



## **The Role of Commercial Timber Harvesting in Forest Ecosystem Management**

### **A Position of the Northern California Society of American Foresters\***

#### **POSITION**

The Northern California Society of American Foresters supports commercial harvesting of timber to meet society's wood products needs, thin excessively dense stands, and generate revenues for forest restoration. Consistent with the Organic Administration Act of 1897 (30 Statute 11), which established the purpose of federal forest reserves in the United States, we support science-based management of national forests, including commercial timber harvest.

#### **ISSUE STATEMENT**

Several major environmental organizations have demanded that commercial timber harvesting be banned from public forests in the United States. This demand appears to be based on the view that all commercial harvesting involves unsustainable forest exploitation and damages the environment. Preservationists argue that commercial harvesting is inappropriate because it is usually uneconomical and only benefits the timber industry and forestry agencies at taxpayers' expense.

Political expediency often supersedes scientific evidence in setting national forest management policies, with potentially dire consequences. One example of this trend is the President's recent establishment of a 328,000-acre national monument within the Sequoia National Forest, ostensibly to protect approximately 20,000 acres of sequoia big tree groves. This action is likely to severely curtail, if not preclude, commercial harvesting over an important timber-supply area, thus overruling scientific agreement supporting the full range of management options, including commercial harvesting, to reduce risks of catastrophic fires.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Society today expects forests to be sustainably managed to support diverse values. Many people do not understand the extent to which the direction of forest management has moved from its former emphasis on timber harvesting to a more ecologically-based management approach. State and federal regulations now require conservation of watershed resources and wildlife habitat, in concert with sustainable timber harvesting supported by long-term planning. A large

information gap exists between reality and public perception regarding modern timber harvesting and its relationship to land stewardship.

Due to historic emphasis on fire suppression and harvesting of high-value trees, the structure of many forest stands is poorly suited to meeting societal expectations. Many stands overstocked with small trees display low vigor and susceptibility to insects, disease, and wildfire. Overly dense understories are also unfavorable to many wildlife species. Stand structures must be modified extensively to improve forest health, reduce fire hazard, and enhance biodiversity.

Ecosystem management requires considering manipulation of trees of all sizes and species, including trees with and without commercial value. The costs of forest management are often high, particularly for thinning dense stands of small trees. Where trees suitable for removal have commercial value, society benefits from the resulting supply of wood products and the related employment, income, and tax revenue. With trees as small as 10 inches in diameter providing an economical source of sawlogs, commercial harvesting is often highly compatible with retention of large trees. The economic benefits of commercial timber harvesting are particularly important to the stability and welfare of rural forest-dependent communities.

Revenues from timber sales are a large and logical potential source of funds for investing in forest restoration. Precluding commercial harvesting increases the need to subsidize forest restoration programs while increasing demands for wood imports from states and nations likely to have weaker forest practice regulation than California.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Northern California Society of American Foresters supports science-based forest stewardship including commercial timber harvesting consistent with applicable laws and regulations. As mandated by federal law, the national forests are an essential source of wood to meet our growing needs. Precluding commercial timber harvesting is contrary to the principles and practice of ecosystem management and antithetical to resource conservation. Moreover, it hurts forest-dependent families and communities. Abundant opportunities exist to utilize small trees while retaining large trees and improving forest health. Greater effort is required to increase public awareness regarding the attention given to ecosystem health and stand improvement objectives in timber harvest planning.

## **ABOUT THE SOCIETY**

The Northern California Society of American Foresters, with about 900 members, is a unit of the Society of American Foresters, with about 18,000 members. The Society is a national organization representing all segments of the forestry profession in the United States. It includes public and private practitioners, researchers, administrators, educators, and forestry students. It was established in 1900 by Gifford Pinchot and six other pioneer foresters.

The mission of the Society is to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry; to enhance the competency of its members; to establish professional excellence; and to use the knowledge, skills, and conservation ethic of the profession to ensure the continued health and use of forest ecosystems, and the present and future availability of forest resources to benefit society.

The Society is the accreditation authority for professional forestry education in the United States. It publishes the *Journal of Forestry*, *Forest Science*, three regional journals of applied forestry, *The Forestry Source*, and the annual *Proceedings of the Society of American Foresters* national convention.

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\*Adopted by the Executive Committee on July 28, 2000, and shall expire on July 28, 2005 unless, after a review, it is renewed by the Executive Committee.