



Working Forests in the State of Washington

A Joint Position Statement of the
Washington State Society of American Foresters (WSSAF) and the
Inland Empire Society of American Foresters (IESAF)*

Position

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) supports “No-Net-Loss” of working forests by encouraging the creation, restoration, protection, and enhancement of working forests in the State of Washington.

Characteristics of Working Forests

A working forest must be an actively managed sustainable forest as measured in ecological, economic, and social terms. This implies a host of things, including the notion of permanence over time.

- A working forest must include a management plan that identifies objectives that will provide a balance of social, ecologic, and economic products and values and a schedule for management activities that will accomplish them.
- Active management on working forests means that silvicultural practices, including determination of tree species composition, stocking control, thinning, prescribed burning, and timber harvest, are planned and implemented recurrently and perpetually over most of the forestland area, causing a different balance of benefits than would occur naturally.
- A working forest must maintain the intrinsic value of the land. These values may include; soil productivity, historical or cultural resources, or other ecological or conservation values.

Issue

With increasing public awareness of the benefits of working forests as a desirable alternative to land-use change and development, it is timely for the Society of American Foresters to clarify what we mean by promoting working forests. In order to develop durable policies that support and maintain working forests, a common vision is necessary.

*The Washington State Society of American Foresters (WSSAF) operates in the western part of the state; the Inland Empire Society of American Foresters (IESAF) operates in the eastern part of the state and also in northern Idaho. This position statement was approved by the Executive Committees of the WSSAF and IESAF on June 25, 2013 and September 25, 2013, respectively. This position statement will expire on September 25, 2018.

Discussion

Working forests may be small or large and can include single (stand scale) or multiple ownerships (landscape scale). The operative factor is the existence of an overall plan that characterizes the intent to produce multiple products and values across the entire forest. In order to provide specific ecological benefits, some areas of a working forest may not receive silvicultural treatments or have planned timber harvest. Examples on a stand or stream reach scale are riparian stream buffers, unharvested areas on unstable landforms, endangered species critical habitat, and nonforested wetlands. Examples on a landscape scale are wilderness areas and endangered species habitats as subsets of a larger working forests. Rarely can any single acre of forest provide all the goods and services we expect and need, but they are achievable with active management across the broader mosaic of a working forest landscape.

Working forests are managed forests, but not all managed forests are working forests. For example, a forest that is designated as a wilderness, and that is not a subset of a larger actively managed area, is not a working forest. Likewise, a forest that is managed solely for watershed protection, without the potential provision for periodic harvest of commercial timber products, is a managed forest but not a working forest. In general, working forests provide multiple benefits rather than single or exclusive benefits.

Conversion of Working Forests to Non-Working Forest Use

The area of working forest is decreasing on federal, state, corporate, and private forestland ownerships in Washington State.¹

Federal lands continue to experience conversion from multiple to single use through administrative policy or legislative changes. For example, the Adaptive Management Areas and Late Successional Reserves under the Northwest Forest plan are not working forests without similar acreages of Matrix Forest. Also, forests managed under a Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, National Parks and Wilderness areas are not working forests if they do not plan for recurrent and perpetual timber harvest over most of the plan area. Without an equitable balance of objectives, including commodity production, these lands no longer support working forests.

Loss of federal working forests has had the unintended consequences of exacerbating forest health and fire risk across the landscape. Additionally, the lack of management and subsequent reduction of the commercial timber products has had a trickledown effect on rural communities ultimately resulting in mill closures. Fewer mills result in the lack of markets for periodic timber harvest that lower the value of commercial products from both public and private working forests

¹ *Washington's forest resources, 2002–2006: Five-year Forest Inventory and Analysis report.* Campbell, S., K. Waddell, and A. Gray (tech. eds.). USDA Forest Service, Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR-800. Portland, OR. 189 p. (2010).

and encourage conversion to non-forest land uses. Similarly, from 1989 through 2012 the Washington State Trust Land Transfer program had transferred 116,455 acres “with low revenue-producing capabilities to other public agencies or programs for protection and management.”² As such, they are no longer working forests.

For private commercial forest lands vertically integrated corporations, driven by federal tax policies, have sold large tracts of working forests to individual private investors and investment funds. Typically, to maximize returns and help finance these transactions, new investors “spin off” parcels for conversion into conservation areas, residential subdivisions, or commercial development.

As would be expected with a rising population, lands that were once productive working forests have increasing conservation or development value. As urban and suburban areas expand, it becomes increasingly difficult to continue to manage the remaining working forests. Local, state, and federal regulations have created disincentives for private forest landownership. As property values and regulations increase, private forest landowners have sold lands to owners that choose not to manage them as working forests.³ In Western Washington non-National Forest timberland acres diminished at an average rate 30,000 acres per year from 1978 to 2001.⁴ In Eastern Washington the average annual rate of conversion was 23,000 for years 1980 to 2002.

This trend is especially evident with family and individual forest landowners that own approximately half of the private forestland in Washington. In addition to being in close proximity to areas with higher development values, these owners are disproportionately older than the general population and less willing to bear the burden of complex and costly regulations.⁵ The sale of part or all of a tree farm can be an attractive financial alternative to the regulatory and market risks of managing a working forest when a landowner is faced with the need for retirement income or intergenerational transfer. Additionally, estate taxes frequently cause the sale of working forest land for non-forest uses.

Measures to Achieve No-Net-Loss of Working Forests

The SAF supports the use of a variety of measures by federal, state, and local governments, landowners, and individual citizens that can help achieve no-net-loss working forests in Washington including:

- Land use policies that recognize the multiple values of working forests and respect the rights and responsibilities of private and public forest landowners.

² Washington Trust Land Transfer Program. (Washington Dept. of Natural Resources, 2013). http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/amp_tlt_proposal_13_15.pdf; LAST accessed Jan. 28, 2014.

³ *Washington’s forest resources, 2002-2006*, *supra* note 1.

⁴ *The future of Washington forests* (Washington Dept. of Natural Resources (2007). <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/ResearchScience/Topics/ForestResearch/Pages/futureofwashingtonsforest.aspx>

⁵ *Washington’s forest resources, 2002-2006*, *supra* note 1.

- Public funding and support for enforcing existing forest practices laws and regulations.
- Promote the use of alternative best management practices that address site specific conditions rather than one size fits all regulations.
- Adequate funding for sufficient and peer reviewed research that is not influenced with policy preferences,⁶ upon which to base good forest policy and adaptive management.
- Expanded markets by promoting the use of wood for construction and energy.
- Develop markets for ecological services that improve timber and non timber resource economics.
- Education programs that emphasize recognition that wood is a renewable natural resource.
- Public and institutional education programs that promote the benefits of working forests.
- Provide credit to working forest landowners for their current and additional capture of atmospheric carbon, storage of that carbon in wood products, and the reduction of carbon release by the substitution of wood for steel and concrete building materials.
- Promote the reduction of estate taxes on forest land to promote inter generational working forest management planning and consolidation of working forests.
- Federal and state forest taxation systems that encourage long term investment in sustainable forest management and habitat restoration, and that discourage parcelization.
- Small forest landowner assistance programs, such as the American Tree Farm Program or Forest Stewardship Program that educate and provide assistance on how to maintain working forests.
- Champion the re analysis of the Northwest Forest Plan and completion of individual forest plans in order to re balance the social, economic, and ecological benefits and products on a national forest specific basis.
- Promote regeneration timber harvests in Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Programs.⁷
- Support state and federal direct payment and cost share incentive programs.
- ESA reform that removes the unintended litigious consequence of private citizen enforcement and serves to provide incentives that encourage the management of and for endangered species rather than making it a liability.

⁶ Science, scientists, and policy advocacy. *Conservation Biology* 21(1):12-17 (Lackey, R.T., 2007).

⁷ A restoration framework for federal forests in the Pacific Northwest. *Journal of Forestry* 110(8):429-439 (Franklin, J.F. , and K.N. Johnson, 2012).