



WESTERN
GOVERNORS'
ASSOCIATION

Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 07-13

Achieving Sustainable Forests

A. BACKGROUND

1. American forests directly and positively influence the social, economic, and ecological conditions of the country. They sustain and enrich the well-being of individuals and communities. And in the West, they are a huge part of the identity of its citizens and communities. The threats our forests face and the inadequacy of our current response to these threats have caused concern as to whether the nation's forests are, in fact, sustainable. The values at risk are not trivial – clean and abundant water, clean air, stable employment, energy self-sufficiency, wildlife habitat, and access for recreation and spiritual renewal.
2. The United States has the fourth largest forest estate of any nation, with 8 percent of the world's forests, exceeded only by the Russian Federation, Brazil and Canada. The total forestland in the United States is approximately 749 million acres — about one-third of the Nation's total land area. This is about two thirds of the area estimated to have been forested in 1630. These forests and woodlands vary from sparse scrub woodlands of the arid, interior west to the highly productive forests of the Pacific Coast and the South, and range from pure coniferous forests to multi-species mixtures, including extensive and diverse deciduous forests. In the West these include what can, and should be, magnificent forests of redwood, giant sequoia, Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, Sitka spruce, lodgepole pine, noble fir and many other species.
3. There is a compelling national interest in sustainable forests for all of America. The nation's forests provide a tremendous array of goods and services and add to our quality of life.
 - A clean and healthy environment for the nation's urban and rural citizens.
 - Employment and economic opportunities.
 - Quality habitat for America's plants and animals.
 - Open space and outdoor recreation.
 - America's cultural and traditional heritage.
 - Energy self-sufficiency.
4. Further, there is a set of disturbing trends threatening these forest values across the country. They include:
 - Rapid loss to development - less green space and open space for recreation, wildlife, clean air and clean water;
 - the sale of industrial forest lands to real estate interests – forest land is being chopped up and sold

- increasing insect and disease outbreaks and large-scale wildfires – loss of life, property and natural resources, enormous firefighting costs, threats to our water supply;
 - loss of forest industry – increasing unemployment, damage to the social fabric of forest dependent rural communities, loss of tax dollars for schools, roads and other services;
 - ineffective tax policies and assistance programs - families find it increasingly costly and difficult to keep forestland, and to pass it down to their children.
 - A failure of US international policy to ensure that all wood and wood products imported into the United States meets the same high environmental and social standards as wood produced within our own borders.
5. Considering the above, we have come to a number of conclusions:
- Our nation lacks a clear vision and policies that promote the sustainable management of the nation’s public and private forests as an integrated and high priority;
 - Many of the problems faced by our forests derive from other much larger social and economic forces;
 - Engagement and collaboration with other partners outside of the traditional forestry community is needed; and,
 - Efforts to address these concerns across all regions of the country are needed.
6. Sustainable forest management (SFM) is an internationally accepted and applied concept that balances the environmental, social, and economic values and services that forests provide. In 1987 the Brundtland Report, more formally known as *Our Common Future*, published by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development, broadly advanced the notion that sustainable development must meet the needs of the present generation without compromising those of future generations. Using that work, a set of *Forest Principles* were adopted by consensus on the part of nearly 180 countries in attendance at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. And since that time, numerous international forest policy dialogues have built on these *Principles* to develop and refine the criteria which serve to define forests as sustainable. The United States has been a leader in these dialogues since inception and from this last nearly twenty years of work has matured a concept of sustainable forest resources that is globally endorsed and that represents a solid foundation for the development of a domestic national policy.
7. Key to this vision of sustainability is that, across large areas, forests must be able to deliver a full and integrated set of economic, environmental and social values. Forests which generate economic value provide the means to fund environmental and social benefits. This is true on both public and private ownerships. At the same time, by protecting a forest’s environmental values sustainable forestry maintains the basic soil, water and biological elements that underpin economic

value. Equally important, is the need for forests to deliver a robust set of social values so that citizens ultimately have the emotional commitment to keep and nourish forests appropriately for all benefits.

8. Our goal is to create a renewed commitment and social contract, both in the west and across the nation, to understand, enhance, and protect the health, productivity, and sustainability of America's forests. A fundamental policy discussion needs to occur on the national stage across all ownerships about the future of forests in the United States.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors believe the country needs to look at new, more effective models for government and societal involvement aimed at sustaining America's forests for future generations. To this end, the Governors recommend pursuit of a national policy on sustainable forests.
2. Western Governors are committed to clarifying and enhancing the roles of federal, state, and local governments in relation to sustainable forests, promoting regional collaboration, joint planning and coordinated action.
3. The Western Governors hold that:
 - The management and conservation of forest resources in the United States should be guided by a mandate to meet the forest related needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.
 - Doing so requires that economic, social and environmental values from forests be provided within a framework where these values are mutually supportive.
 - Laws and programs that promote this vision of sustainable forests and the inter-connectedness of environmental, social and economic values are acceptable expressions of federal policy. Government functions that do otherwise are not.
4. Western Governors believe that pursuit of policies true to the concept of sustainable forests would result in:
 - Improved consistency and delivery of forest goods and services,
 - Regional landscape level approaches to forest management that assure core areas for economic/community sustainability and biodiversity,
 - Revision of relevant forest and tax legislation,
 - Interagency cooperation and better efficiencies for forest management and related data gathering and reporting,
 - A framework and policy context to U.S. engagement in international forest policy.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. WGA will seek Congressional mandate within the 2007 Farm Bill, or another appropriate vehicle, to engage upon a nationwide discussion across all ownerships about the future of forests in the U.S. This discussion should result in development of a national policy on sustainable forests which needs to be based on the interdependency of the ecological, economic and social values we derive from our forests. It should draw upon the 20 year foundation and globally endorsed body of work related to sustainable forests as contained in the Bruntland report and subsequent international forest policy dialogues that define criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management.
2. WGA will seek funding to assist in the implementation of this resolution. Further, WGA will post this resolution to its web site to be used and referred to as necessary.
3. WGA will serve as a catalyst and leader to ensure that this important national forest policy review and discussion results in tangible improvements to the nation's forest resource.

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