

BLM freezes OSU's grant behind study

Forestry | The suspension adds a new element to the furor over salvage logging

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The federal government has abruptly suspended funding for Oregon State University research that concluded federally sponsored logging after the 2002 Biscuit fire in southwest Oregon set back the recovery of forests.

The action came after a team of scientists from OSU and the U.S. Forest Service published their results last month in *Science*, the nation's leading scientific journal.

It escalated the controversy surrounding the findings, which undercut Bush administration-backed arguments for logging after wildfires. The research, led by a 29-year-old graduate student, already had come under attack within OSU's College of Forestry by professors who contend that logging and replanting speed recovery of burned forests.

Those professors tried but failed to persuade *Science* not to publish the one-page report.

Administrators at OSU and scientists elsewhere said they could not recall another instance of the federal government suspending funding for research after controversial results emerge.

"It's totally without precedent as far as I can recollect," said Jerry Franklin, a professor at the University of Washington who has studied

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Northwest forests for decades. "It says, 'If we don't like what you're saying, we'll cut off your money.'"

Federal officials said the publication appeared to violate the terms of the research funding awarded by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management through a federal Joint Fire Science program.

They suggested an online version of the report could be seen as illegally trying to influence federal legislation because it mentioned a bill co-sponsored by Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., to speed logging after fires. They also said the scientists had not consulted with the BLM before publishing their report or included a disclaimer saying the conclusions do not represent a government opinion.

The BLM outlined the points in a letter to Oregon State last week and gave the university until Wednesday to respond.

The BLM suspended funding until the response is received "and any corrective actions if necessary are taken by OSU."

Donald Kennedy, editor in chief

of Science and former president of Stanford University, said the federal move was a "considerable political escalation," coming after the attempt by OSU professors to derail publication of the paper.

He said the mention of the Walden bill was the journal's mistake. The authors of the research report had asked journal editors to remove the mention, but they inadvertently did not.

The mention said that the research results could "help inform the dialogue" about Walden's bill.

Federal officials said the cutoff of money was not politically driven or retaliation for research conclusions that ran against federal arguments for logging.

"I don't think it's politics; I think it's a matter of violating research protocols," said Jim Golden, deputy regional forester with the Forest Service. He said the report's mention of Walden's bill "came across to me as if they were trying to influence the dialogue."

Federal law prohibits the use of federal research funds to influence federal legislation.

Golden echoed the OSU professors who criticized the researchers for drawing conclusions about the lasting impacts of logging after only two years of study.

"They launched into conclusions that were not supported by the data," he said.

He said the findings are likely to be cited by logging opponents who want to hold up future timber sales.

Luanne Lawrence, vice president for university advancement at Oregon State, said the university is taking the issue very seriously. She said OSU officials hope to satisfy the BLM's concerns so the research can continue.

The university has no doubts about the integrity of the research, she said.

The \$307,000 in federal funding came in the form of a three-year grant to examine the effects of logging after wildfires. Oregon State so far has received \$207,000, and the grant is entering its final year, Lawrence said. The remaining funds were to pay stipends for two OSU graduate students, including Daniel Donato, the lead author of the paper published in Science.

Kennedy, the editor of Science, said he could not see how Donato's paper could be seen as trying to influence legislation. The research findings might be influential, he said, but to bar them "would cripple anyone from ever working on a science problem with a policy impact."

Andy Stahl, executive director of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, said the suspension of funding was a "shot across the bows" to researchers who produce findings the government does not like.

"Either way, the administration, regardless of the outcome of this incident, has made its message clear," he said. "You knuckle under and give us the results we want, or we won't fund you."