

## Fuel Reduction Assistance Grants from ODF

Fuel-reduction assistance grants are available from the Oregon Department of Forestry. A grant pays up to \$400 for a project that results in a 100-foot fuel break around a home, and along the home's driveway. In general, guidelines for getting a fuel-reduction assistance grant are as follows:

- The lot must be within an approved grant area.
- A fuel reduction plan must be developed before the project begins.
- Both the ODF inspector and the landowner must agree to the plan.
- A completion date is established as part of the plan.
- A grant payment cannot be made for fuel-reduction projects already completed.

Also, by meeting the requirements of a fuel-reduction grant, a home will also satisfy the requirements of the Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act (SB 360).

Payment will be made upon satisfactory completion of the project. Contact your ODF inspector to schedule a final inspection. If the project has been completed according to the plan, both the ODF inspector and the landowner must sign a project completion form.

Completion of a fuel reduction grant project will greatly increase the chance of a home surviving a wildfire, but it is not a guarantee. Maintaining the fuel-reduction area is important. Periodic mowing of dry grasses, raking of dry needles and leaves and removing dead vegetation will help to keep a fire from igniting in, and spreading through, a fuel break area.

In Jackson County, call ODF's Medford Unit at 541-664-3328 to schedule a free fuel-reduction inspection and to start the grant process. In Josephine County, call ODF's Grants Pass Unit at 541-474-3152.

Grants are available whenever fire season is not in effect, generally from October through May.

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## MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

### What's a tree worth?

BY CHRIS BRATT

If you're a tree lover like me, you might want to support the idea of leaving more of them standing upright in our public forests and beyond. In addition to anyone just loving trees for their majesty or spiritual values, there are many other important reasons why trees are an essential part of our living here on earth.

From the earliest human beginnings (many scientists say we once lived in the trees for a few thousand years), people

and trees have been entwined in a distinctive, natural and harmonious relationship to insure their joint survival. But presently, the fast-rising demand for wood and land in the developing countries is resulting in a net forest loss worldwide of 17 million acres per year. If we are going to continue to exist on this planet, we must stop shrinking our forests, recognize the risks associated with deforestation and find ways to prevent all of the trees from disappearing.

Most of the time, when people like me talk or write about saving trees and forests, we don't really get specific enough about how much a standing upright tree or forest is worth in actual money. The value of a tree is difficult to figure, mainly because there are so many ways to consider a tree's worth and everyone connected with cutting trees (corporations, public land agencies, farmers, thieves, loggers, private land managers, etc.) makes their own economic and value judgments based on factors important to them. Also, a lot of private landowner economic data is unavailable to the public and you need a professional statistician to compute the numbers. So, in this article, I'll try to find out exactly how much a tree is worth, to a couple of different groups and let you be the judge.

To get my first set of numbers, I went to my clothes drawer and dug up a 1989 tee shirt with the financial statistics of a tree's worth over a 50 year period printed on the front (see photo). The source of the data comes from the American Pulpwood Association and the American Nurseryman (who wouldn't believe them) and is as follows:

Oxygen Production	\$31,250	over 50 years
Water Retention	\$37,500	over 50 years
Soil Improvement and Retention	\$31,250	over 50 years
Reduced Air Pollution	\$52,000	over 50 years
Wildlife Habitat	\$31,000	over 50 years

To these corporate organizations the total value of a tree over 50 years was \$193,250 or \$3,805 per year without adding any value for the wood at 50 years of age.

The above figures assert that a tree 50 years old in 1989 was worth approximately \$200,000 without counting the huge potential to store carbon to combat global warming or provide clean

drinking water. Nor do these figures show any increase in value for providing these tree products over the past 20 years. (The tree is now 70 years old.) I think we can safely calculate that this 70-year-old tree is now worth at least \$300,000 using this criteria and the tree is still growing.

To gather my second set of numbers about a tree's worth, I selected a recent Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Timber Sale Notice (Sept. 17, 2009), for a

proposed timber sale called "Small Fortune."

The BLM states in the notice that the "stumpage (a tree still standing) values have been determined by market value estimates and analytical appraisal methods were used to compute the appraised price." I chose to use their appraised price of the Douglas Fir trees being sold rather than their other species because they are so prevalent in Southern Oregon and comparable in appraised value to the other species being sold.

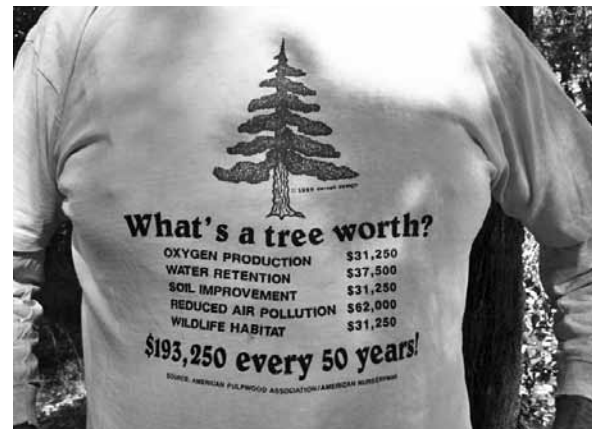
The BLM determines the value of these publicly owned trees-to-be-sold by estimating the number of board feet (1"x12"x12") in a tree multiplied by their appraised price per board foot. In this case, there is an average of 130 board feet per tree, times \$0.0274 (appraised price per board foot), making each tree for sale at \$3.57 (three dollars and fifty seven cents). Of course, these BLM trees are at least 70 years old and have probably produced the same benefits to the environment as our earlier example did. Now the BLM's "Small Fortune" timber sale has added \$3.57 to the value of each tree cut, but has lost approximately \$4,000 per year in environmental benefits if they had continued to let the tree grow. This is what happens when the primary purpose is focused on timber production.

But having BLM cut down hundreds of thousands of the public's trees each year for a pittance raises a big question. Are the ecological benefits gained by continuing to let trees grow to maturity (200-300 years) of more economic and environmental value than cutting them down for timber? I would vote for letting the trees grow. This is not to say we can't continue some tree thinning for wildfire protection.

I believe it's increasingly important that we maintain as many trees as possible in our local and global forests. Storing additional carbon to counter global warming has the potential of doubling as long as our forests are not logged or burned. When combined with the other benefits outlined above, the prospects for a solution to our ecological problems will look brighter. Intact forests and trees are the heirlooms we hand down to the next generation.

Let me know what you think a tree is worth. I believe it's worth more than a "Small Fortune."

Chris Bratt  
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