from the desk of Felice Pace
PO Box 828 Etna, Ca. 96027 530-467-5209 unofelice@hotmail.com

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To the editor:

Mike Dugay's claim that "harvesting (sic) operations essentially provide the same results as Mother Nature" (MSH. 2/28/07) ignores what science and experience have revealed about California and Northwest forests. His comments about fire are a case in point. Like most folks who work for timber corporations (and many in the Forest Service), Dugay wants you to believe that it is "fire suppression" that has made our fires more severe and threatening. As US Forest Service researcher Carl Skinner pointed out in Dunsmuir a few weeks ago, "forest management" (this is the soft way to say "logging and road building") is a major factor causing increased fire intensity. Skinner's own research after the extensive 1987 fires found that mature and Old Growth stands located next to clearcuts were much more likely to burn hot than similar stands not close to clearcuts.

Clearcutting in fact increases fire danger by stimulating the growth of small trees and brush. I've walked and studied many fires since 1987. In most cases, Old Growth underburns "blew up" into firestorms in the clearcuts and plantations. The best way to assure against catastrophic fire is to selectively cut so that shade and moisture keep the forests less prone to crown fire. Shade is particularly important. If the shade canopy is reduced below 60% sunlight stimulates the growth of small trees and brush. This may be good for deer but it significantly increases fire risk.

What Dunsmuir needs is a Fire Safe Council that will work with the Forest Service, Roseburg and other forest owners to maintain healthy closed canopy forests around Dunsmuir and to get the foresters and California Department of Forestry to deal with the highly flammable logging slash routinely left behind when an area is logged. This would be the best insurance the city could have against catastrophic fire.

Felice Pace
Siskiyou County Landowner