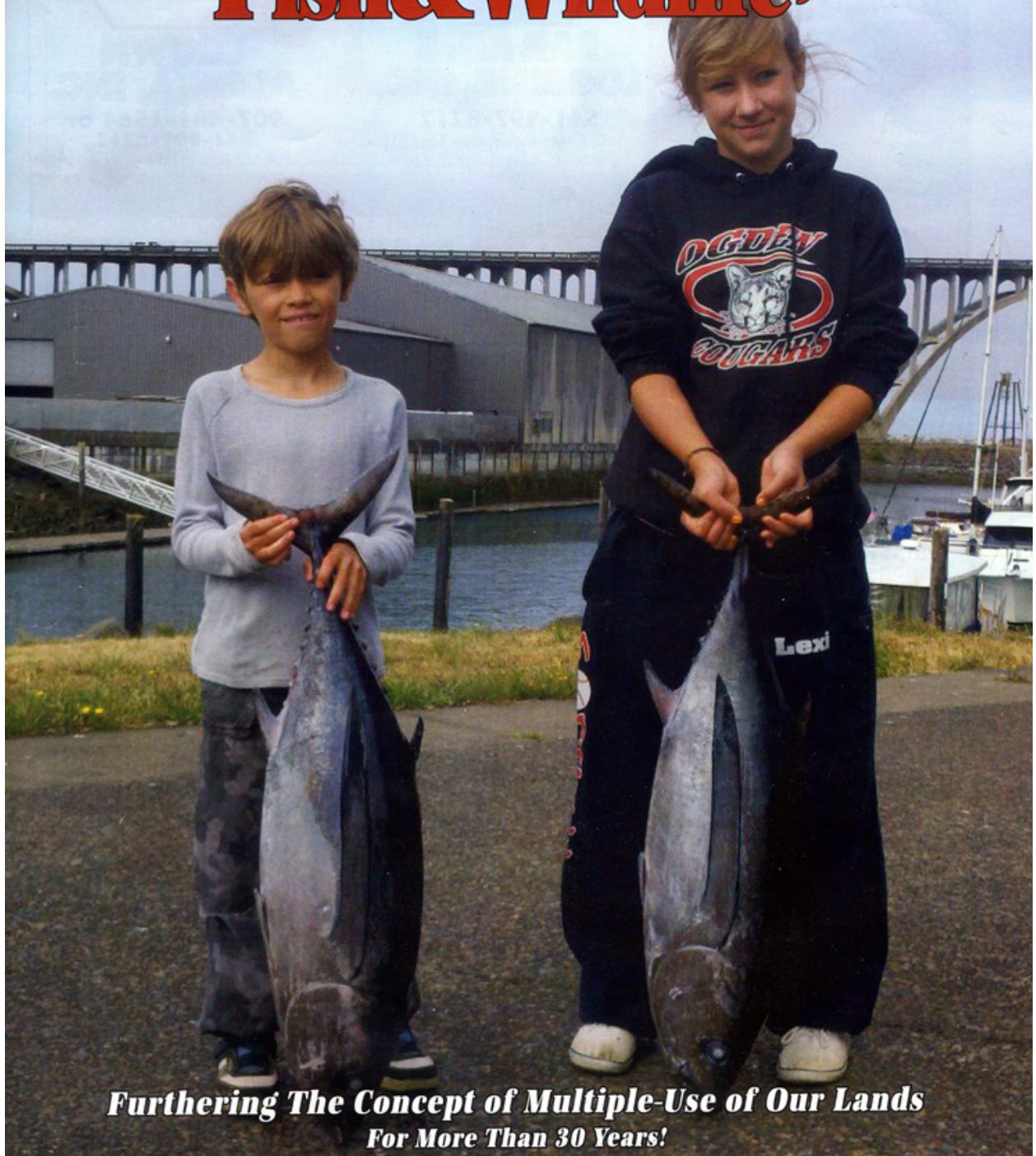


Winter Issue 2012

OREGON **Fish & Wildlife** JOURNAL



***Furthering The Concept of Multiple-Use of Our Lands
For More Than 30 Years!***

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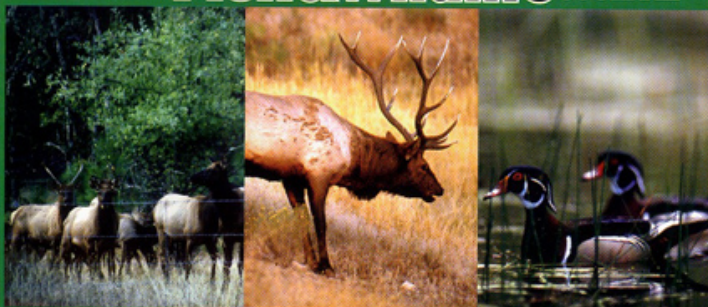
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SPECIAL GUEST EDITORIAL

My Voice

By Bob Zybach, PhD.

To begin, I'd like to thank Cristy Rein for giving me this opportunity to comment on forest wildfire issues in such a prominent part of Oregon Fish & Wildlife Journal. The last time we were in contact was a few years ago and had something to do with spotted owls, old-growth, and/or gray wolves -- so I was very pleased when Wayne Giesy showed me the Fall 2011 "Poof! Assets Are Now Liabilities" issue of the Journal. The directly related issues of wildfire economics and forest management are of personal and common interest, were very well done, and provided an ideal opportunity to get back in touch.

I'd like to use this opportunity to briefly comment on two of the consistent themes in the Fall issue -- wildfire economics and the potential impacts of climate change -- and to provide an outline of the article on the same topics I am preparing for the next issue. The focus of that article will be common sense, proactive, scientifically sound things that can be done to immediately reduce wildfire costs and risks; while simultaneously creating thousands of rural jobs, millions of dollars for state and federal agencies, and safer, more beautiful, forests and grasslands for future generations of people and wildlife.

The issue of wildfire economics is less optimistic. It is one that I have been working on for the past few years as part of a small team of scientists and knowledgeable resource managers. This work has included the online publication of two articles, the creation of a reference website, and several formal presentations to regional and national audiences; including, most recently the Oregon Board of Forestry Meeting in Lakeview on September 7, 2011.

The economic issues and numbers provided in the Fall issue are right on target and deserve serious local and national consideration. The increased sizes, numbers, and costs of catastrophic-scale wildfires during the past few decades have increased at the same time that rural jobs, county revenues, and government services have decreased proportionately.

Is this cause (wildfire and/or policy) and effect, or coincidence?

The Journal cites a figure of \$2 billion in annual wildfire suppression costs; our research confirmed the same number -- and showed that it represented only 2% to 10% of all costs and damages associated with large-scaled wildfires. We estimated that, nationwide, the true costs of wildfire, over and above seasonal fire-fighting expenses, range between \$20 billion and \$100 billion a year -- or between ten to fifty times what is typically reported to simply put fires out:

<http://www.wildfirelessons.net/Additional.aspx?Page=240>

These assertions were directly supported with a free PDF

reference library we created that also provides good support for data in the Fall Journal articles:

<http://www.wildfire-economics.org/Library/index.html>

So far as Global Warming and wildfire risk are concerned, I think the maps of Condition Class 2 and Condition Class 3 (pg. 8) offer an interesting argument. There is a direct correlation between federal land management policies and wildfire risk. If the climate is actually changing, and if that change is actually resulting in increased wildfire risk, then why is that risk almost entirely associated with a particular forest management pattern?

My graduate research focused on a landscape-scale history of fire in western Oregon forests, in terms of prescribed fire and wildfire. Any study of landscape-scale fire usually becomes a study of fuels in short order. By this process, forest vegetation patterns and timber cruises are magically transformed into "fuel patterns." Same with land management practices.

In Oregon, wildfire fuel patterns during most of the past 500 years can be thought of in terms of old-growth, snags ("dead wood"), conifer forestlands, pine woodlands, grasslands, huckleberry fields, oak savannah, camas meadows, and so on. During the past 160 years we can add freeways, urban developments, reservoirs, plowed fields, conifer plantations, clearcuts, and monocultural crops, among other changed land use patterns.

Condition Class 2 and Condition Class 3 appear to closely follow federal land ownership patterns through those areas. Climate change? Or management policies? The direct correlation between land ownership ("management") and wildfire risk is probably unprecedented (NOT "uncharacteristically").

NEXT: Active Management vs. Passive Management. In the next issue my article will provide some basic common sense and scientifically-sound suggestions for resolving many current problems dealing with current resource management policies and results. Particular attention will be given to the terms "active management" and "restoration forestry."

I believe the adoption of these practices, as defined, would have many positive effects on forest health, old-growth preservation, endangered species protection, rural economies, international trade balances, and other economic, ecological, cultural, historical, aesthetic and recreational values associated with Oregon's forests.

Bob Zybach has a PhD. in environmental sciences from Oregon State University. He has been program manager for Oregon Websites and Watersheds Project Inc. (www.ORWW.org) since 1996.

