

Umpqua National Forest Five-Year Timber Action Plan

Topic:

Umpqua National Forest employees are using an integrated timber-management strategy to yield targeted volume in an efficient manner, using a collaborative approach to produce a reliable and sustainable timber-sale program. With current funding, we are capable of efficiently producing and awarding about 50 million board feet (MMBF) annually at a reasonable cost per unit.

Background:

Historically, we focused on regeneration harvest of old-growth and mature forests. The 1990 Umpqua Forest Plan estimated production of an annual yield of over 300 MMBF. The 1994 Northwest Forest Plan reduced the annual timber-harvest goals to about 70 MMBF per year, or a decadal average of about 700 MMBF.

Throughout the 1990s, we offered timber sales that primarily harvested old growth. Many of these old-growth sales were litigated, resulting in lower amounts harvested than our planned decadal average.

It is a simple truth that conflict is cost for Umpqua National Forest managers. For example, conflicts over old-growth sales have associated costs in people's time, delays in implementing decisions, financial claims against the government, and missed opportunities to apply scarce human and capital resources to natural resources that require management. Along with our determination to meet fuels-reduction, timber and vegetation targets funded by Congress, the desire to reliably deliver timber products has caused Forest staff to focus on lower-conflict forest management practices since 2002.

Field inventories show that many plantations resulting from clearcut harvests from the 1940s through the 1960s need commercial thinning; this practice generally has broad-based public support when used in Matrix and Late Successional Reserves. Without thinning, many of these stands will grow towards a future condition that is not desirable, nor intended by those who planted the stands. The fire danger in these stands is high because there are so many trees growing close together. A fire that reaches the tops of these trees could consume the entire stand with one big wind gust, an outcome we saw during our 2002 forest fires.

We are also managing mature stands, using partial harvest techniques known as "thinning from below." Many of the mature stands have dense under-stories that can carry fire. Thinning in these stands can create growing room for pines, which don't do well under the stress caused by competition from other trees. Openings are also being created in mature stands to provide forage for big game and introduce diversity into the stands. While we have emphasized commercial thinning, we have not given up future options to offer regeneration harvests in mature forest areas if conditions warrant such practices.

Congress passed laws such as the Healthy Forest Restoration Act requiring us to look closely at how fire moves across the landscape, the build up of fuels, the increased severity of fires, and the threat of fires to communities and private property. Fuel reduction is now integrated as a co-priority within our timber sale planning efforts which leads to a larger landscape approach and expanded restoration areas. Insect and disease management is incorporated in our planning as well, and will result in specific targeted timber sales and stewardship contracts over the next three years.

By planning and offering a mixture of timber sales in both young and mature stands, we can meet our mandated outputs and can still accomplish multiple management goals and priorities.

Our current planning efforts propose treatments on 4,000 acres of managed stands and 4,000 acres of mature stands each year, potentially yielding up to 90 MMBF of timber, to be harvested over multiple years.

Capacity:

We revise our Five-Year Timber Action Plan for the Umpqua National Forest yearly. We estimate more than 80,000 acres of mature stands across the forest (outside of reserved areas) would benefit from thinning. This action would yield a sustainable supply of timber while reducing fire danger to mature and old-growth forest areas.

We accomplished mature-forest thinning on less than 1,500 acres per year given funding levels in prior years. At this rate, we are unable to stay ahead of increased fuel loadings in those areas. Threats to mature and old-growth forest integrity as well as the species that use these forests would steadily increase. Increasing our level of thinning to about 4,500 acres per year would provide a sustainable supply of 50 MMBF per year or more.

Forest staff estimate there are more than 60,000 acres of younger, managed stands that would benefit from thinning, and at the same time, reduce fire danger. Current funding levels limit us to planning less than 2,000 acres per year. At this rate, it will take 30 years to complete thinning on young stands; by that time, many of the stands will have grown stagnant and be less responsive to management treatments. Increasing to 6,000 acres per year would complete the work in 10 years, bringing about desired forest conditions and likely future regeneration harvests. The supply of timber from managed-stand-commercial thinning could be up to 45 MMBF per year or more for the decade, then at lower levels into the future.

In fiscal year 2009, we are funded for about 46 MMBF at about \$3.7 million, not including another \$500,000 in engineering support. **In the Pacific Northwest Region, the average cost per thousand board feet (MBF) is about \$75 to \$80. Our 2009 program will likely cost about \$80 per MBF.**

To build from our current program, with a minor increase in personnel, an additional **\$850,000** would allow us to increase our planning and output by about **10 MMBF** per year.

Our costs for environmental analysis and appeals or litigation will go down by focusing our program on areas where we have broad-based public support because conflicts will be reduced. We will also meet the intent of the President's Executive Order requiring cooperative conservation and collaboration. With this focus and using more efficient timber-sale-preparation methods and authorities, we will likely see lower costs.

Next Steps:

- ❑ Continue awarding an estimated 46 to 50 MMBF per year based on anticipated levels of funding
- ❑ Continue maximizing fuel reduction work within timber sale planning areas
- ❑ Continue collaborating with local communities and organizations to help maximize efficiencies in our public decision-making process and also meet the intent of the President's Executive Order requiring cooperative conservation and collaboration
- ❑ Seek administrative methods to further reduce costs while delivering a sustainable timber supply

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