

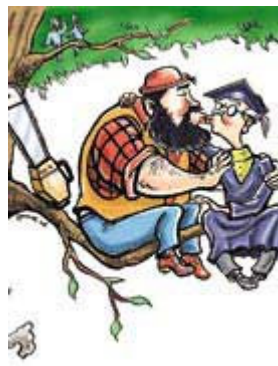
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In Bed With Big Wood

Emails show OSU and timber sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G.

BY IAN DEMSKY



Recently released emails show just how actively Oregon State University's forestry dean helped Big Timber do "damage control" over a grad student's research that found logging after fires hurts forests' recovery.

Putting aside the very public debate over the science, the emails raise the specter of a bigger problem for OSU's College of Forestry: Do Dean Hal Salwasser's actions reveal a too-cozy relationship that runs counter to the basic neutrality and mission of a publicly funded research institution?

"Here's the line that was crossed," says state Sen. Charlie Ringo, who obtained the emails before a recent legislative hearing to examine OSU's ties to the timber industry.

"The College of Forestry should work closely with the industry in advancing scientific knowledge," says Ringo (D-Beaverton). "But it shouldn't work to advance the industry's political agenda."

Hundreds of pages of emails reviewed by *WW* clearly show how concerned Salwasser was by the study written by forestry student Daniel Donato and others. *Science*, one of the country's most prestigious peer-reviewed journals, published the study in January.

Salwasser thought the study's findings were premature and overbroad. But at issue is how his concern translated into action, especially as industry insiders worried the study would undercut pending federal legislation to increase salvage logging.

Salwasser, who has apologized for attempts by university faculty to prevent the article's publication, told *WW* the emails were collegial because he didn't think the controversy was so large at first. He denied the college was too closely tied to industry. "We have to have our programs aligned with the...science they depend on," he says. "That doesn't mean you're in bed with them."

Here are some excerpts from Salwasser's emails, reflecting his and the industry's shared panic over the Donato study:

Writing Jan. 18 to Chris West, vice president of the American Forest Resource Council lobby, Salwasser notes that *Oregonian* reporter Michael Milstein "appears to be taking the side of the [Donato] study and looking for a link between our budget situation and my context piece [that argued against its findings]. This could turn into attacks on me and the college. Not sure what to do next."

On Jan. 12, Salwasser writes Jennifer Phillippi of Rough & Ready Lumber Co.: "These activist groups set up all the hurdles that make these projects money losers then they complain that the agency loses money so that projects should not be done...i can't call these goons out from my position but someone must bring this to light eventually. This is not 'environmental protection' it is extortion."

Or consider this Jan. 17 exchange between Salwasser and Dennis Creel of lumber wholesaler Hampton Affiliates after Salwasser has sent out a retort to the Donato study, in which industry funding of the college seems on the line:

Creel: "Is there a way to get this into a shorter letter form and submit to the *Oregonian* from Hal?"

Salwasser: "They have had a copy of it since last Tues."

Creel: "Well, that's all you can do...Perhaps they are waiting on the timing or to see if other are going to respond."

Salwasser: "Its 'cooking.'"

Creel: "Good. By the way Hal, I would like to talk with you a bit more on philanthropy and the Hamptons when we get a chance. With this flap, I think it would be good to pause...."

Max Merlich, vice president of Columbia Helicopters, a major Republican backer that uses choppers to haul timber from remote areas, also wrote to Salwasser after the controversy surfaced:

"I am going to do some damage control on this thing ... However, the likelihood of this paper being used successfully against us in court on salvage logging litigation is very high. Post catastrophic harvest is the most important part of our business, making this a very difficult issue between our organizations ... How OSU handles this from this point on could play an important part on our issues."

All the emails showing Salwasser's work with timber lobbyists obviously trouble Rolf Skar, campaign director of the pro-enviro Siskiyou Project. "Working with them to do damage control on controversial legislation before Congress," Skar says, "all that seems highly inappropriate."

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