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Tells the Facts, Names the Names

## Depleted Forests

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**“Restoration” logging on Oregon’s Deschutes National Forest. Photo by George Wuerthner.**

You can’t solve a problem if you don’t identify it correctly. When it comes to wildfire safety, the timber industry, the Forest Service, and many collaboratives are selling Snake Oil to the public.

The problem for people is not with the forest—the problem with the communities. Most communities are not adequately prepared to coexist with the West’s fire-dependent ecosystems.

The most effective and cost-efficient way to solve this problem is by making changes in those communities—i.e., working from the home outward—rather than trying to change the behavior of fire in the ecosystems.

However, whenever I try to point this out, the usual comeback is, “yes, we need to work on communities, but we need to fix the forests first.” Those immersed in the Industrial Forestry Paradigm believe that anything that kills a tree other than a chainsaw is a “problem.”

Fire suppression created too much fuel—logging is the answer. Forests too dense—logging is the cure. Fires too severe—logging can fix it. Bugs killing trees—logging can halt it. Mistletoe slowing tree growth—logging is the magic elixir.

I've never seen anything identified as a problem in the forest that foresters didn't suggest couldn't be "cured" by a bit of chainsaw medicine.

One of the myths that proponent of chain saw medicine begin with is the erroneous premise is that logging will "cure" the "dense" forests that contribute to high-severity fires.

The problem with this assumption is that it's not accurate. Studies have shown that in many instances, dense forest stands often burn at low and moderate intensity, in part, because they are shadier, cooler, and moister.

Furthermore, even if a stand burns at high severity, that is not a problem as construed by those immersed in the Industrial Forestry Paradigm. Ecosystems need high severity blazes to create snags, down woody debris (i.e., logs on the forest floor), creation of wildlife habitat such as when logs fall into streams contributing to aquatic ecosystems, and to reset ecological succession. High severity blazes also help to store carbon (burnt trees store a lot of carbon).

If there is a problem with our forests, it is that they are degraded and "depleted" from a hundred years of forest management. The degradation includes fewer snags, a reduction in old-growth, less woody biomass on the forest floor, less carbon stored in soils and tree boles, and far too many roads, weeds, and loss of wildlife security cover.

The Industrial Forestry Paradigm has failed our forests and is failing the public. To "restore" our forests, we need less chainsaw medicine. We must allow natural processes like wildfire, bark beetles, mistletoe, and other agents to continue to "manage" our forest ecosystems.

We can protect our homes and communities by working outward from the structure. If we focus on the home, the threat posed by natural processes is significantly reduced, while at the same time, we can permit real "restoration" of our forests to occur.

Source: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/04/14/depleted-forests/>