



Taking Action to Improve Forest Management - No. 2 May 22, 2014

"Fierce in battle, many of the eco-warriors have been unable to come to grips with the consequences of victory and are now reduced to wandering about the old battlefields bayoneting the wounded. Their counterparts from the resource extraction community, likewise, cannot come to terms with defeat and hold "ghost dances" to bring back the good old days when they were undisputed."

Former U.S. Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas, 2001

Managing forests requires balancing the needs of all who benefit from them.

There has been a rather slow movement toward collaboration on sound forest management practices for nearly a decade. We can and should work together to grow and care for our 740 million acres of U.S. forest lands for all to use and enjoy. For the past dozen years or so, the U.S. Forest Service and timber producers have been greatly hampered by an unending barrage of lawsuits, regulations, overzealous interest groups and pandering politicians that do not take the time to understand how responsible, ongoing timber harvesting can help us restore and sustain our precious forests.

Current U.S. Forest Service Chief Thomas Tidwell understands that our blighted, poorly managed forests desperately need restoration, and that timber harvesting must be part of the strategy. "The Forest Service recognizes the need for a strong forest industry to help accomplish forest restoration work," he stated in a March, 13, 2013 testimony before the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy and Forestry. "The best opportunity for reducing the cost of these restoration treatments is through timber harvests and stewardship contracting."

During a speech last fall in Boise, Idaho, Chief Tidwell called for more community-based collaboration on multiple use of forest lands and stated, "... our focus is on sustaining the ability of America's forests and grasslands, both public and private, to deliver a full range of benefits—the full range of multiple uses—for generations to come." Tidwell continued, "We estimate that up to 42 percent of the National Forest System is in need of restoration—up to 82 million acres—and that 12.5 million acres need mechanical treatments. To help address the rising need for mechanical restoration treatments, we are prepared to raise timber harvest levels by 20 percent, from 2.4 billion board feet in 2011 to 3.0 billion board feet by fiscal year 2014."

Will that really happen? I hope so, but I'm not so sure.

Sixty years ago, forestry professionals were well regarded by the general public as firefighting heroes, conservation leaders, and managers of our timber resources. Thanks to their knowledge of how to grow and harvest trees, foresters played a key role in helping America's economy—and its forests—thrive after World War II. But things have changed during the past two decades. During the '90s, numerous frivolous lawsuits by single-minded, extremist preservationist groups made it extremely difficult—and sometimes impossible—to harvest timber that would have promoted new growth, vitality and yes, sustainability in our forests.

By the early 2000s, America's forest management practices had become extremely costly and time-consuming because our professional foresters were forced to spend much of their time responding to special interest groups and individuals who did not want to collaborate. Furthermore, these groups were not responsible for the legal expenses they incurred for their special interest endeavors; the federal government (i.e., taxpayers) paid—and continues to pay—the legal fees of these fanatical groups.

U.S. Forest Chief Dale Bosworth spearheaded a 2002 report, "The Process Predicament: How Statutory, Regulatory, and Administrative Factors Affect National Forest Management." The report concluded:

"Too often, the Forest Service is so busy meeting procedural requirements, such as preparing voluminous plans, studies, and associated documentation, that it has trouble fulfilling its historic mission: to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Too often the paralysis results in catastrophe."

Today, we all want healthy forests. No one would argue otherwise. However, allowing a single interest group to dominate our forest management strategy does not serve our entire population. A lawsuit to protect an insect in a Western forest can bring responsible timber harvesting in the Midwest to a screeching halt. That's not collaboration.

What do we need to do? First of all, we need to make more members of the general public aware of how timber can be harvested in a responsible way.

Secondly, we need to establish collaborative forest management policies and streamline regulations so that our timber producers can make new investments in responsible harvesting operations. Let's reduce the cumbersome processes and regulations that serve only a single interest, cause prices of wood products to skyrocket and bog down our U.S. Forest Service. Let's make it easier for our professional foresters to spend more of their time in the forests—managing this precious resource for the benefit of all Americans.

And finally, let's embrace Chief Tidwell's goal of more community-based collaboration by giving more control of forest lands to states and counties where local citizens in rural areas can help create sound regional forest management policy. Let's collaborate not just with those who can speak the loudest in Washington, D.C., but also with hardworking people in communities like Mercer, Wisconsin who depend on the jobs and economic development that are created when timber is responsibly harvested and converted into the beautiful wood products our American consumers desire.



Tom Abendroth, President
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Did you know?

- Leaders in the forest industry as well as conservation organizations have developed forest certification programs with criteria for sound forest management.
- Independent audit processes conducted in the field trace products from a certified forest through manufacturing and distribution all the way to the consumer to ensure the consumer that the wood or paper products they are purchasing did indeed come from a sustainably managed forest.

- The US Forest Service estimates 12 million acres of forest in the Southeast will be lost to suburban real estate development between 1992 - 2020.*
- The Forest Stewardship Council was formed to help create demand for products from responsibly managed forests. Today, more than 40,000 American family forest owners are FSC certified. When you purchase products with the FSC logo, you are saying to the landowner, "thank you for taking care of your forest."*
- The Forest Stewardship Council mission is to promote environmentally sound, socially beneficial and economically prosperous management of the world's forests.*
- SFI, Inc. is an independent, nonprofit organization that is solely responsible for maintaining, overseeing and improving the internationally recognized Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) program. SFI Inc. is governed by a three-chamber board of directors representing environmental, social and economic sectors equally.**
- SFI promotes sustainable forestry management, improved forestry practices and responsible purchasing of forest products. By following the SFI forest certification standard, forest landowners, forest managers, forest products producers and other program participants practice responsible forestry on the lands they manage, and influence millions of additional acres in North America and globally through unique fiber sourcing requirements.**
- The forest products industry in the Great Lakes region has utilized hard maple for over 100 years, and there are more timber stands today than any other time in our long history.
- Long before groups such as the Forest Stewardship Council, SFI, and many others were formed, generations before us practiced proper forest management and respected our renewable natural resources.

*www.us.fsc.org Forest Stewardship Council website

**www.sfiprogram.org Sustainable Forestry Initiative website

Next Time:

What can we do? What happens if we cannot change the perception of harvesting? Can any "grassroots" effort be effective? We think so.

AFFILIATIONS



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