

Timber sales stalled as suits hit BLM

September 03, 2012

By [Sam Wheeler](#)
for the Mail Tribune

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is facing four lawsuits in U.S. District Court in Medford over a half-dozen timber sales conservation groups say violate federal land management and environmental policy.

Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, Oregon Wild, and Cascadia Wildlands filed the latest complaint Wednesday against the BLM asking the court to block its MC Thin Timber Sale in the Conde Creek Drainage northwest of Howard Prairie Lake.

That timber sale, containing about 1 million board feet, fails to meet the National Environmental Policy Act because it threatens at-risk salmon populations in the Little Butte Creek Watershed and proposes to log nesting, roosting and foraging habitat of the endangered northern spotted owl, said George Sexton, conservation director for the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center.

The same conservation groups on June 29 filed a similar lawsuit against the BLM over three timber sales in part of the Rio Climax Forest Management Project.

Those sales contain about 2.5 million board feet of timber to be harvested from the slopes of Grizzly Peak and portions of the Little Butte Creek watershed.

The primary concerns with the Rio Climax sales are similar to those regarding MC Thin, Sexton said, including the construction of new roads and harvesting of some trees larger than 30 inches in diameter, and those that contain mistletoe.

He said mistletoe provides excellent nesting habitat for the spotted owl and endangered Pacific fisher.

In addition to those suits, KS Wild, Oregon Wild and Cascadia Wildlands joined conservation groups Soda Mountain Wilderness Council and **Center for Biological Diversity** in two separated lawsuits filed against the BLM to stop the 3.2-million-board-feet **Cottonwood timber sale** in the area of Jenny Creek between Highway 66 and Howard Prairie Lake, as well as the 2.6-million-board-feet **Sampson Cove timber sale** mostly north and south of Table Mountain.

For each timber sale, the BLM completed a NEPA analysis and determined that no significant environmental impact would arise from the logging, records show.

Conservation groups filed protests — all of which were denied — on each of the timber sales prior to filing lawsuits, records show.

None of the sales can be awarded until the pending lawsuits are settled or decided upon by a federal judge, but they all have been sold.

Rio Power, with about 631,000 board feet of timber, was bought by Farmer Logging of Talent for \$38,497; Rio Rumble, with about 1.1 million board feet of timber, was purchased by Rough & Ready Lumber Co. of Cave Junction for \$86,727; Rio Sag, with about 787,000 board feet, was purchased by Greg E. Liles Logging of Medford for about \$37,000; **Cottonwood was purchased by Murphy Company of Eugene, for about \$173,674**; and **Sampson Cove** and MC Thin were **purchased by Boise Cascade LLC**, of Boise, Idaho for about **\$255,000**, and \$186,246, respectively.

In each lawsuit, the conservation groups ask the court to block the timber sales until the BLM carries out more thorough environmental analyses of the units and complies with NEPA and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, alleging it doesn't.

"In all of the Ashland Resource Area timber sales at issue, the BLM is logging old-growth trees "... instead of doing it in a way that restores forest values through a sustainable, productive, and environmentally conscious timber program," Sexton said. "We don't want to be obstructions, we don't want to just say 'no.' We understand. We use wood fiber too. We use books, I live in a wood house. All we're asking is just don't log the old-growth trees."

John Gerritsma, field manager of the Ashland Resource Area for the Medford BLM, said, he is "perplexed," by this year's slough of lawsuits brought against the timber sales he approved.

"When we put out a decision, we do the best that we can to make sure that a project is in appliance with all the laws and regulations "... all of our sales meet the criteria for the Northwest Forest Plan, and Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan," Gerritsma said. "And, we're going to keep putting out timber sales that provide timber to local mills, that generate jobs and receipt to the counties."

Sexton said, as far as timber management practices go, the BLM's Ashland Resource Area is stuck in the 1950s and "addicted to logging old-growth."

Sexton said, conservation groups offered to drop the lawsuit surrounding the Rio Climax timber sales if the BLM agreed not to harvest trees over 30 inches in diameter at breast height.

Of the three timber sales in Rio Climax , about 17,550 trees total will be cut down and hauled to mills, said Kristi Mastrofini, natural resource staff administrator for the Medford District. Of those, about 174 — less than 1 percent — are more than 30 inches in diameter at breast height, she said.

Additionally, Gerritsma said, for the 11 timber sales the Ashland Resource Area has sold and completed in the past three years, the average breast-height diameter of trees harvested is 14.6 inches. In the same span, the agency built 2.6 miles of new road and decommissioned 6.5 of existing road, he said.