

FRIENDS OF DOUGLAS-FIR NATIONAL MONUMENT

Dispatch: The American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*)

One of the most fun birds of the proposed Douglas-Fir National Monument is the American Dipper. It is both the only member of its genus in North America and is the only aquatic songbird on the continent.



What makes the dipper fun is told by its name. You can find the dipper along clean, fast flowing streams. The dipper is unmistakable, not only because of its shape but because it dips. When you see a dipper, if you watch it for no more than a minute, you will see it bobbing up and down. Telling someone that you have seen a dipper is likely to be like talking about yawning: you almost can't help yourself, you will soon find yourself dipping up and down as you describe the bird. Dippers also have relatively long legs and short tails that they sometimes hold up, similar to a wren.



Dippers live along the major streams of the proposed monument. You will find them standing on a rock in the middle of the stream, then diving into the water, only to emerge onto another rock, sometimes a meter or more away. Dippers eat underwater insects and their larvae, small fish, amphibians and freshwater snails and crustaceans.

Dippers can be found along every named “river” in the proposed monument, and along many of larger, year-round creeks (Crabtree Creek, Canyon Creek, Soda Creek etc.). The photo of the dipper out of the water was taken east of the Cascades, the photos of the Dippers in the water were taken in the proposed monument, the first from the overlook at Yukwah Campground.



Taking lessons from wildfires

Five years after the 2020 fire, I recently had an opportunity to visit the Breitenbush River area that has, until recently, been closed because of the Lionshead and Beechie Creek fires. It is, of course a sobering thing to see the burn. There is a great debate going on now about how to “save” the forest from such fires. The dominant view among those who think of the forest as a commodity is that we should increase logging of the forest, alleging that would “solve” the problem of wildfires. They would like to change the idea attributed to Smoky Bear to one that says: “Only logging can prevent wildfires.” This is the thinking behind the recent effort to change the roadless area conservation rule.

Of course, this view is flat wrong. The major wildfires of 2020 burned wilderness areas and privately owned clear cuts and monoculture plantations. Wildfires are a natural part of the Northwest Cascades. Wildfires occurred before there was any logging, and they occur now in private, “sustainably logged” areas as well as in federal lands. We are now in a situation where the regular dry cycle of the weather is exacerbated by the increased temperatures of climate change.

Between 2003 and 2023, the global frequency of extreme fire events has escalated to 2.2 times its original rate, and the average intensity of major fires has risen to 2.3 times its previous level. Zhang, et al. 2025 <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/17/6/2680>. This has nothing to do with levels of “treatment” (logging). As a matter of fact, studies show an inverse relationship between forest management (logging) and fire severity: more severe fires occur in more managed forests. Bradley, et.al. 2016, (<https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ecs2.1492>).

Fires release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, but the burned trees (alive or dead) retain well over 90% carbon in the above-ground forest. Logging and milling is very carbon intensive (produces a lot of carbon dioxide). While some of the carbon in the cut trees is saved and stored in the lumber used for construction, more carbon is added to the atmosphere than is saved in the lumber. A recent comprehensive study by Oregon State University researchers found that “harvest-related emissions are five to seven times that of the fire emissions in Oregon.” Beverly Law, quoted in <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/12/14/oregon-scientists-urge-forest-protection-to-fight-climate-change/>

Fires are not the disaster that some think. Some of the carbon of a forest is lost during a fire, but much remains. All of the above-ground carbon is removed by a clearcut. We have long known that many species of mammals and birds benefit from moving to an early seral forest with lots of snags. Recent studies have found that the diversity of streams is increased after a major fire. <https://www.opb.org/article/2025/08/29/stream-health-oregon-cascades-labor-day-fires/>

Compare these two pictures of “devastation.” Which is more devastated?



You may not be surprised to hear that the Trump administration and the Republicans in Congress have all sorts of proposals to make it easier to do more logging on federal land. Whether it is gutting the laws and rules such as NEPA (<https://www.vaildaily.com/news/trump-national-environmental-policy-act-big-changes-colorado/>) or the Endangered Species Act (<https://www.opb.org/article/2025/05/22/think-out-loud-endangered-species-act-harm-definition/>) that help protect parts of the forest, or invoking national security to justify more logging, or planning on selling away federal land (<https://www.yahoo.com/news/changes-senate-republicans-budget-proposal-120219087.html>), or ending the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, there are a boatload

of proposals to end even the present limited protections for federal land.

When you visit a burned area, even the most severely burned areas, you can usually find unburned patches. It may be only a few trees in acres of burned trees, but you can find them throughout every burn. You'll also notice that of the forest that did burn, it burned at very different intensities, which create a biologically rich landscape mosaic.



The next few years may seem like there is a political wildfire, burning down all the things that have protected a portion of our forests. Those of us who love the woods as something more than stored lumber, who support the idea of a Douglas-Fir National Monument or other protections, need now to think of those small unburned and lightly burned areas remaining after the most intense wildfire. We need to resist the political wildfire now and remain alive for that day when we can start a new forest. Write to your Congresspersons. Even though they may be in the minority, the volume of opinions helps them establish or firm up their resistance. Write to the agencies working to change (gut) the rules, objecting to their mistakes. They may not listen to common sense, but common sense in the record may help entities who choose to sue to block the rule changes, and may encourage future Congresses to fight back. If you can, provide financial support to groups who will sue to block the changes.

Milo Mecham, President