introducing bills to the legislature to protect watersheds and tax timber companies whose practices produce extensive carbon emissions.

“Wall Street capitalism is used to having their way without consulting anybody, so this would actually bring them to the table and force them to have some accountability,” he said.

Laurie Bernstein and Lisa Arkin from the grassroots organization Beyond Toxics said the use of aerial herbicide sprays in industrial forests are harmful to the environment and nearby communities.

Beyond Toxics gathers state-provided data to map where sprays have occurred and what chemicals were used before it researches the effects the aerial sprays have on the environment, wildlife and people.

“The pattern we were hearing over and over for the 15 years we’ve been in existence were complaints from rural communities, people going about their normal daily lives mowing the lawn, trimming a tree, playing with their grandkids outside, and suddenly herbicides drifting over to their residential property from aerial spray on industrial timberland,” Arkin said.

Bernstein, a retired fisheries biologist in the Umpqua National Forest, said people from Triangle Lake in Lane County and others in Curry County have independently reported that when it rains after an aerial spray, they can smell the chemicals, and have experienced nosebleeds, headaches and nausea.

But Roscoe said according to the Eugene Water & Electric Board, the effects of aerial herbicide sprays, as used by Seneca Jones, are minimal to the environment.

“EWEB was looking at potential threats to water, and they did a study on how timberland management affects the water, and it was so trace, it was not a problem so they published the paper and decided not to address it,” Roscoe said.

Though Bernstein said it’s difficult to find good research about how the chemicals affect fish, she said the effects of an herbicide called 2:4-D are known.

“2:4-D can cause changes to the gills, liver and kidneys in adult fish, it can impair the ability of some salmon to capture food and develop normally, and young salmon are more sensitive to potential mortality after being exposed to 2:4-D,” Bernstein said.

She said timber producers also spray glyphosate and atrazine, which she said can lead to hormone disruption, leading to birth defects in humans and causing male frogs to develop female sex organs.

Arkin said when herbicides enter watersheds, it can also impact drinking water.

“We want to encourage our state to look at the cumulative impacts, and to make sure we’re not mixing too many chemicals to create these synergistic effects, that we’re not using chemical soups to spray from the air and that these things are addressed in our policy decisions,” Arkin said.

Roscoe said aerial herbicide sprays are necessary for timber production.

“When I think about our timberlands, we raise Douglas fir which is shade intolerant, so it needs light, so of course we have to spray so it would tamp down the underbrush just long enough for those little Douglas fir seedlings to grow up past it,” Roscoe said. “We spray our land twice and then we don’t touch it for 50 years.”

She added that by Oregon law, timber companies need to replant trees, and the spray allows the seedlings a chance to grow.

Reporter Emily Hoard can be reached at 541-957-4217 or ehoard@nrtoday.com.

Or follow her on Twitter @hoard_emily

Emily Hoard

Emily Hoard is the business, outdoors and natural resources reporter for The News-Review. She can be reached at 541-957-4217 or by email at ehoard@nrtoday.com. Follow her on Twitter @hoard_emily.