

Shasta Costa Revisited:



How the Forest Service's New Perspectives Flagship Ran Aground

By Jim Britell

Sometimes in life when one has failed at an important task it can be a consolation to act as a good "bad example" for others. During the last two years I have been involved with a major planning effort by the Forest Service to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Shasta Costa basin, a key roadless area in the Siskiyou National Forest. This effort was to be a flagship for "New Perspectives," a new approach by the Forest Service to managing public participation and incorporating heightened environmental sensitivity into forest planning. While the project began with a high degree of enthusiasm and cooperation between the environmental community and the Forest

Service, the project has deteriorated to an impasse. This is my view of what happened.

In the Spring of 1990, Siskiyou Forest supervisor Ron McCormick and Gold Beach district ranger Kathy Johnson brought the agency and the environmental community together to plan a project that would take a new approach to logging. McCormick and Johnson proposed an unprecedented engagement between activists and Forest Service staff to plan the future of Shasta Costa—a football-shaped, 25,000-acre roadless area in the controversial North Kalmiopsis, between the Kalmiopsis and Wild Rogue Wildemeses.

The purpose of the Shasta Costa "New Perspectives" project was to develop a plan to enter the basin and lay out timber sales for the first three of the ten years in the Siskiyou

Jim Britell, a contributing editor to *Forest Watch*, is the Conservation Chair for Kalmiopsis Audubon Society. He lives in Port Orford on the southern Oregon Coast.

Forest Plan. In the Siskiyou Forest Plan, this basin is scheduled for 32 million board feet (mmbf) of logging through 1998. The Shasta Costa plan held out an opportunity to end clearcutting and redefine logging plans from the ground up, with clear protection for existing biological values.

With forest activists facing ecological and political disaster on all fronts, the Shasta Costa project offered a way, not only to protect the values of the area, but to put into practice a highly visible example of sustainable forestry.

It was clear from the outset that the Siskiyou Forest intended an experiment of national significance. Significant support from the agency's national officials suggested that a win-win solution in Southwest Oregon might lead to a peaceful revolution in national forest management across the nation.

At the time, forest activists were in dire political straits. Though the North Kalmiopsis had been the focus of intense conflict for more than a decade, conservationists had been steadily losing the battles and the forests. On the other hand, the Siskiyou Forest had been relatively open to environmental concerns. So we decided to participate. Actually, what choice did we have?

The Challenge of Change

Even with strong commitment from progressive Forest Service personnel and activists, however, both sides in the Shasta Costa planning effort faced great hurdles.

If the project was to succeed, the Forest Service would have to implement a three-year project of enlightened forestry. Lower timber outputs would have to be reconciled with the ten-year Siskiyou Forest Plan's goal of high timber volume (again, 32 million board feet)—a target based on the clearcut model and resource inventories that were, at best, extremely optimistic. Implementing the Forest Plan was, and remains, a core organizational value for the agency.

For our part, forest activists would have to cooperate in setting up environmentally sensitive timber sales within a roadless area. The inviolability of roadless areas was, and continues to be, a core value for us.

With these and many other issues in mind, activists and Siskiyou staff set to work. The Forest Service was laying out five alternatives for the basin, from low to intensive logging, as legally required in any EIS. But during the planning sessions, an alternative began to take shape which was unlike anything ever seen before.

A New Path Opens

Alternative "C" was to be a total departure from traditional approaches. It is the only alternative on which forest activists worked. Alternative "C" would provide for entering the basin without roading its roadless portion; almost no new roads would be built; old roads would be closed; much of the volume would be realized by thinning using helicopter logging; some clearcuts would be used, but of only a few acres in size. Environmental foresters would work with Forest Service foresters to lay out the units and select the trees. A volume of about 11 million board feet would be offered, not much less than that scheduled under the existing Forest Plan. An inventory of extirpated species, and a review of reintroduction prospects, would be done. In short, under alternative "C" the basin



Forest Service

would be more roadless after the entry than it is now.

Workshops and tours would be held to familiarize important segments of the environmental community with what was happening at every step. The organizations that file lawsuits and appeal timber sales would be kept fully informed so that appeals and litigation could be avoided.

Substantial resources of the activist community nationwide were mobilized to support this project, and ultimately we contributed around a thousand hours of staff time and some thousands of dollars of direct and indirect support to the development of alternative "C."

During this period just before release of the draft EIS, I began to notice that the progressive climate within the Forest Service was deteriorating. Information was also beginning to dry up. During the last two months of the draft's preparation both Kathy Johnson and Ron McCormick left the Siskiyou Forest—leaving key final decisions in the hands of temporary acting managers with no

continuity on the project.

A Trojan Horse?

The draft did select alternative "C" as the Preferred Alternative. It avoided logging most Ancient Forests; and proposed thinning and selection cutting, and helicopter yarding, to remove 11 mmbf over three years. New road construction within the roadless area was minimal (2.5 miles); more roads would be closed (12 miles) than built. The plan included a model study to inventory extirpated species, and analyze the basin's habitat to see what species might still be supported. All that was exactly what had been planned.

But the report contained an unpleasant surprise at the very end. Appendix "F" contained detailed maps of logging, including new roads, that would take place in the Basin in the years after the Shasta Costa plan. The purpose was "... ensuring that the full compliment of decade outputs are achieved ... timber outputs projected for 1991-1998 ... (in the Forest Plan) are 32.9 million board feet." The appendix laid out the logging units and roads for all alternatives from the end of the period covered by the draft EIS to the end of the Forest Plan, 1994-98. As I understood it, if the timber quota for the basin (32 mmbf) was not realized by the end of the Shasta Costa Project (11 mmbf); then any shortfall (21 mmbf) would be made up before the completion of the Forest Plan.

There was never a hint, during all our planning meetings, that the planning team was developing a detailed logging plan for the "out years" for *any* alternative. We quite naturally assumed that, if the basin were to be logged at all in the years after the Shasta Costa Project, it would be under the enlightened, "New Perspectives" criteria embodied in alternative "C"—which would almost certainly preclude reaching the timber volumes called for in the Forest Plan. Ample documen-

tary evidence exists that the Forest Service managers understood that the Shasta Costa Project necessitated reopening the Forest Plan and reducing the timber volumes, and that this was conveyed to activists, and the media, during deliberations leading to the draft. I had been assured several times that the discrepancy between timber outputs under the Project and Forest Plan would be reconciled by reopening the Plan and reducing the Forest's timber targets (at 160 mmbf annually).

On the other hand, the Forest was under pressure from several sources to produce the timber volumes projected by the Forest Plan. Although activists were not involved in the meetings, Siskiyou staff had been working with the local timber industry as well, and had apparently assured industry that Plan volumes *would* be met under the Shasta Costa Project.

Reduction of both Shasta Costa's and the entire Forest's quota was essential to insure that other parts of the Forest would not experience increased logging to compensate for any shortfall created by the lower volumes anticipated in the Shasta Costa basin. Appendix "F" revealed not only that the shortfall would be "caught up" by accelerated logging in the out years of the plan, but that the catch-up logging would occur in the Basin itself. Appendix "F" thus transformed the draft EIS into a ruse to enter a roadless area with concessions to environmentalists in only the first three years.

What About the Fish?

During the comment period following the release of the draft EIS, several problems arose which raised serious questions about the integrity of Alternative "C" itself. Despite the premise of open planning fundamental to the whole project, it was only at this stage that activists learned that parts of the Shasta Costa basin were not suitable for logging of any sort because of the high sensitivity of the watershed, and that the basin was a critical refuge for surviving wild fish runs that would be threatened by logging.

Consulting with independent scientists, forest activists discovered that much of the Shasta Costa Basin was classified as "high watershed sensitivity." Some of the planned units were found to be located in these areas. The map showing areas of "high watershed impact" was not published in the draft EIS. When asked for the supporting analysis of watershed and sedimentation impacts the Forest Service refused to furnish key documents, pleading workload pressures. Privately, I was told that the technical analysis to support the draft's

Shasta Costa: *The Original Principles*

- no fragmentation of big pieces of intact forest
- no clear cuts (by whatever name)
- protection of fisheries
- protecting of important wildlife corridors
- no new roads in roadless areas
- existing roads to be closed
- extirpated species inventoried and reintroduced

assumptions about watershed impacts were found, on our inquiry, to be incomplete and inadequate, and that the planning team had to rush to prepare and peer review these materials. Needless to say, this should have been done well before the draft was released. Failure to make these documents available was the reason the Forest extended the comment period on the draft EIS.

During the final weeks of the comment period we realized that the project posed significant problems to remnant wild fish runs. Decades of public and private clearcutting have eliminated spawning beds on the main stems of most rivers in Southern Oregon; roadless areas like Shasta Costa are the last refugia for wild fish. In his comments on the draft, ecologist Chris Frissell wrote, "... Shasta Costa may be among the last ecological refugia for diverse aquatic communities ... (it) could serve as the last possible colonization source for reestablishment of Coho (salmon) populations."

Despite a regional crisis in wild fish populations, no comprehensive analysis of the impacts on fish of logging in the Shasta Costa basin has ever been done.

Intimations of Institutional Disaster

I knew this project was in deep trouble when, in one of my first conversations with an acting supervisor, he said blandly, "Well, Shasta Costa merely implements the Forest Plan." Between transfers, retirements and promotions, the project's institutional memory was disappearing.

When the permanent ranger and supervisor finally came on duty they walked into the the middle of an acrimonious dispute. They did what any good manager does: they supported their people. At that point communications with the Forest virtually ceased. The next thing we heard, a summit meeting of environmentalists, timber industry, scientists and affected counties had been announced.

The Medford Summit: Collapse of the Ecological Alternative

On January 30th, 1991, the parties met in Medford. Environmentalists began the meeting totally in the dark about what the Forest Service planned to do. We were in for a big, bad surprise. The Forest Service unveiled a new approach to

Devolution of the Shasta Costa Design Criteria

Fact Sheet: Shasta Costa Timber Sales and Integrated Resource Projects, Siskiyou National Forest 7/91

"The FEIS preferred Alternative is based on design criteria associated with the Preferred Alternative C of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)..."

Letter to "Partners" from Siskiyou NF Supervisor J. Michael Lunn, dated 6/13/91

"The FEIS Preferred Alternative is based on the design criteria identified in the DEIS Preferred Alternative"

Excerpt from Alternative C (Preferred) in the Draft EIS

"Harvest activity would be designed and scheduled to ... *maintain the existing large blocks of old-growth forest during implementation of this alternative.*" Chapter II pg. 30 (emphasis added)

Excerpts from Alternative SC (Preferred) in the final EIS

"Harvest activities would be designed and scheduled to *reduce fragmentation of old-growth habitat.*" Chap. II pg. 64 (emphasis added)

Shasta Costa, one which abandoned many of the the desirable features of the old plan and violated the design criteria of Alternative "C" (see sidebar). The new approach reflected still more bad news: as we were beginning to suspect, the timber volumes projected under "C" had never been more than a hopeful fiction.

It became clear in that meeting and in subsequent discussions that before the draft was issued the planners had not actually gone out on the ground and looked at the proposed units. When they did look, after the draft had been released, fully 6 of the 11 million board feet in the draft had to be abandoned.

This apparently left the planning team with a difficult choice: either keep the principles of the project and cut the timber volume; or admit that environmentally sensitive logging could not meet Forest Plan volumes. They did neither.

Since each alternative had different cutting units, they went back to the other alternatives to come up with units to replace the ones dropped from "C." They called these replacements, for purposes of the summit, "building blocks." But the units in other alternatives were not developed under the environmentally sensitive criteria of "C." For example, one of the "building blocks" put a road into the core of the ancient forest, fragmenting it. Altogether, the revised proposal was nothing short of a disaster. It would have: Logged



Forest Service

on 600 acres of old growth, not 100 as in the draft; Built more roads, and roaded the core of the roadless area; Retreated from the commitment to close old roads; Abandoned most of the concept of helicopter thinning; Changed most of the units in the original proposal. Only 5 million board feet of the original 11 would be retained from the preferred alternative; Increased the total timber volume from 11 to 15 million board feet; Introduced a one hundred acre unit called an "aggregated" cutting unit that would take about 60% of the trees; Fragmented more than the original plan.

As we sat, stunned, amid the wreckage of months of hard work, with the plan to road the core of Shasta Costa before the group on a flip chart, someone on the timber side of the table asked if the environmental community planned to go to court over Shasta Costa. One of our group said that if this was what the Forest Service planned for roadless areas then of course we would sue. We were asked for a show of hands that agreed: we all raised our hands.

To my knowledge, this exchange was the first time anyone in the environmental community had suggested that we would sue over this project. Nonetheless, a stream of accusations flowed from the timber industry and some in the Forest Service, charging that we had negotiated in bad faith. After this disastrous meeting the Forest again went into a "black box" mode until the final

EIS was released six months later.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement

The FEIS answers none of our concerns. Following the "Summit Proposal," it creates a brand new alternative "SC" and selects it as the Preferred Alternative. Compared to "C," it doubles the amount of roads, quadruples the ancient forest to be cut, and increases the projected cut to 13 million board feet. The draft alternative "C" design criteria to "maintain the existing large blocks of old-growth habitat." Although it avoids large clearcuts, the FEIS sets the Shasta Costa roadless area on a course that will fragment and log its ancient forests, destroy its wild character, and dramatically reduce its value

as habitat to threatened species of wildlife, including fish.

The new leadership's basic unfamiliarity with the Shasta Costa Project has led to embarrassing mistakes by the Forest, which have made officials more and more defensive. For example, at one point the Forest tried to respond to charges that a "bait and switch" had occurred by making an announcement that there had been no change in the design criteria. A cursory look at the key pages of each document shows that this is not true (see sidebar).

On another occasion, top Siskiyou staff held a field trip with the planning team to brief Congressman Jontz on the sensitive way one of the units was to be logged. I had to point out that they were in the wrong unit. The unit we were standing in was a planned clear cut. Even worse, the unit had been the site of a meeting between the early Forest Service planning team members and activists, in which we had decided that the unit should be turned into a nature walk. No Forest Service people present had any knowledge or record of that meeting.

Shasta Costa: Changes Between Draft & Final EIS's

	Draft EIS		Final EIS	
	92-93	92-98	92-93	92-98
"Harvest" volume (million board feet)	11.2	32.9	13.4	32.9
New road construction (Miles)	2.5	5.0	5.1	10.2
Old Growth Forest reduction (Acres)	92	798	342	1048
Old Growth Forest reduction (%)	-1	-10	-4	-14
Interior Old Growth Forest reduction (%)	-4	-20	-10	-33
Habitat connection reduced (%)	none	-15	none	-31
<i>Number of Wildlife populations reduced by more than 20%</i>				
Birds	2	12	3	13
Mammals	2	6	3	7
Amphibians	1	4	3	6

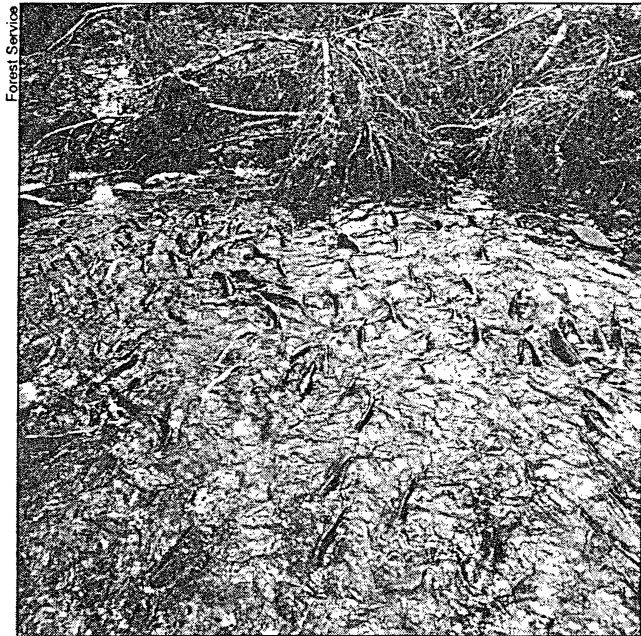
Enter the Consultant

After the FEIS was issued there were even more hard feelings between the environmental community and the Forest Service. It would have been easy to blast the agency for bad faith, but that would not salvage this opportunity fast slipping away.

Until now, I and the other forest activists who worked on this project have tried to avoid public comments about our problems—but for one instance where I gave a critical speech about Shasta Costa to a Forest Service audience which, to my chagrin, included two reporters. In fact, we agreed with the Forest Service that it might be useful for them to hire a fact finder. A consultant was selected (by the agency, with activists' concurrence) to chronicle what went wrong and possibly get the project back on track.

Unfortunately, the consultant's report basically says "mistakes were made;" the Forest Service probably should have communicated better, and all parties think they got screwed and the other side showed bad faith. The report is lacking in context, background, and chronology; only someone intimately familiar with the project can even follow it. It's principal recommendation is that if the Forest Service wants to succeed with such projects in the future it should hire consultants to shepherd the process from beginning to end.

When I questioned the brevity and superficiality of the report the consultant said he was told to keep the interview list short and make only a two or three page report. The Forest Service insists they asked for a brief report because we were pressing for the study to be done quickly. In the end we have a report that took three months to complete and does little to



Forest Service

New Perspectives is not New Forestry

There has been a lot of confusion about what New Perspectives is, and how it relates to traditional forest planning. The Shasta Costa Project has helped me to understand that "New Perspectives" does not necessarily mean "no clearcuts," or lower volume, or a lighter touch on the landscape. It is merely a more elaborate public participation process prior to decision-making. More resources are invested in developing alternatives, more scientific facts are considered, and public involvement is more thorough. But if the Shasta Costa Project is any guide, there may be nothing fundamentally new about "New Perspectives."

resuscitate the original project.

Some Final Thoughts on the Process

Some of us thought Shasta Costa would be a realistic alternative to the devastationist/preservationist impasse. But if a million-dollar demonstration model can be sacrificed for a few million board feet of timber, as I fear it will be, then what hope is there for forests far removed from the spotlight?

It is very important that the breakthroughs embodied in alternative "C" of the draft EIS not be buried in the confusion and recriminations that have overtaken this project. The explicit and implicit design criteria of the original alternative "C," if given the force of law (possibly through new regulations), can bring an end to the war in the woods with, if not a win-win solution, at least neither side losing. Nor is alternative "C" radical. It provides a path from the clearcut/plantation model to truly sustainable forestry, and puts into practice concepts that Forest Service professionals taught environmentalists in the first place.

Any hope that Shasta Costa represented a fundamental shift in attitude by the Forest Service seems to have been dashed. To be fair, it is possible that in the final act of Shasta Costa, the upcoming Record Of Decision, the supervisor could surprise everyone. But for now, it appears that (as usual) Andy Kerr of ONRC called this one accurately at the very beginning when he declared the Shasta Costa planning effort a "bureaucratic solution to a perceived public relations problem." So, to those environmentalists who told me from the beginning that local activists were just being used for Forest Service public relations purposes, and to activist friends who said all along that the only way to stop the deforestation of the Siskiyou Forest is to create a National Park, I have to say it appears that you were right and I was wrong. FW

Note: see additional Shasta Costa articles 3/90, 7/90, 9/90, 11/90, 3/91, 7/91. Jon Lange OSU made a report on why this project went off track. Plans to log the area were subsequently abandoned.