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Tesoro Alaska Petroleum Company

The beautiful spruce forests of Southcentral and Western Alaska are vanishing. Millions of trees across lazy river valleys and scenic ridges are dying in epidemic numbers. The toll is so staggering that there may not be much of a forest to pass on to the next generation.

The shocking decline of the spruce forest across the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska's favorite playground, drives home the realities of a fatal plague that is sweeping through other areas of Southcentral and Western Alaska. According to state and federal officials, the forest is now in irreversible decline, victim of a relentless and massive insect infestation that is rapidly transforming lush green areas into dead, brown graveyards.

Dead trees that are falling across the forests do not promote moose or deer populations. Dead spruce also do not produce an annual crop of seed cones so necessary for birds and small mammals such as squirrels or mice. This in turn affects larger animals in the food chain such as martins and other fur bearers.

All told, over 10 billion board feet of timber has recently been ravaged and killed by insects and diseases running wild and unchecked through the forests. To put this into perspective, the morbid toll far exceeds all of the timber cut by man on state land since the first day of statehood in 1959. It also exceeds the volume of commercial timber lost due to the ravages of wild fires in the Alaska wilderness.

Even this estimate is conservative since it is based only on epidemic areas spotted.

(continued on page 4)
Re-education begins with you

"As the circle of light increases, so does the circumference of darkness." Albert Einstein

As we move into summer, Alaskans have a chance to undo much of what was done to us as a result of the oil spill. Now, perhaps more than any other time, fellow citizens are curious to know about Alaska. Part of the interest is generated by its summer and 20 large barges equipped for warm-water shoreline cleanup are on site. The vessels are brought close to shore and the landing crafts equipped with hoses, pumps, heaters, booms and skimmers. The birds pictured above were released back into its wild environment after being cleaned by workers.

Exxon has employed over 760 boats, several airplanes and a number of helicopters in the animal rescue effort. There are bird rescue shelters in Valdez, Seward and Kodiak. Over 200 animal experts and workers are on site. The bird pictured above was released back into its wild environment after being cleaned by workers. (Frank Flavin photo)

According to the U.S. Forest Service, the Sound’s shoreline, including its many islands, covers 3,495 miles. About ten percent of the total shoreline of the Sound was affected by the spill. Of that amount, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation estimates it is at least 364 miles of beaches in Prince William Sound for cleaning. In addition, shoreline cleanup and nearshore operations have been initiated in the Kenai Peninsula and Shleinfork Sound areas. Exxon has targeted over 364 miles of beaches in Prince William Sound for cleaning. In addition, shoreline cleanup and nearshore operations have been initiated in the Kenai Peninsula and Shleinfork Sound areas.

Exxon's cleanup effort shifts into high gear

It is a messy, exhausting job that looks daunting, but progress is being made in cleaning up beaches tainted by oil from the grounding of the Exxon Valdez. Valor J. Nelson

Exxon has an estimated 4,000 people deployed directly on the overall Exxon effort with some 5,000 people deployed in the Alaska area. More than 7,000 people are involved in the overall cleanup effort with some 5,000 people deployed directly on the Alaska area. More than 7,000 people are involved in the overall cleanup effort.

The massive Exxon clean up effort can best be compared to a small army in wilderness. More than 7,000 people are involved in the overall cleanup effort.

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Tongass reforms spell economic chaos

Turn off the lights

The U.S. House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee has approved legislation that would bring radical changes to logging operations in the Tongass National Forest. The legislation, introduced by Congressman George Miller, would repeal the $40 million Timber Supply Land Reserve that guarantees additional timber harvest in the forest. The bill would also terminate the two-year timber contracts and repeal the 4.5 billion board feet per decade in timber inventory requirements.

If approved by the full House and Senate, Alaska congressman Don Young said he would work to sustain a Presidential veto. "A bill that takes jobs away from working Alaskans deserves to be vetoed," Young said.

"As bad as this is, I can get 130 votes to sustain a veto by the President," Young added.

Don Finney, Executive Director of the Alaska Loggers Association and RDC board member, agreed that the bill is so bad that it will most likely lose the support of some who would vote for more moderate legislation.

The bill as passed would add 1.8 million acres of Wilderness to the Tongass, increasing the existing Wilderness block of 5 million acres by some 30%. The bill would leave 43% of the forest in Wilderness.

The Miller legislation clearly sets aside an additional area larger than the 1.7 million acres presently available for timber harvest. Overall, two-thirds of commercial forest lands in the Tongass are already closed to logging.

The proponents of the Miller legislation claim it only withholds 50 million board feet of commercially operable timber, leaving 400 million a year available for harvesting. "What they don't explain is that the bill also repeals section 705(d) of ANLCA with out which the Forest Service cannot spend money on submarginal timber stands," said Finney. "What this means is that instead of 450 million board feet per year prior to this withdrawal, there are only 250 million board feet. Subtracting the 50 million from 338 million reduces the largest possible cut to 268 million board feet.

The "real hooker" in the legislation is the requirement that mandates the Forest Service to maintain non-logging buffer zones of a minimum of 100 feet on each side of all salmon streams and their tributaries. Finney said, "What this means is that instead of 450 million board feet per year prior to this withdrawal, there are only 268 million board feet. Subtracting the 50 million from 338 million reduces the largest possible cut to 268 million board feet.

The title of the bill is: "Radical reforms of logging operations in the Tongass National Forest could deal a deadly blow to the forest industry and the local economies of Ketchikan, Sitka, Wrangel and other communities throughout Southeast Alaska."

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Quotes from people of the Tongass

This spring the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests held public hearings in Juneau and Sitka on legislation to reform timber operations in the Tongass National Forest of Southeast Alaska. Thousands of jobs in Southeast Alaska depend on local timber harvests and the economies of Ketchikan, Sitka, Wrangel and other local communities are highly dependent on strong Tongass timber industry.

Hundreds of citizens, including loggers, city and state officials, native representatives, local business persons and others came out to the hearings in defense of the timber industry. Here are some notable quotes from those presenting testimony (reprinted from Alaska Peninsula News):

"After the 1980 agreement, we thought a last compromise had been reached and we could go to work with a secure timber base and harvest levels. This was an agreement which put two-thirds of the commercial forest land in Wilderness or other nonharvest designation. Now you are back and want even more of the small timber base upon which the livelihoods, families, and communities depend. We're tired of being told we have to sacrifice our productive lifestyle by other people with more wealth and sophistication who will bear no part of the costs they impose on us. The men and women of the Tongass timber industry contribute to this country by working hard and paying taxes and then they find that their sustenance isn't as important as that of an overmature forest. It's now apparent there's no effective counterbalance to the environmental movement. We who live and work on the Tongass would like to be at least as important as fish and deer."

Steve Constantine, former RDC intern

"I was raised to believe that logging is an honorable and worthwhile profession. I deeply resent the portrayal of the logger as an 'assassin of the forest' when I know from personal experience that modern forest management practices not only provide wood for today's forest products, but will also provide for tomorrow's on a perpetual basis."

Sean Harbour

"It's unrealistic to stamp 'case closed' on our logging, jeopardizing our economy by adding Wilderness to a vast established area. I prefer to stay off the government produced robots and keep logging in my living. Yes, I believe in preservation, but PEOPLE PRESERVATION first."

Pauline Greene

A retrospective look

It is certainly with mixed emotions that I come to the end of my term as president of Resource Development Council. It has been a most enjoyable year and a great opportunity to work with terrific people, both on the board and the staff of RDC. It seems that when a person gets to the end of almost any path in life, we have an opportunity to take a retrospective at all we've been, often, it is a painful experience to compare what we had intended to accomplish with what we actually did accomplish. I guess it is normal to have lofty goals, however, such goals can lead to lofty falls. Looking on the bright side, I have left plenty of challenges for the coming year.

While our victories may have seemed few and far between, progress was made in the last year, particularly when you consider the well-financed and powerful forces arguing against development in our state. Consider the following:

1. A dialogue was started with other land use groups throughout the country who are similarly interested in the "wise use" of land, rather than the indiscriminate "look out" of our land.

2. A major conference which brought together some of the "wise use" leaders, along with government officials and labor leaders to discuss how Alaska's resources can be sensibly developed.

3. A major conference which brought together leaders in the forest products industries and professional foresters together to outline the possibilities which lie in the Boreal Forests of Southcentral and Interior Alaska.

4. An informational brochure was produced which explains the costs of Wilderness designations to the economy and lifestyle of Alaska and its residents.

5. A new brochure was produced outlining the activities of RDC to be given to prospective managers or others interested in further information about our organization.

6. A productive board meeting in Juneau where we had an opportunity to discuss our legislative priorities with the Governor and many members of the Legislature. Our sense was that our issues would receive more favorable attention than in the past. However, the accident on Bligh Reef gave that perception a considerable setback.

While much remains to be done, there were definitely some highlights of the year. Unfortunately, you have to take the bad with the good, and this was a bad year in some respects for pro- development organizations. Among the disappointments of the year:

1. Amendments to the Economic Limit Factor passed by the Alaska Legislature.

2. Failure to make any significant movement toward a meaningful forest management plan.

3. Failure of Congress to approve exploration in ANWR.

At RDC, we believe many of the anti-development strategies can be mitigated, provided Alaskans work together and think sensibly. As we look forward to steps that need to be taken in the future, I would suggest at least two areas that may not yield immediate results, but which are important in turning the tide of public sentiment.

First, we need to develop an intense education program. For the adult population, this programs needs to be presented in a manner that resonates with the way people live and work. It is not one that stands, and drives the personal benefits of resource development home.

I must believe that this can be done on television and radio through short spots that point out the fallacies of non-development arguments in a manner the citizen can understand clearly and clearly. Another effective educational programs needs to be developed for young people still in school. These are the leaders of the future. We can partially attribute the anti-development mode to the fact that a generation or two of our children have not been taught the full story about resource development. While we were proceeding with economic development programs, we had those with a non-development bias to teach our young children.

The second thing we can do that will pay long range dividends is to lay groundwork for a new pro-development movement. This is going to require some time and money to be spent on land use issues outside Alaska. This national movement is gaining momentum. It is going to be a force for the governments and environmentalists to reckon with. If we are part of it, we will have national recognition on an international stage. It will no longer be a "cheap environmental vote" as we have heard so many times before.

Valdez mayor releases oil spill policy

In the wake of the Prince William Sound oil spill, Valdez Mayor John Devore is calling for Alaska and the nation to pick up the pieces and "move constructively to assure that the Exxon Valdez oil spill will not happen again, and that similar episodes are avoided in the future."

While urging the nation and the oil industry to move "constructively, I am calling for a locking relationship between the oil industry and all levels of government must develop with the shared goal of building ample safeguards to protect against future calamities."

In his oil spill policy paper released last month to the Senate Interior and Homeland Security Committee, Devore said the oil industry cannot and should not be the sole mechanism for response to major spills. He cited the need for supplemental and back up programs for the federal agency and the private sector. Devore's paper noted that an "equitable response" (in the early hours of the oil spill) was the industry's "immediate concern," and that a back up vessel by the Exxon Valdez tanker itself. The precarious status of the tanker required prompt attention to safely and immediately lighten the remaining crude oil on the vessel onto another tanker.

"It was during the successful portion of that aspect of the emergency response that Exxon realized that the oil spill was less than the time was going to cost. While much of the work had been focused on the containment and cleanup of the oil escape, this was the point in history that many members of the industry said could not have been done in the critical hours, but neither the industry nor any other entity was prepared to respond to a spill of this magnitude."

"Alaska must learn from what was done and not done in response to the Exxon Valdez tragedy," Devore said. "While we are easy to point fingers at this juncture, it is more productive to focus on corrective, preventive measures that will insure that the Exxon Valdez oil spill will not happen again."

In his oil spill policy paper, Devore called for the establishment of an independent spill containment and cleanup capability as it is being done in the Alaska Legislature. Under this bill, emergency response..."
Forest is a time bomb waiting to explode into a raging inferno (continued from page 1)

from the air between 1982 and 1988. David Orr, an insect and disease specialist with the state Division of Forestry, cautions that there are large expanses of forested lands for which nothing is known from the standpoint of insect and disease activity.

"Our estimates address only known problem areas," Orr noted. He said the facts and figures applying to the massive insect infestations represent minimum rather than maximum statewide impact.

In addition, because it takes from one to two years for insect-killed trees to turn their reddish-brown color so that they can be spotted from the air, the most recent aerial surveys actually depict mortality during 1986. "We are up to two years behind in estimating current mortality at a time when some of these epidemic areas were exploding in size and impact," Orr said.

Contrary to popular belief, "the conditions which are now promoting disastrous forest pests such as spruce bark beetles are not a result of natural phenomena," Orr said. "We are finally getting an answer to our deliberate decisions to eliminate the role of fire or to prevent forest management." Orr explained that the spruce bark beetle infestation sweeping state forests is only a symptom of what is really wrong. "Areas being devastated by insects and diseases are simply an indicator of the sad state of affairs in our once beautiful forests."

Spruce bark beetles inhabit all of Alaska's forests, but for the most part, beetle populations occur in relatively low numbers. When climatic conditions and other factors are favorable for the development of beetle broods, the population in certain areas will explode into an epidemic, capable of causing incredible damage.

The real problem begins when a once healthy and vigorous forest finally reaches maturity and begins to die down," Orr explained. "Our once healthy forests have long since declined into a state that is optimum for any variety of insect and disease problems."

As a result, Orr pointed out that Alaska's forests are being depleted by spruce bark beetles "at a rate which almost defies comprehension."

Spruce bark beetles have lived in the Alaska forest for generations, but in the past natural and man-caused fires often eliminated any traces of insect and disease activity. In the aftermath of these fires, a young, healthy and strong vigorous forest emerged from the ashes, leaving virtually no opportunity for beetles to take hold in epidemic portions.

The success of the state's fire suppression program over the past 40 years has resulted in older forests that once might have been swept by fire and then renewed. Some forest mosaics which escaped fire activity in the relatively recent past have grown up to 400 years old. The trees are now rapidly deteriorating.

"Just like elderly and sick people in the absence of professional care, the trees of Alaska's forests are becoming more susceptible to disease and destructive predators," Orr said.

Insects and diseases are most likely to attack forest stands which are fairly uniform in species and age. This is why the spruce bark beetle epidemic has spread so rapidly over vast areas of the forest.

The Kenai Peninsula and the westside of Cook Inlet between the Beluga River and Mt. Susitna are classic examples of this phenomenon.

The first and greatest danger resulting from the epidemic is fire. Once the trees have been killed, they will eventually fall to produce an accumulation of fuel which is readily consumed by fire.

"Depending on the density of fuel accumulations, the potential fuel buildup can approach situations very similar to those found at Yellowstone National Park just before the spectacular fires of 1988," Orr said. "Such conditions can lead to very severe burns irrespective of human habitation."

In the case of the Kenai River area where Jackson sawdust spruce trees are already 15 feet deep in some areas, a fire would be devastating to the forest and also to private homes and recreation properly," Orr cautioned. "Because so many people frequent the hiking trails or reside along narrow subdivision roads, a fast-moving forest fire in this area could easily result in numerous civilian casualties simply because they could not get out of the way in time. The tracks of previous large fires in the area are simply a warning that such an event will happen, Orr said. "It is not a matter of if, but when."

Orr said a "let burn" fire policy is not an option in controlling the infestation on the Kenai Peninsula. "If we don't contemplate what a future major fire around Kenai Lake, Cooper Landing or the Russian River might cost in suppression dollars, much less property damage and casualty claims."

"The irony is that most of the areas currently plagued by spruce bark beetles could be cleaned up before a major fire gets started," Orr added. "A major new woodland industry could be developed by simply utilizing some of the millions of dead trees which now abound in many of our forests."

Even in far-remote areas where a "let burn" policy is an option, it would be far easier to utilize the trees for local and world markets and encourage several billion dollars of investment capital to be injected into our state, rather than watching a valuable resource go up in smoke, Orr said.

Orr stressed that in the absence of fire, silvicultural options are the only other method available for rejuvenating a forest. However, it takes heavy machinery to implement a silvicultural prescription to clear away dead trees and to churn the moss so that the soil can be exposed and warmed to a point where new seedlings can once again grow. But environmentalists don't like logging and the roads required to get the trees to market. They have objected to past efforts to introduce larger-scale logging to stop the infestations. However, Orr claims that removing the wood is the cheapest and most effective way to deal with the crisis. Without a silvicultural program that targets the dead trees for harvesting, the entire forest is in jeopardy, along with its wildlife and those residents and visitors who may be in the path of what may be an imminent inferno. Meanwhile, the beetles spread to adjacent lands, regardless of ownership.

Besides saving what may be left of the forest, a major harvesting effort on the Kenai Peninsula would create lots of jobs and bring in large quantities of money to buy equipment necessary to salvage the wood. If support services are factored into the equation, Orr estimates that a one dollar direct investment in the wood products industry easily stimulates four additional dollars of economic activity.

"If we did nothing more with some of our dead spruce trees than grind them up into chips and make locally produced pulp, the finished product could easily exceed six billion dollars at this time," Orr estimated. "If we did something more creative, such as produce particle board, veneer lumber or any number of other value added products, the end result could be considerably more valuable than what I just quoted for pulp."

However, with each passing day, the dead trees of the forest continue to deteriorate, becoming more dangerous and less valuable from a product recovery point of view. "Not only are the beetles devastating the forest, they are also ruining any economic potential which may be realized from this land," Orr said. "At the same time, these forest slums and graveyards can no longer support the wildlife on which our tourism, subsistence and trapping industries depend."

Orr complained that for too long the owners and custodians of the forested lands in Alaska have been allowed to foster conditions which enable insect and disease epidemics to spread. The time has come, he says, to where Alaskans should insist on a reasonable good neighbor policy that limits the impact and spread of forest pest problems.

"The longer we wait, the more difficult the situation will become, and the greater is the chance that this state will soon be paying exorbitant costs to suppress the forest fires which most surely will come," Orr said.