Deforestation Of The Pacific Northwest Essay, Research Paper

Deforestation of the Pacific Northwest

One of the most controversial areas associated with the global problem

of deforestation is the Pacific Northwest of the US. The problem can be broken

down into several issues that all tie in together. These include the near

extinction of the Northern Spotted Owl, the “business” aspect of logging versus

the environmental aspect, and the role of the government in this problem.

In 1973, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was passed. This enabled the

Dept. of Commerce and Dept. of the Interior to place species, either land or

marine, as either threatened or endangered. Under these terms species could no

longer be hunted, collected, injured or killed. The northern spotted owl falls

under the more serious condition of being endangered. Also, the bill forbids

federal agencies to fund or carry out any activity that would threaten the

species or its’ habitat. It is the latter part of the bill that causes the

controversy. Under the ESA, loggers should not be allowed to cut down the old-

growth of the forest. The old growth of a forest includes the largest and

oldest trees, living or dead. In the case of the North Coast forests, this

includes some thousand-year-old stands with heights above three-hundred feet and

diameters of more than ten feet.

In 1990, the number of spotted owls dropped to 2000 breeding pairs. The

preservation of any species contributes to the biodiversity of an area. In an

ecosystem, the absence of one species creates unfavorable conditions for the

others. The absence of the spotted owl could have a significant effect on the

North Coast forest ecosystem. In order to send the owl population in the right

direction, the major problem for their decline would have to be remedied ? loss

of habitat. This fact combined with the owls’ short life expectancy and late age

of breeding only exacerbates the problem. When loggers remove old growth the

owl loses habitat for its’ food, housing, as well as protection from predators.

Approximately ninety percent of the forests in the Pacific Northwest have

already been harvested. In order to protect the current owl population, the

remaining forests would have to be preserved, but this would have a serious

negative economical effect. Such a decision would effect jobs, regional economy,

as well as the lifestyle of loggers. With such a great effect, to stop the

cutting seems to be an exercise in futility. On the other hand, by continuing

the destruction of the owls’ habitat, the only suitable habitat that will remain

will be in the confines of a zoo. Seeing an animal in an artificial environment

can certainly not be compared to witnessing an animal in its’ natural

environment. In my opinion, there can be no price put on the existence of any

species on this planet, plant or animal. To think that money has become such an

influential part of our society that companies are willing to sacrifice a

species in order to make a profit. The northern spotted owl is only one of many

species that are on the verge of extinction do to deforestation. Another

important consideration in the deforestation of the Pacific North Coast is

logging as a business. The investors of a publicly owned company sole concern

is the growth of their stock, and this for lumber companies is accomplished by

harvesting trees in the most efficient and cost effective manner. Clear-cutting

old growth is the best way to accomplish this. This approach leads to quick

financial gain but is not best for the long-term or the trees. It is the

companies that use this process that is the most unfavorable to the forests and

contributes to deforestation the most. Another approach uses wise management

techniques to maximize the long-term profit of the forest. Guest speaker Jerry

Howe would fall into this category as a private land owner. As a land

“steward,” he believes he can do what he wants with his land. The term

“steward” is used to mean that no one can truly “own” the land, it can only be

used or under the care of a person. He uses clear-cutting when it has the

smallest effect on the environment, he also uses strip cutting in which the

forest is cut in strips to provide a buffer zone and is more aesthetically

pleasing. His methods are better for the forest due to conservative forestry

practices that speed up the regeneration of the forest. This produces a more

sustainable yield than clear-cutting alone. While neither of these techniques is

good for the environment, using wise management practices can still produce a

large profit while conserving precious ecosystems. For large companies, such as

Pacific Lumber, to switch to using conservative forestry practices would take

more than proposals by environmentalists and the Forest Service to help the

environment to change their current ways. For these companies to switch, it

would cost them money to follow the more sustainable approach while also

decreasing their profit due to less tree cutting in the short-term. In my

opinion, it is up to the government to set standards that force these companies

to switch by making regulations more strict as well as a greater number of them

if need be. The role of the government in the deforestation issue has been two-

sided. This is evident in the several different stands Congress has chosen on

the issue. These include: 1) The preservation of the forests for the public,

such as the aesthetic values of them 2) The conservation of the forests to

support the timber industry in the future 3) The protection of the right of a

private land owner to cut all the trees down they want, with no limit. With

indecisiveness like this there is no hope of setting regulations that protect

the forests. On one side of the government lies the “alphabet soup” of federal

agencies set up to find solutions to questions like, “What is the sustainable

yield of a forest?” These same agencies also decide where taxpayers’ money goes

within the logging business. In some cases, the money subsidizes the large

companies for things such as logging roads in order to keep the cost of paper

and other tree products down. These same companies ship their lumber to Japan

for milling before they are sold back to the United States at a higher price.

Not only does the public lose money in this process but it costs Americans a

number of jobs. On the other hand, agencies have made efforts to prevent

deforestation. Members of the Forest Service educate not only the large

companies, but the private landowners as well. It is the private owners who own

sixty percent if the forests being harvested. By helping to show how

conservative forestry techniques can be made efficient as well as more

profitable, they are helping to diminish the rate of deforestation. If more

money was spent on research and the spread of new and better techniques, then

the taxpayers’ money would be better spent. In conclusion, there are several

aspects of deforestation in the Pacific Northwest that need to be evaluated

before the situation becomes irreversible. If the current harvesting techniques

continue, our children will be missing more than the spotted owl.