

Sustainable Forest Management can achieve and maintain Healthy and Productive Forests in the State of Washington

A Position Statement of the Washington State Society of American Foresters

Position:

In order to achieve the range of values that people seek from Washington's private and public forests, the Washington State Society of American Foresters (WSSAF) advocates the use of active and sustainable forest management. Professional foresters partnering with other natural resource professionals, can assist forest landowners to achieve healthy and productive forests through appropriate and planned cultural operations such as, thinning, vegetation management, timber harvests, fire management and regeneration.

Issue:

Washington's 16 million acres of unreserved private and public timberlands face many challenges to remain healthy, productive and sustainable. The exclusion of natural fire and reductions in cultural practices on public and non industrial private lands have created areas of overstocked, dense forests with tree species mixtures that are highly susceptible to increased pest infestations and threats of severe wildfire. The economic and environmental impacts of unhealthy forests pose risks to human health and safety, threaten sources of clean and abundant water, destroy critical wildlife habitat and restrict financial returns that benefit landowners, local communities and the state.

Science-based sustainable forest management tools that follow state and federal laws are available to ensure new and productive forests. They include thinning over-crowded forest stands, using prescribed fire and approved chemicals to control invasive and flammable vegetation, harvesting and salvaging biomass and wood products, managing slash and reforestation after harvest or other disturbances.

It is critical that government leaders and the citizens of Washington support and proactively invest in the application of appropriate forestry and land management practices on public and private lands to achieve and maintain healthy, productive and sustainable forests. We feel that the use of these tools will provide conditions for our forests to remain healthy. A healthy, ecologically diverse forest provides benefits to all society.

Background:

Years of exclusion of natural fire, lack of proactive forest management, tree diseases and insect infestations have resulted in large areas of Washington's forests, especially in Eastern Washington, that are at high risk from severe wildfire and expanding insect and disease epidemics. Dense, crowded forest conditions stress individual trees and result

in loss of vigor reducing the ability to resist insect and disease threats. Tightly spaced trees make it easy for insects and diseases to move from tree to tree creating large areas of dead and dying trees highly susceptible to extreme wildfire.

In the past, forest landowners utilized the services of professional foresters to implement forestry practices such as thinning, timber harvesting, salvaging of unhealthy and dying trees to control the spread of pests, providing wood products and regenerating new forests. Over the past decades, conflicting governmental policies and controversies over forest management tools on public lands have restricted the ability of federal, state and local agencies to manage unhealthy forests. In addition, reduced governmental investment in proactive forest management has resulted in loss of forest industry infrastructure, causing unpredictable and high costs to address long-term forest health issues and to address increasing catastrophic wildfire events.

Washington's forests can be resilient and dynamic, and disturbances will potentially play an important role in maintaining their health and unique attributes. However, passive management that relies primarily on natural disturbances only, does not recognize the impacts and threats to the sustainable benefits that the citizens of Washington demand from their forests. These benefits can best be achieved and sustained through active management of our unrestricted forests.

Non industrial private forest landowners should work with knowledgeable professionals to understand the capability and limitations of their land, develop appropriate long-term management plans, and implement good stewardship practices to conserve forest land and meet their personal goals.

Private industrial forest landowners should use professional foresters to develop and implement effective management strategies that will protect public resources and meet social, ecological and economic goals.

Public land agencies should increase active management to positively affect large areas of forestland, develop strategic wildfire barriers and distribute key habitat components effectively across landscapes. Moreover, the potentially large scale of public land management can ensure sufficient and reliable supplies of woody biomass to support needed investment in wood processing infrastructure and innovative energy production industries that will increase opportunities for all forest landowners to be active land managers.

Private and public forest landowners working with professional foresters and other natural resource professionals need the regulatory flexibility to apply science-based forest and land management tools to address unhealthy forest issues. Professional foresters can help forest landowners by tailoring active forest management practices to each, unique, local situation. These positive outcomes can help to ensure that Washington's forests return to healthy, productive and sustainable status and provide expected benefits for generations to come.