

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF ALTERNATIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

TESTING ALTERNATIVE STAND TREATMENTS

background

The northern spotted owl controversy and the Northwest Forest Plan have brought about major changes in the management of national forests in the Pacific northwest. These changes are a response to new knowledge and to concerns about late-successional forest habitats. These changes are also a response to public opinion and the political conflicts that led to the Northwest Forest Plan. Adverse public perceptions of clearcuts and other traditional forest policies and practices provided considerable political impetus for change.

As the economy and population of Oregon and Washington have changed, traditional even-aged forestry achieved through clearcut harvesting has lost broad public acceptance. Objectives for federally-managed forests now place less emphasis on timber harvest and more emphasis on the maintenance of biological diversity and ecological processes. This involves management activities such as using thinnings to accelerate the development of late-successional forest habitats and retention of live trees and down wood to enable more rapid and robust re-establishment of functional ecosystems.

It is uncertain whether these new practices will be well-received as an appropriate and acceptable change. This question is of interest to those who are deeply involved in forest management debates and to the general public, including those who recreate in or are broadly interested in the health of national forests. Forest managers and planners need to know what kinds of forest harvests and treatments will gain public acceptance so that they can sustain long-term programs toward the achievement of new landscape objectives.

setting

This research is set within three larger studies that are investigating alternative forest management practices: the Young Stand Thinning and Diversity Study (YSS), the Long-Term Ecosystem Productivity Study (LTEP), and the Demonstration of Ecosystem Management Options (DEMO) study. All three studies involve the intensive measurement of forest vegetation, soils, wildlife populations, and other aspects of the ecosystem both before and after various experimental treatments are performed.

Two of these studies are replicated within the Blue River Ranger District of the Willamette National Forest. Other replications are being studied in two other ranger districts of the Willamette as well as in the Umpqua and Siskiyou National Forests of Oregon, and in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and Department of Natural Resources lands in Washington.

concept

This study is taking advantage of these diverse experiments to investigate social perceptions of alternative forest treatments and to see how the activities and purposes of each treatment match peoples' expectations of "good" national forest management. Perceptions of vista-view and in-stand photographs of these experiments, before and after treatments, will be analyzed to assess this question. Additional questions about peoples' general opinions about alternative forestry



**CASCADE
CENTER
for
ECOSYSTEM
MANAGEMENT**

H.J. ANDREWS FOREST
ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH
EDUCATION
ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97331
541•737•4286



Pacific NW Research Station
3200 S.W. Jefferson Way
Corvallis, OR 97331
541•737•4286



Willamette National Forest
Blue River Ranger District
Blue River, OR 97413
541•822•3317

www.fsl.orst.edu/ccem

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BEFORE



AFTER

philosophies and policies, as well as reactions to information about the experiments, will also provide useful context to interpret results.

Several mail and live-group surveys will be conducted of residents of western Oregon and Washington. The surveys will focus on rural areas in order to ensure enough residents of these historically more timber-resource-dependent areas are surveyed to be statistically represented.

goals

The study will seek answers to several questions:

1. Which forest treatments produce the most favorable change in perceived scenic beauty, acceptability as national forest conditions, compatibility with natural processes, and suitability as settings for recreation?
2. How do the perceptions of scenic beauty and acceptability change with the vegetation structure of the forest as measured by other scientists?
3. How do these perceptions change when information about the intentions of the forest managements are provided to the respondents, especially that about woody debris and snags?
4. How do answers to the above questions vary among people with different philosophies toward forest management, and among people who use national forests in different ways?

timeframe

Pre-treatment and initial post-treatment photos have been taken of all three studies. Surveys are planned in 2001 and 2002, and results will be compiled and reported shortly thereafter. Additional post-treatment analysis in the future will also be highly valuable as these stands develop over time.

Project Contacts:

Robert Ribe
 Social Psychologist
 Institute for a Sustainable
 Environment
 University of Oregon
 rribe@darkwing.uoregon.edu
 (541) 346-3648

Jim Mayo
 Silviculturist
 Cascade Center
 Willamette National Forest
 jmayo@fs.fed.us
 (541) 822-1216

John Cissel
 Research Coordinator
 Cascade Center
 Willamette National Forest
 jcissel@fs.fed.us
 (541) 822-1214

