

# SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS

49er Chapter  
C/O 16198 Acorn Drive  
Sonora, CA 95370

June 5, 2009

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein:

The 49er Chapter of the Society of American Foresters (SAF) represents professional foresters in the Central Sierra Nevada region. We are deeply concerned with the closing of Sierra Pacific's sawmills in Camino and Sonora, CA. Mill closures result in job losses that affect mill workers, independent contractor-loggers, and business that supply the mills. Also, the Forest Service and private timberland owners can not effectively manage their lands without a processing facility to take logs.

We support the administration's commitment to use sound science for wildland management and we urge that all scientific research be considered. This includes research that supports active management that produces desired public commodities while protecting the environment. Research that only supports wilderness and roadless designations for federal forest land does not allow for job creation, economic development, or resource protection. Please consider the following points:

1. Healthy forest stands in California often need active management. Assuming the validity of global warming, California forests need to become more resilient to prolonged drought stress in our Mediterranean climate. Forest science tells us that overly dense forests are subject to various stresses (e.g., drought, insect, disease) that can lead to unhealthy conditions including death. This has occurred over the last several years on the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests.

Healthy forest stands in California often need active management by treating small diameter "ladder fuels." Large trees must be spaced out to prevent drought stress and bark beetle attacks resulting from global warming or other environmental stresses. Sometimes areas with only a few poorly growing trees with dense brush beneath the trees need to be harvested and managed with vigorously growing young trees.

There is a large backlog of needed work on the National Forests. This includes reforestation, thinning to improve forest health and reduce fire risk, hazardous fuel reduction (e.g., slash and brush reduction), road and trail maintenance, and the repair and maintenance of recreation facilities.

2. The existing infrastructure of the remaining California forest industry must be maintained. Reasonable timber harvest levels are necessary to maintain the existing mills and infrastructure. The mills and associated infrastructure help ensure healthy forests on private and public timberlands, support small business, and provide living wage jobs for thousands of forest and mill workers. Without an assured long-term supply of timber, there will be little economic incentive to reopen the mills when the depressed lumber market rebounds.

Currently, there are millions of designated roadless and wilderness acres on public land. Outside of these areas, mills and their infrastructure are required to provide viable markets for managing forest stands to meet public needs. These public needs include sustainable building materials (lumber, paper, etc), and resource protection (clean water, etc).

3. Sustainable domestic forestry is preferable to importing timber from elsewhere. California timberlands are regulated by federal and state policies (e.g., NEPA , Forest Service Framework, and Timber Sale Contracts on federal; and CEQA and the California Forest Practice Act on private timberlands). These federal and State regulations require “Best Management Practices (BMPs).”

The United States imports about 40 percent of our wood products from other countries. Many areas outside California have less environmental controls and do not practice BMPs. Importing processed timber encourages less sustainable forestry elsewhere and discourages sustainable forestry in California.

4. Forest stands must be managed to insure catastrophic fires are minimized across the landscape, not just near communities at risk. Fire, whether controlled or catastrophic, returns carbon to the atmosphere. Not allowing active forest management encourages unhealthy forest conditions and uncontrolled wildfires. The US Forest Service has documented catastrophic wildfires over hundreds of thousands of acres in California over the last few years. Early seral stage vegetation (e.g., brush, grass, small trees) has replaced old growth habitat. All the stored carbon in hundred of thousands of acres of old growth stands has returned to the atmosphere. This includes both from the wildfire smoke and the resulting standing dead trees rotting without being harvested.

Managing and using wood products is carbon neutral if produced from sustainable managed forests, like those in California. Science shows that the carbon footprint of wood products is much less than other material like concrete and steel. These materials substitute for wood when the supply of wood products is artificially constrained. Research shows that a significant portion of the carbon in wood products is sequestered for many years in housing and eventually landfills.

Rather than uncontrolled wildfires burning forests, we recommend active timber management. This includes conventional timber harvesting, prescribed fires, and biomass removal. Conventional timber harvesting allows for management to meet various public and landowner objectives. Prescribed fire provides a means to reduce fuel hazards during a time when the conditions can be controlled. Biomass allows for small woody material to be burned in modern co-generation plants. Active

management creates jobs, protects the environment, and provides energy from the biomass operations.

5. The budget must consider forest products. We appreciate your support of short-term stimulus payments to the Forest Service and private interest (e.g., fire safe councils). The economic stimulus passed by Congress allows forestry investments. Although, small, rural, forest dependent communities are being left behind. The economic situation in many of these towns is critical.

Forest management activities match the skills of rural residents in need of employment. Accelerating current programs requires no new organizations, bureaucracy, retraining or other startup costs.

If the Forest Service has the money, there would be significant opportunities for increased hiring in rural areas. Increased funding for forest management programs would provide immediate employment benefits and would contribute significantly to the long-term economic stability of these rural, forest-dependent communities.

6. Litigation reform is necessary. The environmental gridlock that has stymied responsible forest management on private and federal land in California must be stopped.

California forestry implements both federal and State regulations to meet public needs and protect the environment. Yet, litigation often impedes legally compliant land use policies. The significant benefits of long-term sustainability of California forests are obvious. Sustained forest management, compliant with federal and State laws, requires reform of the endless litigation on environmental issues.

Thank you for considering the above points.



Sincerely  
Thomas M. Francis  
SAF 49er Chair