

Potential Solutions Older Forest

Problem Statement

The desired amount (?) of older forests on federal forestlands needs to be established and protected as a component of sustainable forest management. Older forests play an essential role in maintaining biodiversity and also provide important aesthetic and spiritual benefits to society. To have old growth in the future, it is necessary to identify and protect or restore older forests that are nearing old-growth conditions and to sustain a resilient forest landscape by encouraging a wide range of forest types and ages. Protection and restoration activities in which ecological, economic, and other social goals are compatible are needed.

Alternate first sentence--Protection and management of older forest on federal lands continues to be a continuous issues.

Problem Description

Old growth forests are characterized by structural conditions, ecological processes, and micro-environments that typically require long periods to develop. Their importance in wildlife conservation derives from the diverse and specialized habitat conditions provided, dependence of many wildlife species on these habitats, and the fact that old growth forests are depleted. Others recognize the cultural, recreational, and aesthetic value of "cathedral-like" old growth stands or the existence value of extremely old trees.

Most old growth forests occur on federal lands. Agencies have implemented restoration programs to accelerate the development of stands with old growth habitat characteristics; however, many decades will be required to reverse the depleted status. Conversely, reduced timber harvesting on federal lands is likely to lower the representation of early successional stages in some forest types in the future. Oregon lacks a single comprehensive policy to ensure that biological diversity goals are being met through the combined management objectives of Oregon's public and private landowners. Desired habitat conditions such as tree species composition, age class distribution, stand density and structure, snags and downed wood, and the size, shape, and juxtaposition of forest stands is essential for creating short- and long-term conditions to sustain populations and communities of wildlife. Conservation actions focused on the restoration and maintenance of natural habitats are likely to benefit a wider range of organisms than conservation actions developed for a single species. It is best to maintain diverse and healthy wildlife communities.

The Pacific Northwest currently has no regional or national policy that protects all of the current old growth and produces sustainable levels of timber to support economies of local communities. The Northwest Forest Plan allows cutting of old growth, but relatively little has been cut since the Plan was implemented. Consequently, timber

production has been well below expected levels, and much timber is currently produced from thinning in plantations, not from cutting older forests.

Older forests still exist in the Pacific Northwest and there are opportunities for the reestablishment of ecological structures and processes on these forests where they have been degraded and, simultaneously, restoration of economic and other social values on these lands. On federal forests, they could include:

- Protecting all remaining old growth
- Increasing efforts to reduce the risk of loss of remaining old growth from fire
- Increasing the area of forests treated to restore old-growth structures and processes; developing more effective long-term strategies to provide old growth as well as other forest types and forest values (i.e., more sustainable approaches).

Policymakers and forest managers have struggled to respond to various definitions of complex older forest ecosystems. Additionally, the lack of social agreement on how much older forest is desirable and where it should occur are barriers to improvements in the management of older forests. Federal land management agencies have different goals and is not clear how much they should contribute to older forest conservation. Related social barriers also include:

- Lack of understanding of what's needed to maintain and restore older forest diversity and processes in disturbance-prone landscapes that limits the willingness of the public and some managers to develop more effective long-term strategies.
- Lack of trust in agencies that seek to manage actively in new ways to meet diverse goals.
- Lack of public dialogue because debates often haven't been civil nor really designed to reach agreement on how to manage forests.

Background

Old growth forest are characterized by large, old trees, live and dead, standing and fallen, usually containing many smaller trees, providing structural diversity, and reservoirs for a wide variety of species. As old growth characteristics accrue over time, definitions must be biologically flexible, widely accepted and specific to forest type, location and structure. Forests grown on long rotations for ultimate harvest can provide some older forest values and should not be excluded from old forest definitions. Processes to determine the appropriate amount of old growth, should take into account risk of loss to catastrophic fire, insect attack, disease or other agents of destruction, should be a primary determinant of the amount old forest. Additionally, the full forest cycle should be provided for; there should be a balanced array of forest ages, and location should be an important determinant.

The economic and social value of older forests was clearly demonstrated when President Clinton convened a Forest Summit in 1993 to find solutions to controversies over logging old growth timber on public lands. This summit led to the Northwest Forest Plan, designed to protect millions of acres of old growth on federal lands from logging. The high social value placed on older forests grows from recognition of the recreational and

aesthetic opportunities that they offer as well as their ecological significance. Societal values drive many public debates about older forests. Ecological and biodiversity concerns are secondary for many people who just don't want large, old trees to be cut down.

Policy changes to be considered include more local influence in the form of greater management and regulatory flexibility, and incentives to produce older forests. Federal policy change should embody the creation of a balanced network of older forests across the landscape. The Northwest Forest Plan indicated increasing amounts of older forests on federal lands. Federal fire policy has been important cause of older forest loss.

The major barrier to policy change is *existing* policy. Many of the laws and regulations affecting forest policy were passed over 30 years ago. Forest policies should be reexamined and changed where appropriate. Another barrier was the continual clash of special interests over public forests.

A core barrier lies in the culture of the federal land management agencies and a lack of trust due to past mismanagement.

O & C lands are managed by the Bureau of Land Management under a federal statute (The O & C Act) that makes timber production the dominant use for the lands. There must be agreement on the legal constraints and the objectives of these lands before progress can be made on determining the desired amount of older forest.

Legal constraints define the amount of each agency's discretion. Knowing what we are trying to accomplish through the preservation of old growth would guide the decision of what is needed, how and where.

There are those that view the O & C Act as a barrier to be removed. If so, there must be a realistic, achievable plan to compensate the counties and communities for their loss of a critical source of revenue and benefits.

[I am concerned with the tone directed toward old growth policy on O&C lands. I don't think it is necessary that we trigger a battle with the dependent counties on changing the mandate that is contained in the O&C Act. In saying that, isn't there enough slack in the planning process to protect critical old growth? I thought that in the WOPR alternatives that old growth protection was definitely considered? Isn't the standard for Old growth different on the O&C zersus National Forests?]

The older forests of today, and the future, should respond to identified climate change issues. Drier, warmer climate trends will increase insect and disease activity. There must be a diversity of tree size and species mix to adequately respond to future conditions. Active management must take place to achieve desired future conditions. Commercial forest products are a reasonable output from that activity.

