

# Siuslaw News

SATURDAY

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## Forum focused on herbicide use in Siuslaw



Stakeholders listen and take part in the Siuslaw Watershed Council pesticide forum.

*Forum looked at what, where, how  
and by whom.*

STORY AND PHOTO BY WESLEY VOTH  
For the Siuslaw News

A crowd of people sat in the Mapleton School gymnasium for nearly four hours on Wednesday, April 4, listening to the status of herbicides and their use in the Siuslaw Watershed. The issue has been so emotionally charged in public meetings that the hosting organization—Siuslaw Watershed Council—spent two years coming to agreement on the right place and format. March 28 was the first of at least two forums; the next is scheduled for April 25.

# Watershed

Local professional facilitator Caroline Estes of Alpha Farms moderated the evening; questions were entertained only at the end of the evening, and only in writing.

Twelve presenters reported and then served on a question-answering panel at the end, representing the chemical industry, Environmental Protection Agency, Oregon Department of Forestry, conservation lands, county and state roads, private timber companies, Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, and the environmental organizations Forestland Dwellers and Oregon Toxic Alliance.

Bruce Kelpas of Helena Chemical Corporation listed the 9 main chemical compounds used as herbicides under many different brand names, and explained that they are

See **FORUM 7A**

## Forum

from 1A

used primarily in reforestation when the growth rate is being set for a tree in its first couple of years, and for noxious weed control. Karl Arne of the EPA discussed pesticide registration and the data requirements for chemicals to be approved for use in forest and aquatic environments.

He acknowledged that despite intensive study, there remains both a set of "known unknowns" and "unknown unknowns," and in the question period later advocated caution in any use of herbicides. Bradley Knotts of ODF talked about the current set of rules for non-federal forestlands designed to ensure that chemicals do not occur in soil, air, or water in quantities that are injurious.

Phil Adams & David Cramsey of Roseberg Resources displayed graphs that showed 36% of Oregon's forestlands as industrial timber, which are responsible for 85% of current Oregon timber harvesting. They stated that Roseberg--and they believe others as well--are in managed timber for the long term future, and therefore are determined to follow practices that are good for the forest and associated watersheds. They also attempted to demonstrate that their application of herbicides was careful and necessary.

Mike Northrup & Dan Segotta of the USFS and Chuck Fairchild of BLM said they are focused on noxious weed control, not currently using aerial spraying, and using hand spraying only where mechanical methods have failed. Dennis Joll of ODOT referred to charts he had brought of state roads within the watershed showing detailed analysis of vegetation condition and waterways along every mile of highway, and what the state is doing to make sure that weed control hits only its target. He said that it is possible to get a permit good for one year to stop the spraying along your land. Orin Schumacher of Lane County roads said county spraying here at this point is focused on eradicating knotweed. Andy Reasoner of McKenzie River Trust also spoke.

The last speaker was Jan Wroncy of Forestland Dwellers and Oregon Toxic Alliance, also an organic farmer in the area, and she showed a map of the watershed with 40 acre sized grids highlighted where herbicide has been applied since 1990. She strongly questioned the safety of herbicides, stressing the issue of chemicals reaching groundwater and not breaking down, and being applied to class M streams--those too small to be fish bearing--but emptying into ones that are only a few feet farther down, which is contrary to contended safe use.

A few folk trickled out over the course of the evening, but most hung in until the end, perhaps to hear their questions answered. While most of the presentations were received in respectful silence with polite applause at the end, at several points there was loud murmuring or interruptions; one such moment was when the representative from Roseburg was attempting to show a short video clip of helicopter spraying to demonstrate that the spray falls straight down, leaving no vapor in the air, and several audience members disputed the claim. Another was during the question and answer portion when the questioner was unsatisfied by the answer, and a group of people talked about an industrial timber company in the area that had left bags from the herbicide application behind after spraying. Audible gasps could be heard when Jan Wroncy showed her map, and she received the warmest response from the crowd.

Audience concerns appeared to be human health, despite this being outside the discussion, and the loss of jobs from clearing being done chemically rather than employing local people to do it manually. When figures were given as to what it cost to spray per acre, several murmured that they would be happy to have the manual work for the same price per acre. Half life of the chemicals varied greatly according to condition--one that is broken down quickly by light breaks down very slowly in ground water. Type M streams--smaller than those that are fish-bearing streams--are not excluded from direct application, yet often in this area those are only a few feet from emptying into the larger streams, so how can this be safe? One question asked about penalties for infractions of the rules, and Bradley Knotts of ODF said that most of the limited enforcement money was focused on timber harvesting effects on fish.

Todd Miller, coordinator of SWC and host of the evening, reiterated his opening remarks that he was proud that the watershed could successfully host such a forum, with high quality representatives willing to come and area residents willing to give a respectful hearing. He added that since only two-thirds of the questions could be answered in the time given, all the questions would be entered into the record, and he would try to have them all given answers. This forum leads the way to the next, entitled: *Herbicide Environmental Fate & Toxicology in Aquatic Ecosystems*.