

Curry Coastal Pilot (www.currypilot.com)

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Forests, fires and facts: Making correct choices for the future

The Pilot article of October 31 titled “Fire recovery group sets priorities” included important coverage of this issue, but unfortunately it also repeated several statements presumed to be fact, though they are not.

Directly following reference to 11,000 acres of South Coast Lumber land that burned, the article quoted the Brookings City Manager as follows: “With respect to salvage logging, they will need to comply with the National Environmental Protection Act process,” Milliman noted. “And (I was told) they had seven lawsuits filed on their NEPA approval for the Biscuit Fire.”

First, as written, “they” refers to South Coast Lumber. But logging on the company’s land is not obligated to meet requirements of what is actually called the National Environmental Policy Act. In this case, the act and other relevant federal legislation apply only to federal land. Private timber owners need only to comply with the Oregon Forest Practices Act, which does nothing to limit logging specifically on burned land, and little to limit it elsewhere.

Next, the reference to “seven lawsuits” implies that there was obstruction to all logging after the Biscuit Fire, which is entirely inaccurate. Again, private land was not subject, at all, to the federal laws in question or the controversies surrounding them. Regarding the federal land, a sensible plan, meeting the requirements of relevant laws, was formulated by the Forest Service for quick post-fire logging of 96 million

board feet. That would have kept our mills busy for some time — probably as long as the burned timber remained marketable. Stakeholders agreed with this plan until Douglas County and industrial logging proponents pressed for logging 518 million board feet — five times what was recommended by the Forest Service’s planning team, according to Forest Service records.

The demand for more cut is what delayed approval of the logging plan. The agency eventually caved in to industrial demands, and nearly all the sales went forward without challenge. However, it was this larger proposal’s conflict with established laws —specifically regarding roadless areas — that drew challenges to only seven specific sales, which anyone could have predicted.

In the end, only 65 million board feet went under contract — the low number due not to contested sales, but to a lack of bids for the timber and the high costs to extract it.

If we’re going to use the Biscuit Fire as a reference for decisions to be made today, we should at least get the facts right. The delays to salvage logging owed to the greed of those who were not satisfied with the original 96 million board feet proposed for logging. It all could have been expedited quite painlessly if Douglas County and its followers had not been so greedy and disrespectful to the laws that govern resources owned by all American taxpayers.

The issue of post-fire response in forestry is one that has been fraught with misinformation, opinions that are stated as facts, and a failure to seek what’s in the long-term interest of our land and people. This includes not only immediate timber production, but also sustainable timber production, the quality of our drinking water, the health of our fisheries, the stability of our soils, the abundance of wildlife to hunt and to view, recreation for all and for the multi-million-dollar commerce it generates, and other public values of public land. We would all benefit by investing in facts and science to guide us to the correct choices in the future.