

Position Statements: Wood Production on Washington's Forests

Position

The Washington State Society of American Forests (WSSAF) fully supports reasonable forest ecosystem efforts. We are concerned, however, that the nation is losing its ability to produce forest products to meet consumer demand without relying on imported lumber and other forest products. We support the following steps to recognize and deal with the potential hazards of becoming heavily dependent on foreign countries to supply our nation's forest products:

- The WSSAF will work to educate the public about the expanding demands for and development of forest products and the benefits society receives from those products;
- The WSSAF will promote technical and political solutions that encourages forest management that provides a perpetual output of forest products and ecosystem services;
- The WSSAF encourages development of forest products that replace or ease depletion of non-renewable resources; and
- The WSSAF supports appropriate and sustainable wood production for products from Washington State's federal lands.

Issue

Resulting from policy efforts to understand and implement ecosystem services, forest management for wood product production from federal lands is no longer perceived as important by many people. This new paradigm on how to manage federal lands has had immense impact on the forest products infrastructure in Washington State. There are now fewer, but larger sawmills in the Pacific Northwest. And in some regions, mills no longer exist. This puts at risk private and public land managers ability to market the valuable wood resource they manage. The forest products industry has changed dramatically with the transition of land being owned by integrated forest products companies to the Timber Investment Management Organizations (TIMOs) and Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs). Many times, the latter has shorter forest management planning horizons. Fragmentation of private forestlands into "life-style" tree farms provides additional challenges now and into the future.

It is not in the public's or professional foresters' interest to ignore current supply/demand dynamics. However, a sustainable timber resource managed with a balance of perspectives for both public values and private investment is in everyone's interest. It is well known that wood construction materials are renewable; sequester carbon; and have a smaller carbon footprint than steel, concrete, and brick, helping us mitigate the influence of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere. Wood residues, representing 50% of all available biomass in Washington, may make a significant contribution to renewable energy development through cellulosic conversion to ethanol.

Background

From 1945 through the 1970s, forest management grew from humble beginnings to a technologically advanced enterprise. Computer technology, advancement in genetic science, sophisticated reforestation and stand management modeling and prescriptions, and satellite imagery and mapping combined to create complex, state-of-the-art management systems for the primary purpose of faster, better growing trees to satisfy the nation's - and the world's - ever growing forest products demand.

The use of better forest management technology continues today; however, from the 1970s to the end of the century, new protection paradigms were embraced. Ecosystem management, watershed planning, federal land planning, and resultant land set-asides emerged. The combination of endangered species management, fisheries protection, and water quality concerns required new ways of thinking, management models, research agendas, and regulatory standards to better protect the environment. During the past decade there has been a shift so that land managers are now faced with the challenge of providing "ecosystem services" from all forests, including clean air, clean and abundant water, biodiversity, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Adopted wby the Washington State Society of American Foresters (WSSAF) on November 17, 2008. This statement will expire on November 16, 2013, unless after thorough review it is renewed by the WSSAF Executive Committee.