

Fall Issue 2016

# OREGON **Fish & Wildlife** JOURNAL

**Road To Our  
Future?**

A dramatic photograph of a large fire burning in a forest at night. The fire is intense, with bright orange and yellow flames reaching high into the dark sky. Thick black smoke billows from the fire. In the foreground, a fire truck is partially visible, with two white hoses extending upwards towards the base of the fire. The surrounding trees are dark and silhouetted against the fire's glow.

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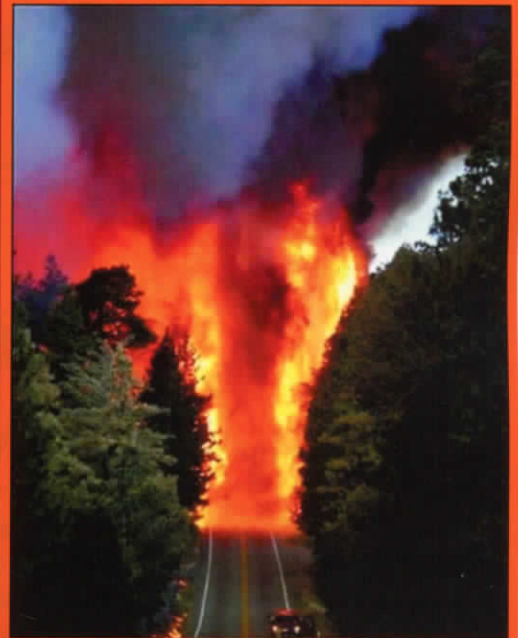
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OREGON **Fish&Wildlife** JOURNAL

Fall Issue 2016

Volume 38, Number 4



Onimous photograph showing yet another large wildfire!

**PUBLISHER**

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Cristy Rein

**FORESTRY EDITOR**

Mickey Bellman

**OFFICE MANAGER**

Nicole de Leon

**ADVERTISING SALES**

Nicole de Leon & Amy Stucks

**CONTENT CONTRIBUTORS**

Cristy Rein, Mickey Bellman, Dr. Bob Zybach, Michael Newton, Dale Bosworth, David A Mihalic, US Rep. Ryan Zinke, Cam Ghostkeeper, Seth Barnes, Dave Tenny, G.I. Wilson

We can be reached at (503) 657-6962

FAX (503) 657-3410 • P.O. Box 1325

Clackamas, Oregon 97015

email: [RZPublish@aol.com](mailto:RZPublish@aol.com)

[www.OregonFishAndWildlifeJournal.com](http://www.OregonFishAndWildlifeJournal.com)

Oregon Fish & Wildlife Journal is published quarterly by R-Z Publishing, Inc. Unsolicited editorial contributions are welcome but should be accompanied by return postage.

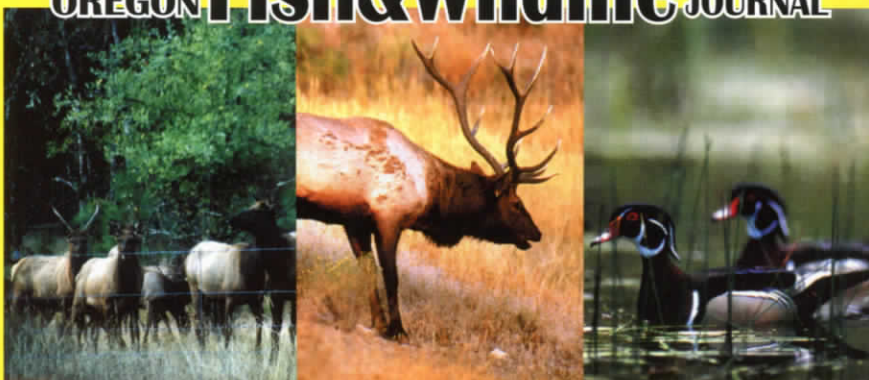
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One Year (4 issues) \$24.95 • Two Years (8 issues) \$46.50 • Four Years (16 issues) \$83.95

# Eisenhower Was Right! Government Science is Killing Our Forests

By Bob Zybach PhD

Excerpt from President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address, January 17, 1961

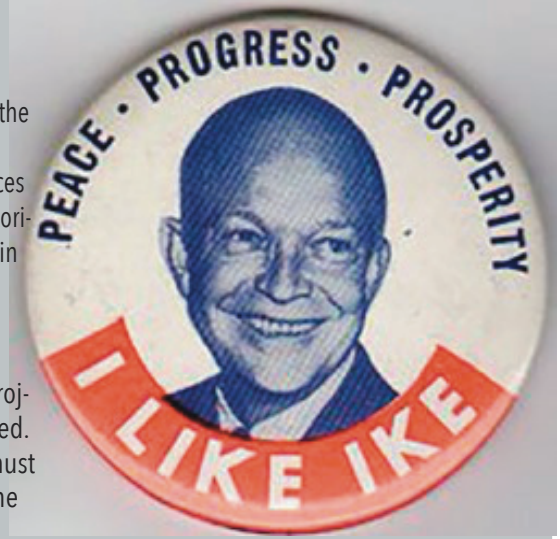
"...Akin to, and largely responsible for the sweeping changes in our industrial-military posture, has been the technological revolution during recent decades.

"In this revolution, research has become central; it also becomes more formalized, complex, and costly. A steadily increasing share is conducted for, by, or at the direction of, the Federal government.

"Today, the solitary inventor, tinkering in his shop, has been overshadowed by task forces of scientists in laboratories and testing fields. In the same fashion, the free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. Partly because of the huge costs involved, a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity. For every old blackboard there are now hundreds of new electronic computers.

"The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present and is gravely to be regarded.

"Yet, in holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should, we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific technological elite."



During the past five years I have written a number of articles and editorials for this magazine that have specifically looked at federal forest management policies, laws, and regulations and the so-called "best available science" that is said to be their foundation. These writings were mostly inspired by the massive changes that have taken place on federal forestlands in Oregon during my lifetime and that have directly resulted in ruined rural economies, broken families, depleted wildlife populations, air and water pollution, degraded landscapes, and hundreds of thousands of acres of dead and dying trees. Almost all of it unnecessary and preventable.

Most of the articles focused on specific topics, such as wildfire economics, spotted owl habitat, streamside buffer regulations, cattle grazing along fish bearing streams, and catastrophic wildfire mitigation. This article is essentially a "bottom line" summary of these earlier writings, and less detailed as one result.

The title to this article/editorial is somewhat misleading in order to be concise and provocative. Eisenhower didn't actually say that "government science" might result in the adverse descriptions given above; he said that government funded scientific research could compromise "intellectual curiosity" and potentially result in misguided policies dictated by a "scientific technological elite" (see excerpt). That is the very process that most concerns me and is typified -- at least in my mind -- by the catastrophic wildfires that have been ravaging our federal forestlands and rural counties the past 30 years.

## 1961 Eisenhower Speech

I was a 12-year-old 6th-Grader in Baker, Oregon when President Dwight D. Eisenhower delivered his famous "Military-Industrial Complex" speech on January 17, 1961. This was his televised farewell address to the American people and, even though it has

been widely-viewed and quoted ever since, I never read a complete transcript or watched the entire speech until a few years ago.

When I read the complete speech and watched it on YouTube, I was shocked at the accuracy of Eisenhower's warnings and predictions, and particularly as I thought they applied to "science-based" federal forest management policies. His concerns for the future had been transformed into my concerns for the present.

Eisenhower's speech is rightfully famous for its warning to "beware the military-industrial complex" of centralized government agencies and international corporations in control of our food and chemical production, transportation networks, and armament manufacturing. His principal concerns were that Americans might become subjected to a police state ruled by wealthy and influential elites -- one potentially in a constant state of warfare because of profits and political power involved. To avert such an undesirable outcome he called for an ever "alert and knowledgeable citizenry."

This warning, of course, was very familiar to me as with most other public school students in the US during the past 50 years. The part of the speech that was new to me were the following sentences: "The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present and is gravely to be regarded"; and, "we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific technological elite."

To my mind this perfectly described my concerns that agenda-based government research funding and the legal profession were being used to develop expensive computer-based models to dictate policy and expand control over the nation's resources. On the surface this could possibly be discounted as a "conspiracy theory," but what alternative theory fits any better? Science has become

overtly politicized in the computer age and public policy is being based on the assumptions and manipulations of modelers, “pal reviews,” and legal challenges, rather than empirical evidence.

## 1964 Wilderness Act

I was an incoming freshman at Grant High School in Portland when Lyndon Johnson signed the Wilderness Act in September 1964. The first Wilderness areas totaled 9.1 million acres. The action seemed generally popular at the time, but I can’t recall a single student or teacher commenting on it.

This new law recognized “wilderness” as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” The Act further defined wilderness as “an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.”

This was an expression of an emerging public desire to “scientifically” manage fragile and uncommon lands and wildlife as protective custodians, rather than as active resource managers.

Over time designated Wilderness areas grew dramatically, including millions of acres of former timberlands, ranches, mines, and fisheries. When historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists began to point out that there was strong scientific evidence that people had been “trammeling” many of these areas for thousands of years – including rock carvings, burials, camas meadows, huckleberry fields, obsidian tools, and more recent traces such as orchards, cabins, fences, and wells – the response was to discount these findings and simply redefine “wilderness.”

By the 1980s taxpayer-funded “best available science” somehow began to support “wilderness” concepts of “natural balance,” “niche ecology,” and “non-declining, even-flow, naturally-functioning ecosystems,” in which humans were mostly seen as pathogens and their observed presence only degraded and threatened “the environment.” In September 2016, Wikipedia defines Wilderness as “a natural environment on Earth that has not been significantly modified by civilized human activity.” Apparently thousands of years of Indian use and occupation of the landscape, followed by a century or more early historical use by European Americans, was accomplished by “uncivilized” individuals.

Today, four federal agencies -- USDA Forest Service, USDA National Park Service, USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and US Fish and Wildlife Service -- administer 759 Wildernesses encompassing 109,754,604 acres.

## 1966 Endangered Species Preservation Act

In 1966 I was an 18-year-old High School graduate with my first tree-planting job, near Diamond Lake in Douglas County, when Congress passed the 1966 Endangered Species Preservation Act. Whooping cranes, grizzly bears, timber wolves, and bald eagles had been in the news for several years and most people – myself included – thought it was probably a good idea to “conserve, protect, restore, and propagate certain species of native fish and wildlife.”

In March 1967 the original “endangered species” list included



**The author, planting trees in 1981 in Lincoln County, Oregon.**

**Photo by Bruce Fraser, courtesy Phoenix Communications, Inc.**

14 mammals, 36 birds, 22 fish, three reptiles and three amphibians and had a budget of \$15 million per year. The money was to purchase “habitat” for animals on the list.

In 1973, with the strong support of the Nixon administration, Congress almost unanimously passed a completely rewritten Endangered Species Act (ESA). The new law distinguished threatened from endangered species, allowed listing of a species in danger in just part of its range, allowed listing of plants and invertebrates, authorized unlimited funds for species protection, and made it illegal to kill, harm, or otherwise “take” a listed species. In effect, “the law made endangered species protection the highest priority of government.”

Today, citing laws and regulations requiring “the best scientific data available,” there are more than 2,050 plants and animals listed by the ESA; of which only 28 (1.5%) have ever been determined “recovered” -- including most recently a wolf, a flying squirrel, and four wildflowers. The annual budget is now \$251 million per year.

## 1970 EPA Clean Air Act

In January 1970 I formed a reforestation business with two friends and began performing tree-planting projects for BLM in Coos County; I was a young business owner with a wife and new baby to support. That same month President Richard Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) into law, declaring: “the 1970s [will be] a historic period when, by conscious choice, [we] transform our land into what we want it to become” in his State of the Union Address.

It is interesting to consider what Nixon “wanted our land to

**Table 1. Large-Scale (10,000+ Acres) Western Oregon Wildfires, 1951-2015**

Year	Name	Acres	County	Ownership	Cause
1951	Hubbard Creek	15,600	Douglas	BLM O&C Lands	People
1951	Sardine Creek	21,400	Marion	ODF Santiam State Forest	People
1951	Tillamook IV	32,700	Tillamook	ODF Tillamook State Forest	People
1951	Vincent Creek	28,200	Lane	BLM O&C Lands	People
1966	Oxbow	42,900	Lane	BLM O&C Lands; 1 death	People
1987	Bland Mountain	10,300	Douglas	BLM O&C Lands; 2 deaths	Arson
1987	Douglas Complex I	30,000	Douglas	BLM O&C Lands	Lightning
1987	Silver	96,000	Josephine	USDA Kalmiopsis Wilderness	Lightning
1992	East Evans	10,100	Jackson	BLM O&C Lands	People
1996	Charlton	10,400	Lane	USDA Waldo Lake Wilderness	Lightning
2002	Apple	17,600	Douglas	USDA Umpqua NF	Arson
2002	Biscuit	500,000	Josephine	USDA Kalmiopsis Wilderness	Lightning
2002	Tiller Complex	69,800	Douglas	USDA Umpqua NF	Lightning
2002	Timbered Rock	27,400	Jackson	BLM O&C Lands	Lightning
2003	B&B Complex	90,800	Linn	USDA Jefferson Wilderness	Arson?
2005	Blossom	14,800	Curry	USDA Wild Rogue Wilderness	Lightning
2008	Middle Fork	21,100	Jackson	USDA Sky Lakes Wilderness	Lightning
2008	Rattle	19,800	Douglas	USDA Umpqua NF	Lightning
2009	Boze-Rainbow	16,700	Douglas	USDA Umpqua NF	Lightning
2009	Tumblebug	14,600	Lane	USDA Willamette NF	Lightning
2013	Big Windy Complex	26,700	Josephine	BLM O&C Lands	Lightning
2013	Douglas Complex II	48,700	Douglas	BLM O&C Lands	Lightning
2013	Whiskey	16,200	Douglas	USDA Umpqua NF	Lightning
2015	Stouts Creek	26,500	Douglas	BLM O&C Lands	People

become” in 1970 compared to what we now have, and how people now might “want the land to become” in the future. At that time loggers were still “getting out the cut,” and often entire hillsides were “slicked off” during logging operations. There was no such thing as a “riparian buffer strip,” and logging and tree planting were routinely conducted to the very edge of rivers and streams. Fishing, hunting, hiking, and camping were generally excellent and new roads were going everywhere the fish and game – and logs and wildfires – were.

The Clean Air Act was also signed into law by Nixon during 1970 and, on December 2nd of the year, he created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to enforce these new regulations. This Agency almost single-handedly created an entirely new industry – one that has continued to grow and thrive to this time: the practice of “environmental law” by hundreds of EPA lawyers responding to the hundreds of legal suits filed by hundreds of lawyers paid by taxpayer-subsidized non-profit organizations.

Computerized “models” of “habitat” and “climate” and “fire return intervals” and the number of government scientists, technicians and lawyers needed to develop, promote, and defend them accelerated rapidly following the creation of EPA. New policies, laws, and regulations sprang – and continue to spring – from their wake. The agency now has an annual budget in excess of \$8 billion and employs more than 17,000 people, of which more than half are highly paid engineers, scientists, lawyers, and “policy analysts.”

### 1994 Clinton Northwest Forest Plan

In 1981 my reforestation business was identified as one of the “500 fastest growing businesses in the US” by Inc. Magazine -- the only such business (#332) so identified from Oregon that year. I now had two kids, a small fleet of trucks, more than 30 employees, a new log home of my own design, a few hundred acres of manicured timberland, and represented the reforestation industry at a Congressional hearing about Oregon Wildernesses, chaired by Senator Mark Hatfield. A few years later we were broke, my wife and I separated, and the land and property sold -- just like hundreds

of other rural family-owned forestry businesses in the western US at that time.

When I subsequently attended forestry classes at Oregon State University in the late 1980s and 1990s there was a lot of interest in such concepts as “preserving old-growth forests,” “maintaining spotted owl habitat,” and “riparian enhancement.” These concepts were typically rationalized by unfounded theories of “steady state ecosystems” and idealistic descriptions of such circumstances as “non-declining, even-flow, naturally functioning” forests and grasslands. It didn’t seem to matter that such conditions had never actually been observed in nature, measured, or documented – only that, for some reason for some people, they were desired.

In 1994 these theoretical “ideals” were integrated into President Clinton’s “Northwest Forest Plan” as a “focus on scientifically sound, ecologically credible, and legally responsible strategies and implementation.” Since its adoption the plan is claimed to have resulted in a worsening of rural forestry-based economies; a significant increase in the number and severity of large-scale wildfires; and a decrease in several desired native plant and animal species, including deer, elk, spotted owls, oak, and huckleberries.

This table of large-scale western Oregon wildfires tells the story of government science-based policies regarding the management of federal forestlands in the western US.

Even a cursory examination of these numbers is startling: from 1951 through 1986 there were only five large-scale forest fires in western Oregon, an average of one major fire every seven years that cumulatively burned an average of less than 3,900 acres/year; conversely, from 1987 through 2015 there was nearly 2/3 chance of wildfire and an average of 36,700 acres burned per year. That is, for the 29-year period of 1987-2015, large-scale wildfires were nearly five times more likely to occur than during the preceding 36 years -- and averaged nearly 10 times as many acres burned per year. Further, if 1951 is removed from the equation the numbers become even more glaring.

The total is: 24 large-scale wildfires from 1951 through 2015 covering more than 1,200,000 acres. Two 1951 fires took place on Oregon State forestlands -- the remainder all took place on federal lands: six wildfires totaling 154,700 acres on USDA National Forests; 10 wildfires totaling 266,400 acres on BLM O&C Lands; and six fires totaling 733,100 acres on USDA Wilderness lands.

During the entire 1951-2015 period, not a single large-scale wildfire was associated with any of the millions of acres of industrial forestlands and private tree farms in western Oregon. Because climate and native plant and animal species were identical on both types of ownership (government and private), the cause of this stark disparity must be something other than climate or species.

The stark difference in recent fire histories has been identified and discussed in several of my earlier articles as active management vs. passive management. Active management is typified by such activities as road maintenance, vegetation, and wildlife

management, and/or recreational developments – all of which took place on federal forestlands from 1951-1966 and continue to take place on private and industrial forests today. Passive management is typified by Wilderness creations, roadless areas, spotted owl habitat, and riparian buffers, as outlined in the preceding pages and characterized by decisions to do very little or nothing -- and even then often restricting uses of motorized tools and transportation.

### 2016: Science vs. Modeling

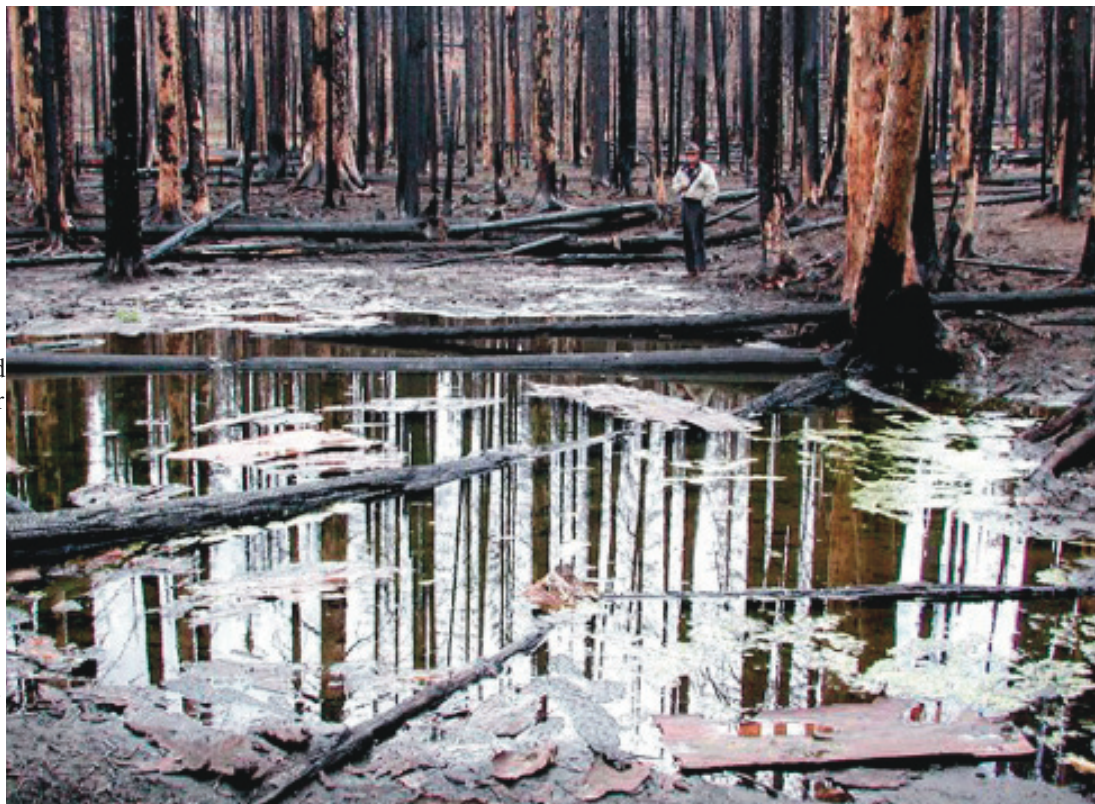
Eisenhower was right. In the years since his farewell address, taxpayer-funded research and related policies and litigation have been accompanied by massive numbers of expensive and restrictive federal regulations requiring huge bureaucracies and thousands of lawyers to enforce.

All apparently based on findings and desires of a like-minded corps of government-funded computer-centric modelers and technicians: the “scientific technological elite.”

Most of the current policies, laws, and regulations governing our federal, state, tribal, private and municipal lands, waters, and resources are based upon the dictates of these elites. One problem is that many of these policies are based on disproven theories that are inherently racist and strongly biased against past cultures and current populations; a fact that has gone largely unnoticed and unchallenged. Why that is might be hard to explain, but these biases are obviously based more on personal values and political realities than on empirical findings or research. The additional fact that these laws and regulations are claimed and being taught as “science-based” is even more troubling.

The practice of science has been seriously compromised during this process, our rural economies and environments have been significantly damaged as one result. The same argument can be made regarding damages to our native plant and animal populations, the degraded quality of our scenery, air and waters -- as well as the teaching and practice of science itself.

My opinion is that now would be a good time to return to traditional scientific methods to guide our resource



**Dr. Ben Stout, along western shoreline of Round Lake, B&B Complex fire aftermath, May 29, 2004. Photo by author.**

management policies; and also to develop a common faith in legitimate experience, earned knowledge, and to better value “intellectual curiosity” over “government contracts,” as Eisenhower counseled. It only seems right that we leave our descendants something similar to the wonderful conditions we were given by our own ancestors on the land.



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