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Opinion

Amanda Astor: Managing our forests is the answer

By Amanda Astor

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I'm a young female forester who lives in Lane County. I am part of the new generation of natural resource professionals who believe in collaboration and science. As someone who is passionate about forestry and addressing climate change, I am confident that sustainably managing our lands can be part of the solution to reduce catastrophic fires, decrease carbon emissions, promote economic stability and much more. And being involved in the type of forest management [projects](#) discussed in the June 13 guest viewpoint "[Lane County's forests being whittled down](#)," I am shocked by the outdated and stale narrative the authors present.

First off, the Bureau of Land Management does not clear cut forests. This is a false narrative the opponents of healthy forests, vibrant economies, and any form of logging use to scare and build distrust within our communities. A clear cut removes all standing material from the land. According to its own management practices, the BLM [leaves many trees on the landscape](#) and therefore would never be categorized as a clear cut by any trained forester.

Second, forest management activities actually [increase the likelihood of success](#) of firefighting by improving access through road construction or maintenance, removing firefighting hazards (like rotten trees), and reducing density of unnaturally dense forests which have a high amount of fuel and intense competition for resources like water and sunlight. Furthermore, the BLM is directed by their Resource Management Plan to manage logging slash following harvest activities through removal, piling and burning, broadcast burning, or other such techniques laid out in their plan.

Third, a large percentage of Oregon's [wildlife species live in or need young forests](#). It is about time the BLM started to develop a better mix of forest ages across its landscape. Diverse young stands, commonly known as "complex early seral habitat," is lacking in Oregon. Species like the Western purple martin, deer and elk need these young stands in order to survive. That is why the BLM is working to enhance much needed habitat with the goal of improving wildlife populations. Many of our native pollinators [need the bare soil, flowers, and other plants](#) associated with creation of young forests as well.

Lastly, three sawmills in western Oregon have closed permanently in the last three years, [two in the last three months alone](#). This has devastated hundreds of working families. In a state covered by forests, it is hard to believe we do not have enough wood to support our local communities.

An employee in the timber industry makes a living wage and can support a family. By turning our backs on this vital industry, we are neglecting our neighbors, friends and local families.

I am here to tell you that responsible forest management is part of the answer to many of Oregon's challenges, [including climate change](#), wildfires and unemployment. Managing our forests in many ages and levels of complexity increases biodiversity. Using more wood products and growing more trees sequesters more carbon. More work in the woods means more trained professionals and equipment at the ready to protect communities from wildfire. Having a successful timber industry equals less poverty and more funding for counties from timber sale receipts for critical services like education and mental health.

Forest management is not a "dirty" business. It is an extremely humbling, fulfilling and often spiritual one that brings more people into nature. Here in Oregon — where trees grow the best in the whole nation, where regulation requires forests to be replanted, and where we can be a solution to climate change — we must retain this vital industry. We need to push back on the people who do not see the solutions in front of them. We need to retain sustainable forest management here. If we do not, our wood supply will come from somewhere with fewer regulations and laws to protect people and our planet.

It is time for a new vision, new voices, and to work collaboratively with the timber industry for a more sustainable future.

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