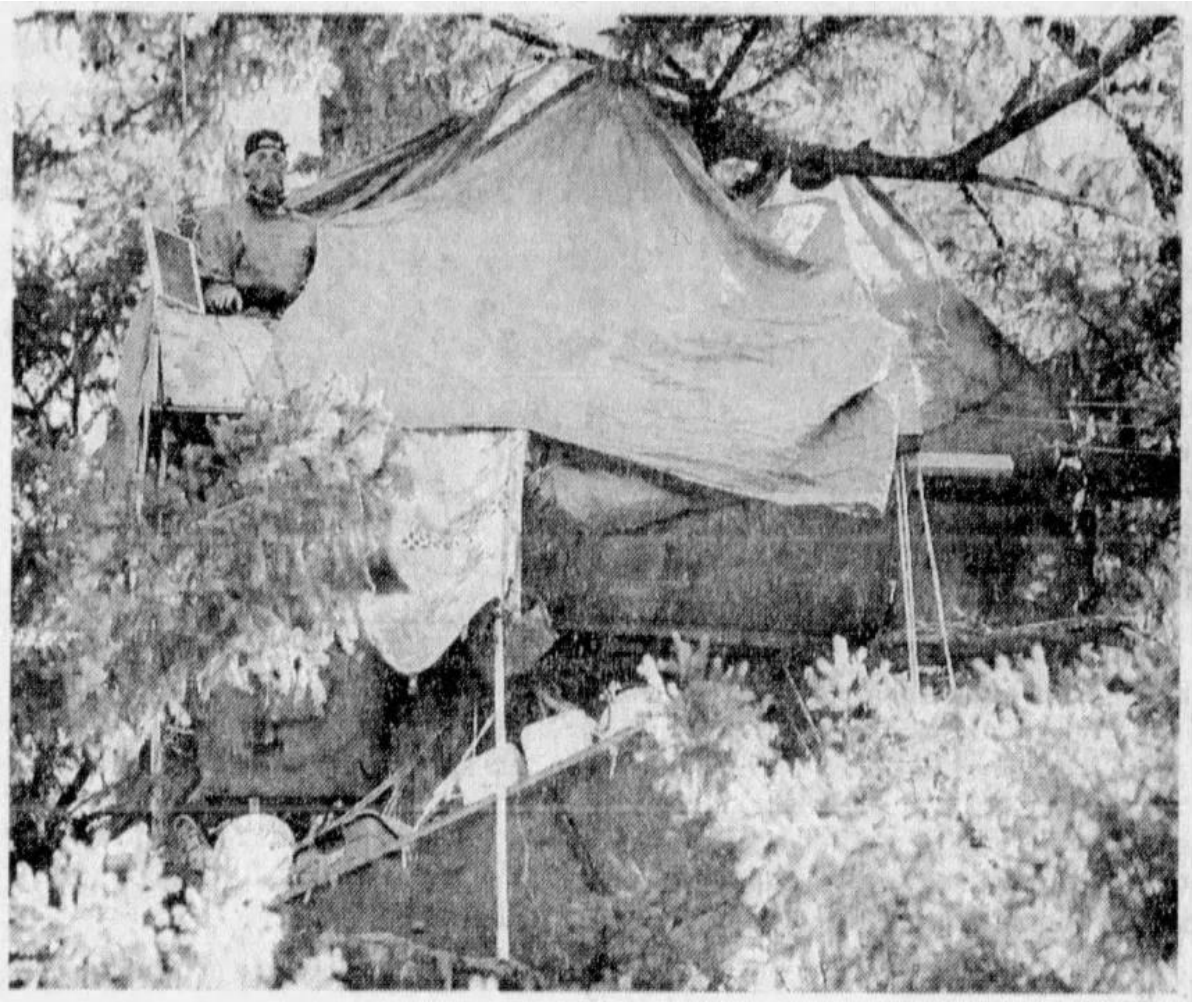


# Activists' research helps save old-growth forest

Kim Murphy

Jun 24, 2001



BRIAN DAVIES/Los Angeles Times

A tree sitter peers out from an elaborate treehouse built to prevent logging. It has since become a base camp from which environmentalists gathered evidence on endangered species. The U.S. Forest Service announced it will sharply scale back logging along Fall Creek, largely due to new wildlife surveys that were possible only from the elevated vantage point of the tree sitters.

FALL CREEK. Ore. — For more than three years, this high-altitude shantytown has been a fixture in the Willamette National Forest — an elaborate village of platforms, ropes and canvas roofs perched 200 feet in the air. on the shoulders of old firs and hemlock.

Erected to block logging of 94 acres of rare old-growth trees, the Fall Creek tree village in central Oregon has become one of the longest-running acts of civil disobedience that environmentalists have ever mounted.

Last week, it reached another milestone: The U.S. Forest Service announced it will sharply scale back logging along Fall Creek, largely due to new wildlife surveys that were possible only from the elevated vantage point of the tree sitters.

The decision affects only 51 acres of old-growth forest, but it marks an important turning point in the timber wars that have plagued the Pacific Northwest since the 1980s. For the first time, environmental activists have used their intimate acquaintance with forest biology acquired through years of living in the treetops to force a scientific reassessment of forest wildlife.

U.S. Forest Service officials said the activists discovered a number of previously unknown wildlife nests high in the trees, triggering automatic protections under federal law and forcing the government to significantly curtail logging in the Fall Creek drainage.

The environmental community has been at odds with the federal government for years over Fall Creek, which contains islands of low-elevation ancient forest of the kind that is rapidly disappearing across the American West.

Since the spring of 1998, the fight has been centered 200 feet above ground, where activists, in a tactic used throughout the federal forests over the last decade, established an interconnected network of platforms and treehouses designed to form a physical impediment to the loggers' chain saws.

The tree sitting has been marked by confrontations, with Forest Service officers making arrests, seizing protesters' camping gear, trying to starve protesters out of the trees — even bombarding the tree sitters through the night with floodlights and loud country music.

In the end, a federal judge's demand in 1999 for more and better wildlife surveys in old-growth forests prompted protesters to take on the role of scientists, capitalizing on their familiarity with the forest and their willingness to climb higher into the forest canopy than most federal biologists had dared.

At issue in the Fall Creek drainage were surveys for the red tree vole, an elusive, nocturnal mammal that dwells high on the limbs of old Douglas firs — an important food source for the spotted owl, whose diminishing numbers forced the Clinton administration in 1994 to broker the compromise known as the Northwest Forest Plan.

The pact sharply reduced logging on forests throughout the Northwest, conserving some old-growth forests, logging others and setting aside some forests to grow over the years into new old-growth reserves.

Under the plan, many of the magnificent 600-year-old trees in the Fall Creek drainage were slated for harvest.

But Judge William Dwyer's ruling in 1999 required Forest Service biologists to go into the woods and survey the area for red tree voles.

The biologists scanned the area thoroughly from the ground, climbing selected trees and locating a small number of red tree vole nests — enough to prohibit logging on a few acres.

Having lived for more than two years in the treetops of the same forest, the protesters knew there were many more nests than the biologists had tallied.

All last spring and summer, they mobilized volunteers and climbed 200 feet and higher into the trees to find hard evidence of more than 20 nests, both active and inactive, that federal scientists had missed.

Because of their findings, the Forest Service said this week it will set up buffer zones around the nests, effectively blocking logging on 51 acres of the 94-acre timber sale.

Activists said they have Unrated an additional eight nests in other areas still slated for logging, which, if verified, could cut the sale even further.

“They’ve climbed the trees, and from their vantage point, they have a better view of what’s up in the canopy of the tree. They’ve brought in samples to us, and our biologists have verified them,” said Rick Scott. Middle Fork district ranger.

“We’ve seen the campaign go from mainly roadblock-type of structures in the road, things like that, which was more confrontational-type tactics, and move toward actually gathering data to protect forest land,” said Kelly Townsend, director of the Oregon Forest Research and Education Group, which helped mobilize and train the amateur surveyors.

The tactic of tree sitting to block logging came into vogue in the 1990s. the best-known instance being Julia “Butterfly” Hill’s two-year residence in California’s Humboldt County atop a 180-foot. 1.000-year-old redwood she named Luna. Blockades and tree-sits at Oregon’s Warner Creek timber sale spanned nearly a year.

But activists say Fall Creek’s tree village, continuously occupied for three years and five months, is probably the longest-running environmental direct action in U.S. history. Protesters will probably dismantle the village soon, depending on the forest service’s final determination on logging the remaining 43 acres.

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By KIM MURPHY  
Los Angeles Times

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## Oriental Rugs

### Free Seminar!

Thurs., Oct. 4th • 7:00 P.M.  
Stickley Showroom

Hamid Kamal and Eric Rowles, foremost authorities on Oriental Rugs, will conduct a seminar at Stickley's Manlius showroom. Learn how the finest handmade Oriental Rugs are created. Take a visual tour of the master weavers' habitats and their weaving tools.



## The Ted K Archive

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The Sentinel (Pennsylvania), Jun 24, 2001, page 50.

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