

# THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

GUEST OPINION

## Restoration of forest sidelined in Eastern Washington

By Timothy Coleman

How are forests best restored to not only reduce wildfire risk to communities, but to also prepare for our changing climate? The first principle is to keep all the old fire-resistant trees, such as Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir. Yet those are the trees that the Colville National Forest is targeting in the Sanpoil project, which a District Court Judge has found illegal.

Under the former forest supervisor, and his head forester, large and old Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir have been targeted in sale after sale. Clearcuts have decimated healthy forests and logging has taken place illegally next to streams. No wonder two judges this year have found the Colville National Forest in violation of several federal laws – as well as the agreements they had with a local collaborative group.

Other trees, such as large grand fir, are not found in this project. Detractors claim grand fir is a threat to healthy forests in the Sanpoil project area. I disagree. In 40 years of hiking, hunting and reviewing Forest Service projects in the Sanpoil area and I have never seen grand fir trees there and if there are they are few and young.

The National Environmental Policy Act is a bedrock law that gives citizens the right to review and challenge federal government actions and act as a counter to money and politics. The Sanpoil Timber Sale in the Colville National Forest is a case in point.

Kettle Rangers challenged the Sanpoil timber sale because it sanctioned logging big trees. Our pleas to the Forest Service to follow collaboratively agreed guidelines and mimic its work completed in the adjacent Walker Project were outright rejected.

Incidentally, in addition to revised forest plan exceptions for cutting down large trees it also sanctions clearcutting up to 1,000 acres – or larger – in the Colville National Forest. Five years of projects demonstrably shows that “restoration” is based in timber production of every tree species.

Sanpoil Project litigation was Kettle Rangers’ first in over 20 years. I am a founding member of Northeast Washington Forest Coalition – Kettle Rangers dedicated two decades to finding collaborative agreement with the Forest Service and timber industry – including during the entire Forest Planning revision process. Unfortunately, decades of hard work were disregarded in the revised forest plan.

A key sticking point has been the Forest Service’s unwillingness to retain large and old trees despite its and the bulwark of historic photos, scientific research acknowledging that large and old trees are at historic low levels and their importance to birds, amphibian and mammals at risk of extinction.

For now, the Colville National Forest has agreed to apply the District Court’s ruling to all present and future timber sales – mandating the retention of trees 21 inches and larger. That’s a win for wildlife and the public who value beautiful forests.

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