

News and Public Relations

The Collins Companies Position Statement on Federal Land Management
January 2001

Overview

The original management concepts of the Forest Service were established under the influence of conservationists such as Gifford Pinchot and Aldo Leopold. Simply said, the idea was not to harvest more trees than a national forest could grow during a given period and to allow for harvesting on an un-even age basis. During the mid-twentieth century, practices shifted and Forest Service lands began to be managed on an even-age basis, leading to clear-cutting.

Then in the 1990s, under pressure from environmentalists, Forest Service timber sales were severely reduced. The results? Annual harvests on national forest lands are currently only a fraction of the timber that is growing each year. And while that may seem like a good practice, it has actually produced some unhealthy results for the total forest. Increased fuel loads have led to catastrophic fires, like the ones that raged through the West this past summer.

At the Collins Companies, we believe that it is critical for federal lands to be responsibly managed for the long-term health of the total forest ecosystem. Responsible management plans, such as the one developed by the Quincy Library Group in California, can improve the health of the forest, can support local communities, can provide economic stability, and can promote a beneficial environment for animal, plant, and fish life.

The following are eight discussion points that we believe point out the potential environmental benefits of a more active management program on federal lands:

1. Improve Spacing of Trees on Our National Forest to Help Control Fires and Bug Infestations.

Selective harvesting can space trees so that fires can be more easily controlled. The fires that burned periodically through the forest in pre-settlement times kept the understory (small seedlings and younger trees) open and enhanced the regeneration of Pine. However, the fuel loads that have built up in the western forests, as a result of fire suppression in this century, can result in catastrophic fires, that do far more damage to ecosystems than logging could ever do. Even the most intense clear-cut leaves treetops, downed woody material, snags and regeneration, all of which recycle nutrients and maintain wildlife habitats. A catastrophic fire can eliminate all of those structures, including the upper layer of soil.

It is important to mention that if we manage only the understory, or sub-merchantable component of the forest, we would need to eliminate a whole age class of trees to alleviate the risk of catastrophic fires. To promote structural

diversity, and to create a full range of tree sizes, we need to harvest and leave trees of all ages. This also enables us to capture forest pests in every age component of the forest before they spread. Controlling mortality reduces the risk of catastrophic fire.

2. Control Commercial Harvesting on National Forests to Enhance Diversity.

Harvesting by individual tree selection can maintain, or enhance diversity within timber stands. Removing trees in species and sizes that are over-represented can result in greater biological and structural diversity. There are many ways to thin a stand of timber, but it can, and should be done in a way that improves diversity and enhances wildlife habitats.

Controlled and limited scale “Even-Age” management can also enhance the balance of age and species classes. Sustainable even-age management involves harvesting limited volumes in small acreages each year so it will yield enough volume of timber to balance against the growth on the entire managed area. This creates a full range of age classes and produces many different wildlife habitats. We do not advocate eliminating natural stands and planting or encouraging a single species, but limited “even-age” management can be done in a way that enhances the natural regeneration of shade intolerant species such as Ponderosa Pine, Sugar Pine, Douglas Fir, Black Cherry, and White Ash.

3. Continue Maintaining Access Roads on the National Forests to Monitor the Health of the Forest.

Forests are very dynamic, and catastrophic events can affect large areas. It is not our desire to see the National Forests managed so intensely that all of the wilderness is eliminated. However, rather than create a separation between man and nature, we believe that it is possible to participate with nature, in the forest, in a positive way. The availability of access roads enables us to control catastrophic events and to continue to learn from our forests without eliminating many of their wild attributes. We do not support the “over-design” of roads on federal lands nor do we support the implied funding of road building through timber sale activity. Reasonable and proper road construction and deconstruction to prevent erosion are hallmarks of good forest management.

4. Improve Community Stability through Controlled Commercial Harvesting

The financial and social capital that has been and is being lost to timber dependent communities by eliminating logging, can only be replaced through higher impact recreation and sprawling development activities. Relying on these forms of land use to provide economic benefits to local communities would have more negative impacts on ecosystems than periodic, controlled and rotational logging.

Forest restoration projects alone, without commercial logging, are not economically sustainable. Commercial logging can sustain jobs in forest dependent communities, while forest restoration projects in the absence of revenue-generating harvests depend on temporary expenditure of tax dollars. If forest management activities cannot be economically sustained, there is a risk that other land uses could be entertained which would result in greater environmental degradation. The best way to maintain forest cover, nationally and globally is by supporting and influencing

active, responsible and economically viable forest management.

5. Our National Forests can Reduce the Rate at Which Non-Biodegradable Materials are Building Up in the Biosphere.

From a global standpoint, we are extracting substances from the Earth's crust too rapidly, placing our entire environment at risk. We are also creating synthetic products from these long buried materials that cannot be reprocessed by the Earth's natural systems. This results in a build-up of poisonous synthetics in the biosphere. The contents of landfills are a powerful, visible reminder of this man-made pollution. Yet, even more dangerous are the man-made compounds that are accumulating in the atmosphere and in our water resources. We must recognize that our National Forests are, and can be, "Virtual Factories" for water, and for renewable and biodegradable materials. These advantages to mankind are then multiplied many times over by improved wildlife habitat and by trees that continually convert carbon dioxide into carbon fiber through photosynthesis.

6. Harvesting on our National Forests can Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, World Wide.

With the severe reductions in timber sales on the National Forests in the last decade, we have seen a corresponding increase in lumber imports from New Zealand, Chile, Brazil, Eastern Europe and Canada. Meeting our national needs with our own resources reduces the amount of oil that is burned to transport products from these more distant sources.

When trees die and decompose in the forest, they release greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. Trees that are carefully harvested and made into lumber or similar solid wood products become "carbon stores" for a long period of time. New and additional carbon then begins to be sequestered in the new growth and replacement growth of the forest. But, nonrenewable materials such as plastics, metals, and other composites that are drawn from the earth's crust are not as easily recyclable, require more fossil fuel consumption in their production as well as in their recycling. The responsible management and utilization of timber from well managed and sustainably managed forest including the National Forests can slow down the release of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere and displace the fossil fuel intensive products that we are becoming more dependent upon. And by meeting our national needs with our own resources we will reduce the amount of oil it takes to transport lumber from international sources.

7. Sustaining and Harvesting our own Forests Reduces the Environmental Impact on Forest Worldwide.

When lumber and timber is imported from other countries, we do not have any control over how those forests are managed. This imported lumber poses a greater risk to forests and the environment, worldwide, than products from sustainably managed National Forests. Our own National Forests must be committed to harvesting no more wood than they are growing in any ten-year period. This has actually been the practice for quite some time (in spite of many representations to the contrary) and even then, harvesting occurs only after the harvest plan has been subjected to substantial environmental review. We can, and we should, influence how our National Forests are managed through public input and community based forestry initiatives.

8. Sustainable Harvesting on the National Forest Relieves Pressure to Over-Harvest on Private Lands.

Severe cut backs in Forest Service timber sales in the last decade has created a tremendous pressure and/or competition for the timber in the remaining private forest lands. This, in turn, has resulted in numerous leveraged buy-outs of private and corporate timber companies and timberlands. The leveraged (deficit financed) buy-out has then precipitated a need to over-harvest the acquired forest tracts to meet the debt service on the borrowed funds. There is also a tendency for some companies that have relied on federal timber for a portion of their production needs to move heavily on harvests from private and corporate lands to cover the short fall. These increased harvest rates can exceed the sustained annual growth rates on those lands.

Additionally, private landowners who might have been practicing sustainable forestry, are now considering the “Highest and Best Use” of their land which often means converting their property to urban expansion and development. These lands never return to active timber production.

Summary

We believe that the U.S. National Forests should be looked upon as providing both wilderness preserves and sustainable resources for the benefit of all. To this extent, we offer the following recommendations:

1. Maintain as wilderness areas, those areas that have been so designated through 1996.

2. Maintain as roadless areas, those areas of at least 5,000 acres that were roadless in 1996.

3. Form an independent commission that will function as a non-political, independent overview of the management of the balance of the federal lands.

This commission would be comprised of representation from environmental, governmental, academic, social and economic disciplines in equal representations. This commission would provide the oversight on several sustainability indicators such as renewability, biological diversity, and social and economic benefits.

4. Initiate Stewardship Pilot Projects on at least 200,000 acres on each of seven (7) or more national forest areas, for a controlled example of active management versus inactive hands-off management.

We propose that these would include the Plumas, Lassen, Fremont, Allegheny, Boise, Payette, and the Kaibab National Forests.

United States environmental policy should take into account its global, as well as its local impacts. The pressure to stop all commercial harvesting on National Forests is a very misguided policy. Relying on resources from other regions in the world will have greater overall negative impacts on the environment than will sustainable management of public lands in the United States. Let us not shift the issues of the environment to other people in other parts of the world. Nor should we shift away from responsible, sustainable, and renewable uses of wood to a greater reliance on synthetic and mineral based products in an attempt to save our “view” here at

home. Much is at stake. It is vitally important for more and more people to be exposed to the concepts of a truly sustainable society. A society that is not overly dependent on non-renewable resources (such as fossil fuels), a society that does not create products that cannot be reprocessed by the Earth's natural systems and a society that does not ignore the long term impacts of its choices and activities.