



Washington State SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS

4033 SW Canyon Road • Portland, OR 97221 • 503.224.8046

CHAPTERS: Central Washington • Mid-Columbia • North Olympic • North Puget Sound • South Puget Sound
• Southwest Washington • Longview • Admiralty Inlet Chapter •
Green River Community College • University of Washington Student Chapter • Grays Harbor College

Working Forest Position Statement

Position

The Washington State Society of American Foresters (WSSAF) supports creating, protecting, and enhancing working forests in the State of Washington. ***A working forest is defined here as a forest that is actively managed for a sustainable and balanced delivery of social, ecological, and economic products and values.***

Issue

With increasing public awareness of the benefits of working forests as a desirable alternative to land-use change and development, it is timely for the Washington State Society of American Foresters to clarify what we mean when we promote working forests. ***It is becoming widely known that alternative land use, development, and regulatory change contribute to the loss of working forests in Washington State.***^{a, d} Various interest groups, including the Puget Sound Partnership^b, Cascade Land Conservancy^c, and Northwest Environmental Forum, and several endangered species recovery plans, recognize the social, ecological, and economic products and values provided by working forests. In order to develop durable policies that support and maintain working forests, a common vision is necessary. This WSSAF definition provides that common vision.

Discussion

Active management means that silvicultural practices including determination of tree species composition, stocking control, thinning, and timber harvest are planned and happen recurrently and perpetually over most of the forestland area, causing a different balance of benefits than would occur from passive management alone. Foresters recognize that some areas of a working forest will not have planned timber harvest in order to provide certain ecological benefits. Examples of these areas are riparian stream buffers, non-forested wetlands, and endangered species habitat. To achieve balance across the landscape these areas are managed for their most suitable use.

Note that all working forests are managed forests, but not all managed forests are working forests. For example, a forest that is managed as a Wilderness area is not a working forest. Likewise, a forest that is managed solely for watershed protection, without provision for periodic harvest of commercial timber, is a managed forest but not a working forest. In general, working forests provide multiple benefits rather than single or dominant benefits.

Similarly, all working forests must be sustainable but not all sustainable forests are working forests.

Conversion of Working Forests to Non-Forest Use

Using the WSSAF definition, the area of working forest is decreasing on federal, state, corporate, and private forestland ownerships in Washington State^d.

Federal lands are experiencing conversion from multiple-use working forests to forests managed more for social and ecological values through direct policy changes. National Park expansions, Wilderness area expansions, and the Northwest Forest Plan have transferred many acres of national working forest into forests managed principally for ecological and recreational benefits. These are no longer working forests, and in some cases, these changes have inadvertently exacerbated forest health and fire risk issues.

Similarly, many acres of state-owned Trust lands have been moved into management categories for ecologically dominant uses that restrict stocking control and timber harvest. As such, they are no longer working forests.

Vertically integrated corporations, driven by federal tax policies, have sold large tracts of their working forests to individual private investors and investment funds. Typically, these transactions include or plan for a "spin off" of parcels that have a higher and better use as subdivisions or commercial development than for forest management.

On private forestlands, the decision to move lands from working forests is commonly a function of economics and happens slowly over time. As Washington's population continues to grow, lands that were once most valued as working forests have increasing development value. *As property values and regulations change, private forest landowners have sold lands to owners that choose not to manage them as working forests^a.*

This trend is especially evident with family and individual forest landowners that own approximately half of the private forestland in Washington. In addition to being in close proximity to areas with higher development values, these owners are disproportionately older.^d The sale of part or all of a tree farm can be an attractive financial alternative to the regulatory and market risks of managing a working forest when a landowner is faced with the need for retirement income or intergenerational transfer.

Benefits of Working Forests

WSSAF recognizes that the bundle of benefits from working forests will vary from forest to forest, but will always include a balance of social, ecological, and economic products and values.

- Examples of social benefits are watershed protection, wildlife, recreation, and aesthetic and spiritual experiences.
- Examples of ecological benefits are the provision of high quality and abundant water, watershed protection, wildlife and fisheries habitat and species diversity, a smaller wildland-urban interface, the capture and storage of carbon in wood products, and increased health and climate change resiliency.
- Examples of economic benefits are family-wage jobs from timber harvest and forest products manufacturing, maintenance of forest production infrastructure, reduced importation of forest products, tourism revenue from outdoor recreation, and sufficient profits to forest landowners that provide the incentive for them to perpetually reinvest and maintain their working forests.

Measures to Protect and Enhance Working Forests

WSSAF supports the use of a variety of measures by state and local governments, landowners, and individual citizens that can help conserve working forests in Washington including:

- Land use policies that recognize the multiple values of working forests and respect the rights and responsibilities of private and public forest landowners.
- Public funding and support for enforcing existing forest practices laws and regulations.
- Application of forest practices rules that are site specific when appropriate, rather than one size fits all.
- Adequate public funding of research necessary for fair and durable forest policy.
- Adequate public funding for sufficient and peer reviewed, rather than "best available science" upon which to base good forest policy.
- Expanded markets for private and public forest products, including but not limited to wood and fiber production.
- Develop markets for ecological services.
- Education programs that emphasize recognition that wood is a renewable natural resource.
- Provide credit to working forest landowners for the capture of atmospheric carbon and the reduction of carbon release by the substitution of wood for steel and concrete building materials.
- Federal and state forest taxation systems that encourage long-term investment in sustainable forest management and habitat restoration, and that discourage parcelization.
- Small forest landowner assistance programs, such as the American Tree Farm Program or Forest Stewardship Program that educate and provide assistance on how to maintain working forests.

^a Sutherland, D. Bare, B.B., 2007. The Future of Washington Forests.

^b Puget Sound Partnership, 2009. 2009 State of the Sound Report.

^c Cascade Land Conservancy. The Olympic Agenda.

^d USDA Technical Report PNW-GTR-800. Washington's Forest Resources 2002-2006.

This position statement was adopted by the Washington State SAF Executive Committee on August 10, 2011. It will expire August 10, 2016, unless it is renewed by the committee.