

Crabtree: A decade's

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In April the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) formally announced plans to acquire 640 acres of threatened private land in Crabtree Valley, home of the oldest known trees in Oregon.

From utter hopelessness, things have gone full circle now for Crabtree Valley and efforts by conservationists to protect the giant old-growth trees from logging. 10 years ago, a BLM employee tipped off the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group (OSPIRG) about a fantastic stand of old growth Douglas-fir forest at the head of Crabtree Creek in Linn County.

The privately-owned section, a square mile in the heart of the 1200-acre valley, is surrounded by public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. OSPIRG, led by intern Jim Draeger, attempted to facilitate a land exchange between Willamette Industries and BLM. The off-and-on talks finally broke down after a few years.

The problem was not as one might suspect. This time, Willamette Industries was cooperative, and willing to talk, but not BLM. The private timber corporation saw the trade as desirable since the trees were extremely old (and consequently highly "defective") and this section was the only land they owned in the vicinity. An exchange would allow them to acquire some isolated BLM holdings near the company's Snow Peak Tree Farm.

The Bureau's reluctance stemmed almost exclusively from then State Director Murl Storms. He threw up procedural hurdles at every step and was successfull in blocking the trade. Finally, Willamette Industries had decided they were through waiting. In the summer of 1978 they cut 63 acres of their section, but on the edge in the least critical portion.

Fortunately, before the company

could cut more, the heavy snows arrived and prevented more damage. But it would only be a temporary reprieve. The federal government was just not interested. All appeared lost.

Draeger, after working exclusively on Crabtree for a few years, had burned out and sought re-creation in Nepal.

Then came Cameron LaFollette. The Reed College student dropped out to save Crabtree Valley. A descendent of Robert "Fightin' Bob" LaFollette, the great progressive statesman from Wisconsin, this LaFollette also refused to say die.

An advantage to the federal-state system of government is that if you fail with one side, try the other. Cameron LaFollette traded in her khaki green fatigue pants and Birkenstocks for more respectable wear and took her case to the State Legislature.

A bill was hastily drafted to have the state condemn the private land in Crabtree Valley. Payment to Willamette Industries would be in the form of and equal valued parcels of state land. The lands specified for trade were isolated pieces of the Santiam State Forest.

It was a deal that Willamette Industries couldn't resist. The chance to consolidate ownership, acquire better tree growing land and not have to pay the political costs for cutting down the oldest known trees in Oregon was too good to refuse.

In May 1979, the House Energy and Environment Committee, chaired by Nancie Fadeley (D-Eugene) unanimously passed a bill to make Crabtree Valley a State Park. Rep. Tom Throop (D-Bend) was the principle sponsor. The full House vote was a lopsided 44-16.

In the Senate the bill also sailed through the Energy and Environment Committee chaired by Senator Ed Fadeley (D-Eugene). On the floor the bill was carried by Senator Keith Jernstedt (R-Hood

effort nears completion

River) and passed 27-2. The House repassed the bill to accept the Senate changes and it was soon on the governor's desk for signature. These startling successes were a stirring reflection of the well-organized grass roots network which lobbied individual Senators and Representatives.

Governor Victor Atiyeh, a good friend to the timber industry, just couldn't sign it. Politically, he couldn't veto it either. So he let it become law without his signature.

The bill directed the Department of Transportation (which includes the State Parks Division) to negotiate the exchange with Willamette Industries. During consideration of the bill, it was not the timber industry which objected, but the Association of Oregon Counties. The counties were very worried about establishing a precedent of using unneeded State Forest land to acquire other valuable private timber lands for public uses.

Eventually the State and Willamette Industries agreed to an exchange, but Linn County, using a provision in the exchange law, cited "unreasonable economic loss" and forced the Department to seek the approval of the Legislature to consummate the deal.

The 1981 Legislature was a far different animal than the 1979 session. The counties had done their homework. LaFollette was again able to get the House of Representatives to accept the land exchange, but ran into insurmountable difficulties in the Senate. Due to parliamentary maneuvering by Senator Dell Isham (D-Lincoln City), the bill never got out of Committee.

Willamette Industries felt it had no choice but to start up the chainsaws.

In 1980, Murl Storms was retired and was replaced by William G. Leavell. Leavell didn't display the same type or degree of bias that his predecessor and took a more objective look at the issue. He suggested to Salem Dis-

trict Manager Joe Dose that he consider acquiring the private land.

Dose circulated a proposal for public comment. The response was overwhelming in support of acquisition. Linn County, while not supporting the proposal, didn't oppose it either.

"I felt quite good about the broad-based support for the proposal," commented Salem District Manager Joe Dose.

Willamette Industries, to its credit, will be patiently and generously waiting for another logging season.

If Crabtree Valley is saved, who deserves the most credit? Many players have played critical roles at critical times. The Fadeley's, Tom Throop, a host of legislators and bureaucrats, hundreds of citizen conservationists, Willamette Industries, and even in the end those that originally opposed protection, such as Linn County.

But two individuals are true heroes in the fight to protect the 900 year old forest. Jim Draeger started with the issue when it didn't have a chance. He succeeded in educating conservationists and scientists about the sacred valley. But Murl Storms burned him out.

After that came Cameron LaFollette, who organized conservationists, scientists, bureaucrats, legislators and the public into a force to save Crabtree Valley. Her organization was, for a brief time, so tremendous, that even after failing to secure State Park status for the Valley and burning herself out as well, the issue now has a life of its own.

Through their efforts, the public came to know and love Crabtree Valley, so that even the original foes have joined with the friends of preservation to see that the valley remain unlogged. Great personal sacrifices and years of effort will hopefully soon be rewarded, and the public will be wealthier than before.