

## **Mismanagement of lands causing grief in wildfire season**

As I sit here writing this, the hazy air brings up anxiety reminiscent of September 2020. It also brings up frustrations over the continued mismanagement of our federally managed state lands.

I'm Melinda Montgomery. My roots in Lane County go back to the 1850s when my great-great grandfather Parvin settled in Dexter. The Montgomery side arrived in Noti about 100 years ago and I am one of three generations living on the family timberlands today.

We actively manage our property by maintaining logging roads, preserving the watersheds, keeping the underbrush down, and selectively cutting our timber. But we have also clear cut our property and Dad had seen this happen twice in his life.

The worry is the Bureau of Land Management land that borders our property. It manages their land differently. Will it adversely affect our property?

This is a legitimate fear since the federal government has grossly mismanaged our state's federal forest lands for decades. This has occurred through a series of legislation over the last six decades, culminating with the Clinton Forest Plan in 1994.

It more or less started with the Wilderness Act (1964) and the Endangered Species Act (1966). They began with good intentions like saving the bald eagles. Somewhere between their inception and today the intent has changed and the repercussions have been devastating.

The one we are living with now are the forest fires burning away in mostly federally managed land. My brother posted recently his utter disgust with the practice of letting these fires burn until life and home is threatened.

He should know. He is a retired firefighter.

In 1987, the total number acres of mostly federal forest land burned in Oregon about equaled the number acres burned from the previous 36 years combined. In 2002, there was just one fire that almost equaled the total acres burnt from 1951 to 2001. That was the Biscuit Fire in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area.

What's interesting is these huge fires began about 35-40 years after the federal government intervention in the form of the acts just mentioned. That is about the same amount of time we can log a piece of land and replant it.

What these acts have in common is they ushered in a form of forest management that can be described as "passive management" versus "active management" which Dr. Bob Zybach, PhD, described as "typified by such activities as road and trail maintenance, vegetation and wildlife management, reforestation planning, and/or recreational development – all of which took place on federal forest land from 1951-86 and continue to take place on private and industrial forest today."

Passive management is what occurs in our wilderness areas and national forests. It is where we basically do nothing until they start to burn. And then very little is done except record the fire coordinates until homes and lives are threatened.

This "passive management" isn't relying on real data and research conducted by "boots on the ground" people but on computer models and government funded science. It feels like the federal agencies are using their own science to justify their existence.

We need to actively manage our state's federal lands once again. They have to be stopped from being taken out of use and allowed to lay fallow. We need to keep the roads up, harvest timber, and continue to develop recreational areas.

Once a fire begins, we fight it immediately and hard. Once the fire is out, it needs to be cleaned up of burned trees and snags, removing future fire fuel. When we engage in active management, we have healthy land.

Melinda Montgomery has been an educator for 35 years and is the president of the Lane County chapter of Oregon Women in Timber. She also serves as secretary for Lane Families for Farms and Forests.

August 24, 2023 | The Chronicle