



A salvage plan for jobs, schools

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In a state that needs income and jobs, you would think state and federal officials would welcome this proposal for getting some of both: Start harvesting trees from some of the public lands that burned last summer, sell them gradually and build up a reserve fund for public schools.

The basic idea comes from Wayne Giesy, a lumber mill consultant in Philomath who once served in the Oregon House. (He served in two regular sessions and one special session of the Legislature in 1955 and '57.)

Last summer, the so-called Biscuit Fire covered about 500,000 acres in the Rogue River and Siskiyou national forests. According to a written summary of his proposal, Giesy would like to have the state and federal governments cooperate on using the Biscuit Fire area for a pilot study of salvaging fire-damaged timber for public benefit before the trees deteriorate beyond the point where they can be sold as logs.

He would have Oregon State University and the Pacific Northwest Research Station of the Forest Service conduct research to establish guidelines for future operations of this kind. The Forest Service would contract with the Oregon Department of Forestry to conduct salvage operations. Timber in the Biscuit area would be salvaged under rules of the Oregon Forest Practices Act. Reforestation would be done to stabilize the area. After expenses, any proceeds would go toward Oregon education from kindergarten through college. To get any of this done, there would have to be emergency legislation on the federal level, and perhaps on the state level as well.

An idea like this runs into immediate objections. The Forest Service is already studying the fire areas. Environmental regulations and interest groups stand in the way. Congress has been impossible to move on the subject of salvage logging to reduce fire danger. Even if something like this could be done, suddenly dumping more timber on the market would depress prices. And so on.

But in theory at least such objections could be overcome if the situation was considered bad enough. And isn't that close to the situation in which we find ourselves now? The state is desperately short of revenue to run even its most basic services. And here we sit in the middle of natural resources that offer at least a chance of making some economic headway. Moreover, these are resources -- fire-damaged trees -- that have a limited life. If we don't make use of them soon, their immediate economic value is going to

disappear.

The governor is going to Japan to try to drum up business. Before that he went to China. He deserves praise for these efforts. But let him not forget that Oregon also has the means of yanking itself upright by itself, by finding ways to make better and faster use of the forests we have.

The Giesy plan sounds visionary because it is based on common sense and assumes that obstacles can be overcome. That's the way most Americans used to think. Would that more of us did so now. (hh)