

GEOHERMAL LEASING ON MT. HOOD

In 2008, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management worked together to form massive programmatic directives for expanding geothermal sourcing onto 192 million acres of public lands. Leasing applications had been piling up on land managers because there was no clear system or incentive for processing them. This effort intended to “fast-track” those existing applications and creates an easier system for processing future applications. Many of the programmatic changes that have been proposed through a Draft Environmental Impact Statement are in conflict with current management plans and in some cases would override land designations that are intended to protect areas from destructive development and extraction. In the Mt. Hood National Forest, over 9,000 acres would be opened to geothermal leasing, including approval of four existing applications by Portland General Electric.

Although geothermal is considered by most to be a renewable energy source and a necessary component to our future energy need solutions, the proposal brings up several large concerns for Bark and other public lands advocates:

TRANSMISSION LINES One of the most pressing questions in American energy debates is the issue of transmission lines. Currently, our networks of power and pipeline corridors have been created to meet sources that we are trying to move beyond, particularly international sources that come in through coastal ports and boundaries. If we are to look towards domestic, renewable energy, our energy grid will need to be retrofitted to bring source to consumer. The current proposal for geothermal leasing does not include the cumulative impacts of the needed transmission corridors for the sources to be economically viable for commercial interest. However, transmission corridors bring expansive ecosystem issues and must be considered as a part of all energy sourcing.

MASSIVE INCREASE IN SUPPLY There are currently roughly 2,400 megawatts of installed geothermal electricity generation in the western United States, less than 1% of total U.S. generation capacity. The Draft PEIS forecasts that within the planning area, 12,100 megawatts is commercially viable. Such massive development of resources will have significant impacts to the public lands and other resources that we depend on from these lands. By only providing a framework for lease by lease development, this proposal offers no guidance for land managers to assess the cumulative impacts of so much concentrated development.

WE NEED LOCALIZED ENERGY Rather than opening up millions of acres to geothermal leasing, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management need to be enabling individual forest supervisors work with state agencies, other local leaders and energy companies to come up with ways to help create the most localized energy networks possible. Locking our national forests and public lands into a continuation of corporate subsidy for large industry development will only add to the burden felt by decades of subsidizing big timber.