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MT. HOOD NATIONAL FOREST LOGGING SHIFTS TO PINE FORESTS OF EAST SIDE

by PETER D. SLEETH of the Oregonian Staff

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Summary: The decision to suspend timber harvesting in the Zigzag district pleases conservationists and a Portland public official

Chain saws will be stilled on the most heavily used portion of the Mount Hood National Forest for at least five years, the U.S. Forest Service said Monday.

In a move sure to ease tensions between the federal government, the city of Portland and conservationists, the Forest Service will sell no timber in the 267,000-acre **Zigzag Ranger District** after October 1998 until at least the year 2003.

The district straddles both sides of U.S. 26 leading from the area near the town of Sandy up to Government Camp. It includes the Little Sandy River basin, as well as the Salmon, Sandy and Zigzag river areas of the forest.

"That's terrific news for the city," said Erik Sten, Portland city commissioner. "Not having to worry about a timber sale this year is a tremendous step in the right direction."

The city has been quarreling with the U.S. Forest Service over whether any logging should occur in the Little Sandy River basin. The river is next to the Bull Run drainage, where Portland gets most of its drinking water.

Forest supervisor **Roberta Moltzen** said she decided to transfer the logging to the eastern side of the forest because of a need for more salvage logging in diseased pine forests there, as well as a lack of public support for logging in the predominantly Douglas fir forests on the west side of the Cascade mountains.

"Having a program where the public supports it is better than having a program the public does not," Moltzen said.

The Forest Service logged 11 million board feet of timber on the Zigzag district last year. A board foot is 1 inch thick by 1 foot square. It takes about 16,000 board feet to build a 2,000-square-foot wood-framed house.

The logging will move to the Barlow Ranger District on the eastern side of the Cascade mountains, south of Hood River. The predominantly pine forests of the eastern Cascades are choked with disease and undergrowth from decades of fire suppression. Moltzen said there would be little or no clear-cutting but extensive thinning of trees to let in more light and water.

The Zigzag district gets heavy use from Portland-area visitors. When the Forest Service held a roadside timber sale there in 1996, 64 people were arrested as they protested at Enola Hill.

The sale of virtually any trees in the district is guaranteed to bring vocal opposition, despite a drastic reduction of timber cutting in the 1990s. Logging is down in the forest by 80 percent to 90 percent from the peak harvests of the 1980s.

The Mount Hood forest was an enormous wood basket for the Forest Service. In a single year in the 1980s, the cut filled 75,000 log trucks. Parked end-to-end, those trucks would stretch from Portland to Los Angeles.

Federal court orders have slashed logging to a fraction of those years. The Mount Hood forest yielded 413 million board feet of timber in 1986; the cut was 27 million board feet in 1996.

The goal for the forest in 1999 is 64 million board feet, Moltzen said.

Since World War II, about 25 percent of the 1.1 million-acre Mount Hood National Forest has been clear-cut, with even more trees felled in less-visible thinning sales.

All told, the Forest Service sold about 36 percent of the entire acreage in the forest in the past 50 years.

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