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Recently I visited one of several proposed projects in the Kootenai National Forest, the Black Ram. There are over 20 projects in the Kootenai; I believe the Black Ram is the largest and most controversial. I have never visited such a large, self-regulating system, except during a brief swim near a coral reef. We have a pretty good idea of what's happening with the reefs, which should be instructive for our attitude toward old growth.

To reach the old growth forest we had to cross a fire line which had been logged at the time of the Davis fire. It is now a dismal expanse of stumps, bordered by debris from trees that have blown down as the result of cutting. Between that barrier and the road an MCC crew was spraying weeds that had invaded since the fire line was created. The young men didn't know the name of the grasses nor the name or nature of the herbicide they were using.

There's not much old growth left in the world; it's mostly in the Amazon and the Tongass. But the Kootenai has some in the Yaak, in the Black Ram. The purpose of the Forest Service project is to "help move the landscape toward the desired condition." Yet we've seen so often what the results of our helpfulness have been. If a tree falls in the forest we don't have to hear it to know that the "gap dynamics" will provide opportunities for growth and species diversity. The old growth in the Black Ram isn't particularly human friendly. The Black Ram isn't there for me, but I'm glad it's there, from its mycorrhizae to its canopy.

In the United States, with such small remaining populations of mature and old growth left as natural resources and carbon sinks, President Biden's executive order will enable the Forest Service to protect our resources. Forests are not just board feet and fuel.