

# The Case for and the Cases Against a Douglas-Fir National Monument

by Andy Kerr

## *Abstract*

*In this paper seven arguments are made in favor of the establishment of an ~0.5 million-acre Douglas-Fir National Monument in northwestern Oregon. Fourteen arguments against such a monument—split evenly with the perspectives that inappropriate logging is still a threat or that it is not—are also summarized and then rebutted. It is time to debate what is—and what will be—the highest and best use of these federal public forestlands for this and future generations of Americans.*

## **Introduction**

It is proposed to establish a [Douglas-Fir National Monument](#) on and near the Willamette National Forest in the upper watersheds of the North, Middle and South Santiam rivers in Marion, Linn and Lane counties in Oregon. The national monument could be administered by either the Forest Service or the National Park Service (in either case, hunting and fishing would continue under State of Oregon management). Federal public lands in the upper Little North Fork Santiam watershed are not included in this conservation proposal as they are partially (and could be fully) protected in the (expanded) Opal Creek Scenic Recreation Area.

The national monument would be ~487,491 acres in size. The vast majority of the acreage would be federal public lands (~404,604 ac. of USDA Forest Service lands and ~31,800 ac. of USDI Bureau of Land Management holdings). While ~1,270 acres of the Santiam State Forest and ~49,854 acres of private timberlands would be within the exterior boundary of the national monument, national monument status, protections and limitations would not apply unless any of those lands became federal lands as a result of willing sellers. The cities of Detroit and Idanha and surrounding private lands are not included within the proposed national monument boundary. Detroit Reservoir would also be excluded.

A national monument can either be established by an Act of Congress or by the proclamation under authority given to the President under the Antiquities Act of 1906.

Below are abbreviated cases for and against a Douglas-Fir National Monument. There are two cases presented against the monument.

The first case against assumes that inappropriate logging is still and/or could be a threat in the future, while the second case against assumes that inappropriate logging will not resume, or be a threat in the future.

Inappropriate logging is defined as the logging of natural native forest, the vast majority of which is either mature (~80 to ~150 years old) or old-growth (~150+ years old) or the logging of plantations that arose after clearcutting of the native forest for purposes of timber production. Inappropriate logging does not include scientifically sound ecological restoration thinning of plantations with the purpose of diversifying and increasing the structure, composition and function of these degraded forests to put them on a path of once again being naturally functioning forests.

Under each point in opposition to the establishment of a Douglas-Fir National Monument, a rebuttal is offered (after all, the paper is in favor of establishing the national monument).

### **The Case For**

*The highest and best use of these federal public forestlands is for the conservation and restoration of nature for this and future generations of Americans.*

#### **1. Iconic Species Deserve Their Own National Monument**

National parks or national monuments have been established specifically to protect superlative examples of iconic tree or tree-like species. Redwood National Park (1968) was to protect some of the last old-growth coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) forests on Earth. Yosemite (1890) and Kings Canyon (1940) national parks were established in part to conserve the giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), as was the Sequoia National Monument (2000). The Joshua Tree (1936) and Sauguardo (1933) national monuments were established to conserve and enjoy tree-like cacti (*Yucca brevifolia* and *Carnegiea gigantea*). The Big Cypress National Preserve (1974) was similarly established for the bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). The Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) is comparably iconic and can rival the size of coast redwood.

#### **2. Old-Growth Forests Are in Short Supply and We Need More**

Most forests dominated by Douglas-fir have been clearcut and converted to single species plantations where the trees are all of similar height, diameter and spacing. These plantations are generally biological deserts more akin to a cornfield than a forest.

Most of these Douglas-fir forests were in mature and old-growth stands. The old-growth stand condition lasted hundreds and hundreds of years until a major natural disturbance event such as fire, wind, insects and/or disease reset the ecologically complex old forest to an even more ecologically complex, but relatively short-lived complex of early seral forest. This “pre-forest” eventually reestablished itself with conifers and the young forest progressed into mature forest and then old-growth forest.

If we want to have a functioning Douglas-fir ecosystem across the landscape and over time, we need to conserve all the old-growth forest that is left and restore much that has been lost.

### **3. A National Monument is an Investment for Future Generations**

Just about a human generation ago, in 1989, approximately three square miles per week of old-growth forest were being clearcut on federal public land in Oregon. Today, while logging is but a small fraction of that historically high and ecologically obscene level, we should ask of ourselves to do what we think best for the next generation. Recent history is generally a guide to the near future, but not so much the longer future of a generation. There are number of economic, social, demographic and other trends that suggest that the highest and best use of forests is no longer logging to create wood products and jobs. Such is generally the case today, as the timber industry has lost its social license to log native forest and trees on federal public forestlands just to feed the voracious appetite of its mills. The best thing we can do is give our heirs the legacy that includes the conservation of large landscapes for ecological and watershed integrity and for recreational (pronounced “re-creational”) enjoyment. They will appreciate our foresight and action today as we appreciate those of our ancestors who established the national parks, national monuments, wilderness and other strong and enduring conservation areas. If future generations turns out not to be be appreciative, they can always log the hell out of it.

### **4. It’s In the National Interest**

The major conservation networks that are the National Park System, National Forest System, National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, National Wilderness Preservation System, National Landscape Conservation System, National Wildlife Refuge System, National Marine Sanctuary System and National Estuarine Sanctuary System are an important part of what makes America great. These conservation systems are incomplete. Establishing a Douglas-Fir National Monument would be an important contribution to the conservation, restoration and appreciation of nature for this and future generations.

### **5. It’s in the Regional Interest**

Oregon is becoming more populated and the population is increasingly in urban and suburban settings. Natural recreation opportunities are and will likely continue to become increasingly important. In the 1920s, an increasing number of citizens felt the need in the future for a national park located within driving distance of the expanding populations of greater Baltimore, MD; Washington, DC; and Richmond, VA. The problem was there was no public land from which to establish a national park. It was the policy of the National Park Service and Congress to only establish national parks out of the federal public domain (located mostly in the American West) or for the states to give the land to the National Park Service to become a national park. The Commonwealth of Virginia began buying tens of thousands of acres of land. This land was not pristine, as most of it had long been long, mined, grazed, drilled, logged or plowed. Nonetheless, the people of this generation were thinking about the next generation and persevered. As the National Park Service said, “we are inviting nature back” into what we enjoy and appreciate today as Shenandoah National Park, a crown jewel in our National Park System. The majority

of the lands in the park are wild and natural enough today as to be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The Blue Ridge Parkway runs the length of the park so it can be enjoyed by all.

## **6. It's in the Local Interest**

The future of Lyons, Mill City, Lebanon and Sweet Home are not in the logging of forest and the milling of wood. Slowly, but surely (albeit with fits and starts), the communities and their economies are changing. Their future, like all futures, is uncertain. The good thing about futures is that communities have some ability to seek the future they want—within the constraints of macro-economic and political forces. It is very likely that—due primarily to economic but also political forces—the downsizing of the timber industry will continue. Both in absolute and relative terms to the Oregon economy—and the economies of eastern Marion and eastern Linn counties—the timber industry will continue its decades-long contraction. A national monument will draw not only tourists who will spend money in the local communities, but also small, and perhaps large, businesses who can locate anywhere, but choose to locate near permanently protected landscapes that the owners and their employees can enjoy. Economists refer to this as the “second paycheck.” One can make more money working and living in (Cleveland, Dallas the other Detroit or nearly anywhere else), but natural and recreational amenities also contribute to the quality of life.

## **7. It's Controversial**

In matters of public policy, it's only worth doing if it is controversial. If every one agrees it ought to be done, it has probably already been done. As President Bill Clinton said, “everyone is for change in general, but rarely in particular.” There will be local people and local interests who will adamantly oppose a Douglas-fir National Monument. They prefer status quo, or even a return to the logging levels of the past. Their problem is that the status quo isn't static or stable. History has also shown that returning to the status quo ante (prior) is even more unlikely.

Most of what are today our beloved national parks, monuments, wildernesses, wildlife refuges, wild and scenic rivers and other federal conservation designations were highly controversial at the time of their establishment and the opposition was most entrenched the closer to the area. Most locals opposed the establishment of the Crater Lake National Park in 1904, the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 1904, the Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in 1936, Silver Falls State Park in 1936 the Mount Jefferson Wilderness in 1968, Hells Canyon National Recreation Area in 1975, the Middle Santiam Wilderness in 1978, the Table Rock Wilderness in 1984, the Opal Creek Scenic Research Area in 1996, the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in 2000. Today, the controversies have subsided.

When there is a trade-off between short-term economic interests and long-term national interests, the latter should prevail.

## The Case Against in Two Alternatives

There are two alternative cases that can be made against a Douglas-Fir National Monument. Alternative A assumes there is a threat that inappropriate logging will resume. Alternative B assumes that inappropriate logging will not resume.

### **Alternative A: While Quiescent Now, the Logging of Older Forests Could Resume**

*The highest and best use of these federal public forestlands is for the production of logs to create wood products and jobs.*

#### **1. Americans Needs the Wood Products from Federal Public Forestlands**

*Rebuttal:* More raw log volume from Oregon and Washington are [exported](#) to Japan, China and Korea than cut off of federal public lands in those two states.

#### **2. Oregon Needs the Jobs Associated with Logging Federal Public Forestlands**

*Rebuttal:* While since 1995, when the Northwest Forest Plan came into effect, the number of mills and milling jobs in Oregon has decreased by half, the milling capacity of the remaining mills has [increased by one-quarter](#). This automation trend is expected to continue. In the old days, timber jobs paid higher than the Oregon median income; today they pay less

#### **3. The Counties Need the Revenues from Federal Timber Sales**

*Rebuttal:* The “glory” days of the counties’ share of federal timber receipts prior to 1990 were dependent upon logging a very large amount of very large trees. It is highly unlikely that those days will return. For going on a quarter of a century, the federal government has directly given monies to the counties—not as much as they would like, but are more than they deserve. These timber-addicted counties have some of the lowest property tax rates in the nation. The solution to county funding woes is for the three levels of government ([federal](#), [state](#) and [county](#)) to all do their fair shares.

#### **4. Logging is Good for Fish and Wildlife**

*Rebuttal:* No its not. Think about it for a minute. Logging and logging roads cause erosion that reduces water quality and therefore the quantity of fish. Thousands of species of wildlife find homes in the habitats provided by complex very large and very old stands of forests. The logging of forests is contributing to the endangerment of numerous species.

If by “wildlife” is meant black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), it is the case that deer prefer recent clearcuts—recent meaning the time after clearcutting and before the artificial establishment of a dense stand of young Douglas-fir that soon crowds out the browse and forage that flourishes in a clearcut. Deer are far from an imperiled species.

While less in number than during the peak of clearcutting on federal public lands, there are still plenty of deer on public lands and on private lands. In addition, due to demographic changes, deer hunting has been decreasing in recent decades.

If, as proposed, salvage logging after natural and beneficial disturbances ceases, then nature itself will episodically create plenty of black-tailed deer habitat in the form of complex early seral (“pre-forest”) conditions.

## **5. Without Timber Management, the Forest Will Burn Up and/or Die Off**

*Rebuttal:* A forest fire is either the beginning of a new forest or the continuation of the current forest. Fire (and wind and native insects and native diseases) are natural disturbance events that are beneficial to fish and wildlife, and to ecological and watershed function. Salvage logging after a fire is akin to mugging a burn victim. There is no ecological or hydrological benefit to doing so.

## **6. People Will Be Locked Out of the National Monument**

*Rebuttal:* The majority of the proposed national monument is readily accessible by road. Some has already been established as Wilderness or consists of roadless areas where there never were roads. While it is proposed that unnecessary roads be decommissioned for the benefit of watersheds and wildlife, it is also proposed that the remaining roads be improved for the benefit of public safety and enjoyment and for the proper administration of the area. Both treatments of roads would create jobs in the woods. The costs of maintaining such vast amounts of little used roads that went to every old clearcut are huge and an unnecessary expense.

## **7. Local People Know Best How to Manage the Land**

*Rebuttal:* To the degree that profits, wages, life styles or re-election are dependent upon logging, then “locals” have a conflict of interest and their views must be examined skeptically. “Local” management led to the vast roading and logging of forests and watersheds to the detriment of water quality, fish, wildlife, recreation and scenery. Data do not lie.

## **Alternative B: The Logging of Older Forests Is Over So Leave Well Enough Alone**

*The Status Quo of the Northwest Forest Plan has brought political peace to the region and establishing a national monument would upset that delicate balance between conservation and wood production and inflame local interests.*

## **1. A National Monument is Unnecessary as Inappropriate Logging is Irrevocably a Thing of the Past**

*Rebuttal:* It is hoped that is going to be case and it would be a safe bet of money on it being the case. However, one might similarly bet money on one’s house not burning

down. In both cases, while the risk is low, the consequences are catastrophic. Prudent people hedge against risk.

## **2. Even Salvage Logging Is A Thing of the Past**

*Rebuttal:* Only in a conservationist's dreams. While salvage logging after a natural disturbance is less likely to happen than in the past, it is still a major threat to forest and watershed integrity. Post-disturbance logging is the last best chance of the timber industry to log older (mature and old-growth) forests. Logging forests after a natural fire—even a stand-replacing fire—adds unnecessary and undesirable human stresses on top of the necessary and desirable natural stresses to the ecosystem.

## **3. Even a new Presidential Administration Hostile to Conservation Won't Succeed in the Large-Scale Resumption of Inappropriate Logging**

*Rebuttal:* The Northwest Forest Plan was imposed during the Clinton Administration. The ecological, legal and political crisis was provoked by the Reagan Administration and amplified by the George H.W. Bush Administration. The Obama Administration has is trying to weaken the Northwest Forest Plan. One should not be sanguine about the continuation of the Northwest Forest Plan during a Trump/Cruz Administration as one should be sanguine about the continuation of Social Security, the right to choose, or the mandate to provide health insurance to all without regard to prior existing conditions. Elections matter.

## **4. Administrative Land Allocations and Overlays Preclude Inappropriate Logging**

*Rebuttal:* The Northwest Forest Plan was imposed upon the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management by actions of the courts, the White House and the scientific community. Land management agencies hate having their management discretion limited and they have chafed under the Northwest Forest Plan. BLM is well along the way in eroding its portion of the Northwest Forest Plan and the Forest Service has plans to. The Northwest Forest Plan is neither the 11<sup>th</sup> Commandment nor the 28<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

## **5. Planation Logging is Beneficial for Nature and for Wood Production**

*Rebuttal:* It depends upon the kind of logging in the plantations.

Most conservationists support scientifically sound ecological restoration thinning with appropriate sideboards (that protect streams, dense-forest dependent species and other resource values) that puts the stand on a path to becoming more biologically diverse. Such logging results in a very significant amount of commercial timber volume produced, but it is a *byproduct* of silvicultural management.

Most conservationists do not support “variable retention regeneration harvest” in plantations. Also known as “sloppy clearcutting” or a “kinder and gentler clearcut” it has

the purpose of producing timber volume and also artificially creating early seral (“pre-forest”) conditions. Proponents argue that the widespread practice of logging after a natural disturbance (salvage logging) followed by artificial regeneration of conifers (a plantation) has created a dearth of early seral forest habitat on federal public lands. A couple of responses:

- a. There is no shortage of early seral forest habitat on non-federal forestlands due to continued wide-scale clearcutting.
- b. If salvage logging after a natural disturbance was discontinued, there would be plenty of early seral forest habitat.

One also must consider the quality of early seral forest. That which is created naturally from a disturbance of an old forest is *complex* in that it includes the legacy of standing live and dead very large trees, as well as large downed trees. This, together with the explosion of grasses and forbs (wildflowers) due to the opening of the stand creates for one of the most biological diverse habitats anywhere. Early seral forest created in a plantation is *simple* in that it doesn’t contain the legacy from the earlier forest. The old large trees were hauled off during the first clearcutting and most of the new young trees will be as well.

How you feel about variable retention regeneration harvest generally depends on the reference point you choose. If the reference point is an industrial-style clearcut once prevalent on federal public lands (and still on state and private timberlands), then a sloppy clearcut looks a lot better than regular clearcut. However, if your reference point is a perfectly good natural stand sacrificed for timber volume in the name of ecological diversity, then it doesn’t look good in comparison.

Some propose practicing variable retention regeneration harvest in perfectly natural stands of young and mature forests. Due to widespread artificial planting after natural disturbances in mature and old-growth forests during the last century, young natural forests (up to 80 year old trees) are quite rare. As for the mature forests, they are the easiest, only and best way to increase the amount of old-growth forest. Just leave them be.

## **6. There are already National Monuments, National Parks and Wilderness Areas That Contain Douglas-Fir Forests**

*Rebuttal:* In Oregon, there are some Wilderness areas with magnificent stands dominated by low-elevation old-growth Douglas-fir (e.g. Drift Creek, Middle Santiam, Opal Creek, Salmon-Huckleberry, Boulder Creek). These wildernesses are relatively small. While Douglas-fir is found in Crater Lake National Park at its lower western edges, it’s not that low in elevation and the soils, climate and latitude favor forest types where Douglas-fir is present, but does not predominate. Yes, there is some low-elevation old-growth Douglas-fir forest in some wildernesses and two national parks in the State of Washington, but while it was the Oregon Territory, it’s not Oregon.

## **7. There Won't Be Additional Conservation Benefit From a National Monument That Would Outweigh the Local Controversy Generated**

*Rebuttal:* The benefits that come from conservation permanence are large and should not be easily discounted.

Most social improvement comes as the result of social tension. If avoiding conflict was the goal, then African-Americans would still be slaves, women could not vote and children would work. While unnecessary conflict should be avoided, necessary conflict is often necessary for a better future.

### **Conclusion**

Because of the very large area of plantations within the proposed Douglas-Fir National Monument, there are literally decades of commercial timber volume to feed existing mills that would be a byproduct of scientifically sound ecological restoration thinning that is desirable to restore older forest conditions. Therefore any controversy can be minimized and the transition lengthened and smoothed.

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