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To the editor:

Tam Moore's article on post-fire salvage logging in the December 17th edition repeated many of the old clichés about what is needed to restore a forest which has experienced a wildfire. We were told that failure to quickly log and replant these areas will result in "brushfields" which will persist for "centuries." We are also told that failure to log will allow "erosion" to "dominate the landscape" and will inevitably lead to catastrophic wildfires that threaten homes and communities.

Tam did not repeat the clichés on the other side of this debate. The most famous of these came from the now legendary Andy Kerr who likened salvage logging to "mugging a burn victim."

What is missing from the endlessly repeated debates ("to log or not to log THAT is the question") is the reality on the ground after a fire. I've walked extensively in every large fire which has burned in Northern California and Southwest Oregon since 1987 including the Yellow, Silver, Grider, Dillon, Specimen, Megram-Big Bar and Biscuit. I've also walked and studied those portions of these fires that were salvage logged and those that have not been logged. Here are the major features of what I've observed:

- Even under the most intense fire conditions, over half the fire area burns at low intensity and up to 90% at low to moderate intensity.
- Trees that are alive a year after the fire are unlikely to die. On one site in the Grider over 70% of the trees marked for salvage were still alive 8 years after the fire.
- Because of soil disturbance, erosion almost always increases after salvage logging.
- Even in 100% tree kill fire areas natural tree regeneration almost always takes place. Salvage and subsequent planting typically results in reforestation that is delayed 3 to 10 years as compared to natural regeneration already present on the site. Salvage and replanting typically kills 90-100% of the naturally regenerated trees.
- Salvage logging often results in increased short term fire risk because small trees, limbs and branches that would fall over a decade are knocked down and left on the forest floor where fire can easily reach (and burn) them.
- Responsible salvage logging is compatible with forest restoration when the logging sites are road accessible and when the economics will support dealing with the highly flammable logging slash that results. Helicopter salvage logging far from roads results in "jackpots" of small and medium fuels (logging slash) that are often where future fires "blow up" into firestorms. The economics of helicopter salvage logging will not support slash reduction.

As the Forest Service spokesman quoted by Tam Moore confirmed, timber industry claims that forest activists have stopped all post-fire logging are not accurate. In Northern California and Southern Oregon most Forest Activists have supported some logging in every large fire area since 1987. What forest activists have never and will never support is salvage without slash reduction, helicopter salvage, logging trees that are still alive and logging next to streams and springs.

I believe prompt and responsible post-fire salvage logging would be commonplace if Forest Service and timber industry folks would focus on limited, responsible salvage logging. Unfortunately the politics of greed has dominated. Timber barons who made past fortunes via irresponsible salvage logging are constantly looking for a return to the old days when healthy Old Growth trees were logged as “fire killed salvage” at 50 cents per 1,000 board feet.

And so the post-fire salvage wars – and the clichés they spawn - go on and on with no end in site. What a waste!

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