

**THE NEED FOR ACTION
AGAINST MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE
ON COMMERCIAL TIMBER AND RELATED LANDS**

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When small, privately owned woodlots are between 10 and 160 acres in size and when much of this acreage is in affected lodgepole pine, the owner usually cuts. In this circumstance, these owners are often at a disadvantage on the selling price and may have difficulty getting a good logger. These small acreages may face the same problems in the future, because there is no effective plan for regeneration, thinning, or a second harvest.

Large, privately owned lands between 160 and 20 000 acres are mostly ranches. The owners understand economics and may have considerable understanding of silviculture. Their goals are often different from foresters and timber is harvested whether infested or not. They are apt to suffer the same price disadvantage in a salvage situation as the small, private landowner, unless there is little federal timber on the market at the same time.

There are three large, private commercial timber-producing landholdings in Montana, and if you add Idaho and eastern Washington, there are three more. For the most part, those lands are developed and have been cut over, if only by a salvage cut. Burlington northern might be the exception because they do have considerable virgin lands, and these lands are being intensively managed for timber production. Except for the Burlington Northern lands, much or most of the susceptible lodgepole pine has already gone to the mill. Ponderosa pine might be a different story, but so far, mountain pine beetle activity is not excessive on large, private landholdings, due to the lack of suitable host material. The large, private landholders do have insect problems, but not to the

same extent as the federal lands. Affected timber on large, private landholdings is being salvaged as it is infested, or cut before infestation. Little will be lost.

For a generalization, on all private lands, the lodgepole that now is infested or might become infested is being cut on an accelerated schedule. Little will be left for snags. What are the effects of this? Ecologically, it interrupts a cycle (lodgepole—fire, lodgepole—fire) that occurs in nature. This cycle would have happened regardless of beetle epidemics. The change due to salvage logging, as I see it, is not good or bad, it is just different. The cut areas are usually reforested promptly, though often not with pure, or even predominantly, lodgepole pine. In the future, these areas will be managed with increasing intensity, e.g., spacing control, possibly fertilization, and shorter rotations. The mountain pine beetle of the year 2050 will find private land "pretty poor picking".

Temporarily, the hydrologic balance—that darling of Forest Service planners—may be upset. I believe hydrologic balance is an ideal situation. Cutting certainly affects the balance, but no worse than the inevitable fire in an undisturbed forest. The land has been through it all before.

Visual quality is changed, but this is subjective, and opinions vary regarding visual quality. It is not a fit point for scientific debate.

Environmentally and ecologically, I see our treatment of the epidemic as change. Accelerated change, if you will—but not a disaster. Larger and more

perplexing problems come from man's legal regulation of man. So here I must look at the public sector.

State-owned lands are of no excessive concern to neighboring, private landowners, as they are basically managed for a profit, as are private lands. Being pretty well managed, I see no problems here.

Federal commercial forestlands are of no excessive concern—their foresters manage them for timber within their system. Their heart is in the right place and their goals are reasonable. The system does, however, tend to keep a lot of land in a roadless category. If anyone wants further enlightenment, they should look up the results of visual management, hydrologic constraints, Senate Bill 393, and RARE II.

Two federal land classifications pose broad legal and moral problems for timber companies who own their land—wilderness and national parks.

Wilderness, taken by itself, in isolation from the real world and from politics, presents no problems. If a wilderness is a forest of lodgepole pine, it grows, matures, gets mountain pine beetle, dies, catches fire, and burns. It's a natural cycle. The lodgepole comes back after varying degrees of erosion and, in the fullness of time, does it all over again. However, in practice, it doesn't work that way. Let's ignore all the people problems that occur when the status quo is disturbed. Let's just look at the legal problem. When an insect epidemic appears and, because of legal direction, is allowed to spread beyond the wilderness, is the federal government liable for my dead trees, my loss of profit, and my increased costs for changed cutting plans?

When the inevitable fire occurs in the unharvested downfall, how about air quality? We have laws that are very specific about the amount of smoke we can put in the air. Do we, can we, ignore the smoke from a "natural" fire? What happens if and when a conflagration leaves a federal wilderness and enters my property? Who foots the bill for damage? Who is responsible for the effects after such a fire, in view of the Clean Water Act? Although erosion can occur, it is not usually serious.

How about the currently popular Endangered Species Act? For example, let's look at mountain caribou that are not in it yet and grizzly bear that are. Both of their habitats are altered drastically by insects. Trees are killed and fall down into an impenetrable

tangle. You, I, the caribou, and the bear cannot walk through it. Where do they go? They go out to commercial timberland that is well taken care of. Next, an outcry arises to restrict the commercial land to protect the wilderness animals. Legally, we are bound by the laws regarding endangered species. When the inevitable wilderness fire comes and burns the windfalls and all else flat, it is a long time before the land will provide cover, and perhaps food, for caribou or bear. Were the animals wiped out, we might gain. I have seen few problems arising from dinosaurs, saber-toothed tigers, or dire wolves. Morally, extinction would be questionable. Land that is near a wilderness may have grave problems that are not all biological but quite as real. I have not even touched the bogey man of "integral vistas" either.

Since I have taken a poke at wilderness, I cannot let the national parks escape "scot free".

In a park, as in a wilderness, an epidemic can be started, harbored, and exported to neighboring lands—as an example, look at the north fork of the Flathead and its proximity to Glacier National Park. If we owned land in the north fork, I would try to have the park administration in court! The same is true for the animal problems. Where will the grizzly range when the north fork burns out?

There are some other problems too. The wilderness philosophy does not necessarily cater to people. The visitor is tolerated, but not sought for—not so with a national park. Parks are for people, although the actions of Glacier do make me wonder if that one is not for grizzly bears first. Roads, campgrounds, trails, etc., are built and maintained. Clearly, people have a place in the park. It is my deep feeling that it should be a safe place where possible and that it be the responsibility of the park administration to make it so. By blatantly ignoring fire possibilities, the Bowman and Kintla Lake campgrounds are death traps. From my personal knowledge, those in charge in 1980 were ignorant of the possibilities. Should a dozen or so tourists be broiled some day in a fire, the mountain pine beetle would be basically responsible. Perhaps I am somewhat responsible too. I knew of the condition and did not violently object to park policies.

Federal lands and federal laws, policies, and actions add a new dimension to a serious biological problem. Some of these directly impinge on industry—for instance, the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts and

the Endangered Species Act. Trying to be a good neighbor to adjacent landowners and adjacent countries, adds to the problem. The policy of cutting or of not cutting is setting us up for a rerun of the mountain pine beetle problem in 100 years, or perhaps sooner. I started to work in 1952 during a spruce beetle epidemic and now the beetle is back in some of these areas.

I was asked to discuss innovative practices. I wish I could say we had done something innovative. So far, we have cut green timber, salvaged dead timber, thinned immature timber, and regenerated some lodgepole. There is nothing innovative there. The thinning has not been a complete success, but I

would like to try a heavy fertilization in conjunction with it because, if it increases growth and vigor, it could also be a help against insects.

One thing I would like to see tried that is both innovative and scary, would be to deliberately burn some of the unsalvaged, uncut lodgepole acres—a planned forest fire of large magnitude. You could at least pick your time, place, and weather and not rely on nature for ignition. It is an opportunity, but one that is full of dangers.

Where do we go from here? Onward, I guess, and try to do the best job that we can and the best that we dare.