



The Oregonian

Logging study: Scientists vs. politicians

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When Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., and Rep. Brian Baird, D-Wash., convened their kangaroo court in Medford last Friday for the purpose of convicting "rogue" Oregon State University researcher Daniel Donato, it turns out that they bit off more than they expected. As your front-page story ("OSU researcher defends forest findings," Feb. 25) revealed, Donato was able to firmly defend his scientific motives from the congressional bullying.

In contrast, the political motives of Walden and Baird are less defensible.

Baird lectured Donato on scientific method, as if he were remotely interested in revealing facts that might undermine the logging bill he and Walden are pushing through Congress. Walden trolled for some sort of procedural "gotcha" to undermine the real story: That it might not be a good idea to log burned areas, after all.

The bright light in this spectacle was Donato, who gives many of us hope that a new generation of forest scientists is more interested in objective research and real understanding of forest ecology than in advancing the timber agenda.

TOM KLOSTER, North Portland

As a scientist (but not a forester), I have to admire Oregon State University graduate student Daniel Donato. Not many in his position have to endure lectures on integrity from politicians or attempted censorship of their work by faculty at their own institutions.

His actions and the reactions surrounding the publication of his study [in Science magazine] should remind all scientists that it is essential that research remain independent of funding sources and unconstrained by "conventional wisdom." Otherwise, all scientific credibility is lost and nothing new will ever be learned.

I don't know if his study conclusions are correct or not, but instead of simply attacking the scientist, OSU, federal land managers and elected officials should be encouraging healthy debate of the issues so that facts can be established and questions needing further study identified. That is how science works.

TOM MICHALEK, Forest Grove

The appropriate response to Daniel Donato's logging study should have been: Of course, but so what? Of course logging could damage new seedlings. There is nothing original here.

The duration of the setback is what is unknown. It could be as long as three years plus the duration of the logging contract. In the overall length of the life of a typical forest stand, this doesn't represent a significant time.

Additionally, how much seedling loss depends on how the land is logged. Tractor logging would do the most damage, and fully suspended logging would do the least amount of damage. Damage to seedlings is really not all that important. The soil is what is really important.

Removing logs is not a bad thing, but how they are removed can be devastating. Everything depends on, lives in or lives on the soil. Damage the soil and everything goes sour. I was a silviculturist for the Salem District of the Bureau of Land Management for 32 years.

DALE A. SNEDAKER, Salem

If you would like to compare the ability of nature to repair forest damage to the ability of man, go visit the

Mount St. Helens Volcanic Monument. On the road in, you will find a 23-year-old human-planted forest in the blast area that has conifer trees up to 35 feet in height and up to 20 inches in diameter.

In contrast, in the unmanaged Monument blast area, you will find only those conifers that survived the blast because they were behind the hills or covered by snow. In the 25 years since the eruption, essentially nothing of the original coniferous forest has recovered in the natural area.

If you visit the Tillamook State Forest in northwest Oregon, you will see what true forest management can do. If you want to see what nature often does, visit Carlton Butte northeast of Waldo Lake in Central Oregon. Except for burned snags, the area still looks like the surface of the moon.

To imply that man cannot manage our state and natural forests better than nature is deceit of the highest order.

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