

The Forest Service regards responsible public input as essential to its mission. In numerous instances, responsible environmental groups have served to re-direct the agency's focus and helped generate more balanced management of the National Forests.

However, neither the Forest Service nor the general public benefits when irresponsible parties distort facts as a means of achieving an objective. The March 10 edition of the Missoulian ran an article entitled "Environmentalists Request Goshawk Protection".

The article attributed this quote to Mr. Michael Garrity of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, "*In the Helena National Forest, for example, a survey found only six nests on 900,000 acres. There were eight nests, but two were logged a few years ago and those birds left the forest*". What little knowledge Mr. Garrity has of goshawk populations on the Helena Forest is the result of information we have shared with him. Neither he nor his organization conduct surveys for goshawk or other species—we do.

It is galling that he intentionally distorts the information we provide. First, we have not had the resources or the need to survey 900,000 acres of the 975,100 acre Helena National Forest. Our modeling suggests that approximately 270,000 acres provide suitable goshawk habitat. Rather than eight, Forest Service biologists have documented at least seventeen goshawk nests. In the past five years we've surveyed approximately 50 areas of which 22 have had resident goshawks either on nests or responding in a manner that indicates they were defending nests. That certainly presents a healthier picture for goshawks than the one painted by Mr. Garrity.

"*...two were logged a few years ago and those birds left the forest*". Due to miscommunication with a local goshawk expert, we did not realize until after the fact that we had conducted a thinning operation within an inactive nest stand. If we'd known about the nest tree we thinned around (one, not two as stated), we would have adjusted the boundaries to provide a buffer, which is our routine practice. The nest tree itself was not cut (as stated), and we have documented that this pair of goshawk relocated to an alternative nest about ¼ mile distant and successfully fledged young—they did not leave the forest.

Goshawk, and many other species, are impacted much more directly by extensive wildfire than they are by small scale thinning projects designed to maintain healthy green trees on the landscape. Most people accept this as reality. The Forest Service already provides protection to goshawk and I hope others question the need for the hands-off management advocated by the groups who filed this particular petition.

***--Tom Clifford is the Supervisor of the Helena National Forest***