



Management of Federal Lands in the State of Washington

Position Statement of the Washington State Society of American Foresters

Position:

The Federal Forestlands in the State of Washington are some of the most productive forests in the world and with the implementation of a sustainable multiple use forest management strategy can supply a variety of goods and services to benefit the American public. The Washington State Society of American Foresters (WSSAF) recommends that the following steps be taken to manage federal forest lands in the State of Washington:

- **Federal resource managers must determine sustainable outputs levels of a multitude of products and services.**
- **Federal forest lands need to contribute sustainable woody biomass resources they possess to meet renewable energy production goals in the Pacific Northwest.**
- **Federal forest lands allocated to resource production must be monitored to ensure sustainable productivity is maintained.**
- **The Forest Service must develop and use the best scientific information available to support ecological, economic and social sustainability.**
- **Federal policy managers must examine existing resource management policies and legal mandates in order to streamline management procedures and ensure an integrated approach to addressing resource management issues.**

Issue:

Congress established the Forest Service in 1905 to manage America's National Forests to provide quality water and timber for the Nation's benefit. Congress has further refined the management direction for the Forest Service to include the management for additional multiple uses and benefits and for the sustained yield of renewable resources such as water, forage, wildlife, timber and recreation. Multiple use means managing resources under the best combination of uses to benefit the American people while ensuring the productivity of the land and protecting the quality of the environment.

Federal forest lands comprise approximately 15 percent of the forest land base in western Washington and almost 32 percent of the forest land base in eastern Washington. Harvest levels from federal forests are currently 14 percent of annual growth in eastern Washington and 2 percent of annual growth in western Washington. These low harvest levels contribute to increased wildfire fuel loading and an elevated risk of insect and disease attack. The low harvest levels reduce the supply of raw materials to the forest products industry in the timber dependent communities where many of the forestlands are located.

The problems of maintaining forest health, a sustainable and predictable timber supply and identifying the appropriate mix of environmental services including the amount of older forest are interrelated and difficult to solve in isolation.

Background:

Public concern about the environmental health and sustainability of America's federal forest lands has increased since the establishment of the U.S. Forest Service. Congress has responded by passing the National Forest Management Act of 1976 with the intent of protecting and improving the environment, conservation of natural resources and offering greater involvement to interested citizens in the federal planning process. National Forest System resource management plans should provide for multiple uses and sustained yield through an "integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic and other sciences."

The 1973 Endangered Species Act (ESA) exerts broad discretion over Forest Service land and resource management activities. ESA requires the Forest Service to, "...utilize their authorities in furtherance of the purpose of this act by carrying out programs for the conservation of endangered species and threatened species," in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Compliance with existing law increases planning complexity and has substantially delayed the implementation of resource management decisions.

Management of federal forest lands in Washington State is constrained and the original land base established for resource production continues to decline while restricted use designation such as wilderness and scenic areas, Late Successional Reserves and endangered species habitat are increasing. One result is that under the Northwest Forest Plan expected timber harvest has been reduced by 80% from pre-plan levels and the Forest Service has been unable to achieve even this reduced harvest level thus contributing to the economic hardship of timber dependent communities in Washington State.

References:

Rural Technology Initiative, 2007. "The Future of Washington's Forests and Forest Industries" Final Report. University of Washington, Seattle, WA.

USDA Forest Service, 1983. "The Principle Laws Relating To Forest Service Activities." Agriculture Handbook No. 453.

This position statement was adopted by the Washington State SAF Executive Committee on July 23, 2009, and supported with 95 percent approval by member referendum in November 2009. This statement will expire July 23, 2014, unless after thorough review it is renewed by the Committee.