

## **Deplorable conditions in Umpqua National Forest deserve active management**

By [Guest Columnist](#)

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By Bob Devlin

A proposed timber sale in the Umpqua National Forest deserves serious public attention. Located close to Crater Lake National Park, this popular recreation area has forest conditions as bad as they get in our national forests.

Named "D-Bug," the proposed project is located in thick stands of spindly, stressed trees. Its purpose is to slow the spread of bark beetle infestation and to create conditions such that, when wildfire does come to this forestland--as it will one day-- many larger trees will remain alive and the area will continue to be a forested landscape.

This lodgepole pine forest, high in the North Umpqua River drainage, is very much like the forest that once existed along the Santiam Pass between Salem and Sisters. During the hot, dry August 2003, the Booth and Bear Butte fires merged into a giant fire known thereafter as the B&B Complex Fire and burned into the fall. Nearly 100,000 acres of scenic forestland were scorched raw. The fire killed almost everything along the Santiam Pass and left the landscape denuded and vulnerable to erosion and landslides.

To help avoid this, the Umpqua National Forest staff proposes to actively manage this forest to avoid a similar outcome. This is a fuels treatment project and is not cutting old growth stands, but rather harvesting and thinning dead, dying and insect-infested lodgepole stands. Part of the project will thin and remove lodgepole from around existing stands of old growth mixed conifer stands to help prevent their destruction, not if but when a wildfire occurs in this area. The plan also includes noxious weed removal and prevention work and reforestation of other areas. The Umpqua National Forest staff is preparing an environmental impact statement under the authority of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act to thin thousands of acres of diseased forestland, largely by using existing roads and modern forestry practices.

Some people say that more roads will be opened if this project goes through. And yes, a few more miles of roads are proposed for construction and then for immediate closure and rehabilitation. Additionally, already existing roads will be improved to allow the planned work. This thinning sale will provide some timber to local mills and the proceeds will help pay for the work. And it will have its own environmental impact. However, doing nothing will, without a doubt, have serious environmental impact. During the late summer and fall, these forestlands are one lightning strike away from destruction. In Oregon, nearly 40 percent of forestland is designated by the U.S. Forest Service as Class 3, at high risk of uncharacteristically intense fire. Another 45 percent is designated as Class 2, at moderate risk of fire. Most of this at-risk forestland is on federal land, like the area proposed for the D-Bug sale.

The Umpqua National Forest staff is to be commended for this project. Effectively treating this forestland for fire resiliency and health won't be accomplished by nibbling around the edges. Active management of many thousands of acres--thinning and some timber harvest--- are an antidote to the kind of highly destructive fires seen in recent years. After all, it is what the staff on the Umpqua Forest are responsible for doing. That is managing the public lands within the forest.

Bob Devlin is retired from the U.S. Forest Service and was the forest supervisor for the Umpqua National Forest from 1985 to 1991