

## OPINION

## GUEST VIEWPOINT

# Managing our forests will curb climate change

By BOB ZYBACH

For Oregonians with a strong interest in doing something about global warming and climate change, the logical starting point is our forests. That is where most of the carbon is, and where the most immediate and profound actions can take place to affect statewide carbon dioxide emissions.

Here are five practices that can be implemented within a few months or years. These practices would achieve dramatic results in Oregon's efforts to address this issue: 1) Prevent forest fires by rapid response and 2) by mechanical thinning to reduce ladder fuels, 3) by salvaging dead trees, 4) by planting new trees and 5) by creating log banks.

These practices were first detailed in a 1993 Environmental Protection Agency paper I presented to an international group of scientists in 1991, and again in a one-hour radio interview I gave in Albany last year: [www.NWMapsCo.com/ZybachB/Reports/1993\\_EPA\\_Global\\_Warming/](http://www.NWMapsCo.com/ZybachB/Reports/1993_EPA_Global_Warming/).

I also believe the adoption of these prac-

tices 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.

◆ **Prevent forest fires:** Wildfires are a major source of carbon dioxide. The 2002 Biscuit Fire in Southern Oregon, for example, produced more than 25 percent of Oregon's carbon dioxide emissions that year. Wildfires result from a combination of fuels, weather, topography and a source of ignition, not climate change. They primarily occur in August and September, and are made worse by the presence of ladder fuels and dead wood, as shown in a video that can be seen at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LcG-tNw6\\_2o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LcG-tNw6_2o).

◆ **Reduce ladder fuels:** By dramatically reducing ladder fuels and quickly extinguishing unwanted flames we can greatly reduce statewide carbon dioxide emissions from wildfire. Ladder fuels, for the most part, are comprised of merchantable conifer trees in the Pacific Northwest and can be removed profitably from stands of

old growth, other desired "leave trees" and protected areas.

The subsequent conversion of these hazardous fuels to timber products and alternative energy sources would result in thousands of stable local jobs and needed income to our rural schools, roads, libraries and governments.

◆ **Salvage dead trees:** Trees killed by insects, disease, fire, overcrowding and other causes will increase the likelihood, intensity and severity of wildfires. If left to rot unburned, they will also produce massive amounts of carbon dioxide, but at a slower rate. Turning this biomass into long-lasting forest products or alternative energy helps mitigate these effects.

◆ **Plant new trees:** Carbon dioxide is most efficiently removed from the atmosphere by rapidly growing vegetation. On land, conifer trees are the best plants for achieving this result. Keeping forest lands stocked with growing conifer trees is the most effective way to manage carbon in Oregon.

◆ **Create log banks:** Finally, all trees and tree products eventually burn, rot or otherwise

decompose back to carbon dioxide. The only available ways to prevent this from happening are to freeze trees or submerge them in water. Creating underwater (or arctic) "log banks" is a highly expensive, last resort method for storing carbon, but has an added benefit of preserving old-growth tree products for the future.

It is vital that we actively manage our forests, rather than standing by and watching them burn, rot or grow into massive fire hazards, as we seem to have been doing in recent times. The disastrous results of inaction are not limited to global warming concerns, but affect wildlife, habitat, watersheds, airsheds, our economy, culture, public health and safety. A return to active forest management will be of general benefit to all.

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