

The Network Solution¹

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When invited to speak at this symposium, I was asked to discuss corporate timber policies and Board of Forestry perspectives as they relate to oak woodland ecology, management, and planning. I was also asked to comment about hardwoods and the role of Registered Professional Foresters. The topics of timber company policies and Board of Forestry perspectives are rather different, but I think I can use one to reach the other.

Let me begin by sharing my feelings as a resource manager for a timber company that owns 380,000 acres of timberland on the North Coast. I was trained as a forester and a scientist. I came to Simpson Timber Company³ from a university faculty position, and my qualifications included an understanding of students, a dislike of faculty politics, a healthy skepticism about what is known about forestry, and a strong desire to find answers.

I presently oversee the resource base of a company in California with a focus on long-term asset management. Specifically, my role includes producing seedlings for replanting units after harvest, managing these young forests through cultural treatments to control competition, prescribing treatments to enhance growth, and ultimately estimating the volume of these young stands as they grow into merchantable size classes. These cruise data then serve as a “check point,” strengthening our growth and yield modeling efforts, which are anchored to permanent growth plots.

Since the beginning of this decade, the management of noncommodity wildland resources on private lands has risen to assume major importance. To accommodate the need to manage these resources, we have increased our staff to include a wildlife dimension, and more recently a fisheries dimension, to our forestry business. This company is family owned, having been in the timber business for more than 100 years, and it plans to continue in that business. The purpose of the company is to make a profit. It does so by selling logs and other wood products. Hence, the company aggressively manages its land to produce wood fiber. Log prices, harvesting and marketing costs, and interest rates get much attention—and so do governmental regulations.

The company also has a land ethic: Preserve our productive assets—the soil, the watersheds, and the genetic and vegetative bases of the forest. To these ends, we invest hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to maintain a road system, to monitor the impacts of our management on water quality and wildlife, to improve the genetic quality of our growing stock, and to protect and restore streams. We make extensive use of GIS technology and saturate our managers with information.

More importantly, we use science as an asset. Our large land base treats us to many different problems, each an opportunity to learn. Although the existing information base is impressive, it is not yet adequate to address the complexity of forest ecosystems. The company is not timid about trying something new, observing how it works, and then making adjustments. I believe this is called “adaptive management” in current parlance.

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³The use of trade or firm names in this publication is for reader information and does not imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture of any product or service.

As is so often true in land management, managers are constrained by a past not of their making. Nearly all of the company's lands have had extensive harvesting historically, so many of our current ecological challenges involve vegetation assemblages that developed as a result of past harvesting practices that had little or no regard for regenerating the site with conifers. A common legacy of these practices throughout the north coast is conifer sites covered with hardwoods, principally tanoak/madrone complexes, although alder can dominate sites with ample soil moisture. Timber companies differ in their approach to hardwoods, but what I will describe is pretty much a standard dilemma over whether to harvest hardwoods that are unwanted because they occupy conifer growing space or to retain them for wildlife habitat reasons.

For most timber companies, the standard approach is to discourage hardwoods from growing after conifer stands are harvested, and to try to recapture hardwood-dominated conifer sites if hardwood log or chip prices make it economically feasible to do so. Harvesting and regeneration techniques vary by timber company and by site. No set prescription exists for harvesting method, choice of planting stock, or the use of fire or herbicides. Of course, techniques like fire, and especially herbicides, can raise very different sets of questions and bring in larger social issues with neighbors and surrounding communities. That topic, however, is beyond the scope of this talk.

Foresters also know that hardwoods are critical components of ecosystems for wildlife and fish. In some ways, hardwoods in a forest stand provide the best assurance of habitat diversity. At Simpson, as a part of our obligation to comply with our conservation plan for the northern spotted owl, we leave recovery centers—cores of habitat—as part of our harvesting practices. Our foresters are instructed to make sure that these "Habitat Retention Areas" include both hardwoods and conifers whenever possible. As part of our planning, and to simplify the timber harvesting plan process, company foresters often enlarge the stream protection zone, or design a bulge onto the riparian strip to meet our habitat retention requirements for the owl. As it happens, these riparian corridors are commonly dominated by hardwoods so, as a practical matter, a significant component of hardwoods, especially red alder, is retained low on the slope, where it benefits owls and other wildlife. On drier areas inland from the coast, and on upland locations, the "Habitat Retention Areas" are composed of hardwood and conifer species typical of less mesic sites. Types of hardwoods retained at these locations include tanoak, madrone, pepperwood, black oak, and white oak.

Companies vary in how much time or money they spend trying to understand how hardwoods function on their lands. Most leave hardwood trees or stands in places where they serve critical ecological values, such as in riparian areas or for specialized nesting or denning habitat. Analyses of these opportunities are required in the forest practice rules.

Simpson considers hardwood retention a cost because it promotes lower-valued, slower-growing trees at the expense of conifers, which lowers the productivity of our timberlands. Yet we also consider the retention of hardwoods a necessity for meeting wildlife needs and managing public-trust resources. Nonetheless, from a strictly economic viewpoint, we would generally prefer to have conifers because they presently give a greater economic return.

Next let me turn to a Board of Forestry perspective. It has been broadening, to say the least. I arrived at the Board in 1993 as a member with a forest products background. My first assignment was to chair the Ecosystem Management Committee, which oversees the Board's interests in hardwoods. Consequently, almost from the first day on that job, I realized that the timber perspective on hardwoods was a subset of a much larger, more sweeping set of concerns. In most places in California, the economic worth of hardwoods is related to property

values that come from viewsheds, desirable living space, and big, old oak trees in the yard.

I also learned that the Board considered regulation of hardwoods in the mid-1980's because of concerns over loss of deer habitat, negative impacts on water quality, and fear of the environmental effects from a proposed biomass plant in Mendocino County that would have used hardwoods. But the Board rejected actions to bring hardwood harvesting under the Forest Practice Act in favor of a program of research, information, and educational outreach to encourage conservation and wise management of the hardwood resource.

Largely through the efforts of the Board and the University of California, the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program was formed. And over the next decade some key things happened. More was learned about the status of hardwoods, about regeneration problems, and about interaction with range and other uses. Several research projects were initiated, and some preliminary hardwood guidelines were written. But probably of greatest importance, in the long run, a much wider network of persons concerned about hardwood resources was formed. This was due to the work of University of California (U.C.) Extension, the California Oak Foundation, landowner groups like the California Cattlemen, a host of urban and community forestry groups, and governmental agencies.

Many of you may not appreciate the significance of this achievement. But to me, coming from the outside and late in the process, it seems amazing. My first reaction was surprise because of the wide diversity of interests that bring people's attention to hardwoods—everything from protecting property rights to worry over loss of recreational resources, viewsheds, or wildlife habitat. On further reflection I also thought that this network was a solution, or at least a framework for a solution, to hardwoods issues. People from seemingly very diverse backgrounds could actually agree on things—not always, but often enough to make the effort worthwhile.

About the time I arrived at the Board, in 1993, it was reviewing the status of oaks. Hardwoods were still being lost to firewood removal, especially in some parts of the Sacramento Valley, and to development. The Board, which has been mired in regulatory matters for conifers under the Forest Practice Act, believed that local government was best suited to deal with hardwood issues in their jurisdiction. It gave itself 3 years to see if, by additional focus and encouragement, more local governments would develop strategies that would work locally.

Letters were written to each of the counties with significant hardwood resources, asking them to develop appropriate strategies. A copy of the excellent publication, *A Planner's Guide for Oak Woodlands*, and maps of hardwoods were sent to each county. U.C. Extension, the California Oak Foundation, the California Cattlemen, county planning staffs, and others took the lead in different parts of the state to encourage development of local solutions. The Board followed the progress of the counties and sent another letter in 1994 to those counties from which we had not seen results. With a variety of local input, by 1996 every county with significant oak resources at least had a network of persons interested in hardwoods. Most had developed a formal process to track hardwood resources and discuss issues. These took several forms:

- Some counties have enacted voluntary ordinances, with a local committee to oversee how they are being followed. Tehama County was the first to develop this approach and others have followed. In this county, the cattlemen were very influential, as were environmentalists, agencies, and others. A woodcutter is chairman of the committee.
- Other counties have used their general planning process, with most

focus at the project review level. Examples are Nevada and Tuolumne Counties.

- Still other counties are using an ordinance approach. Examples are Monterey County, with a completed ordinance, and Sonoma County, with one under way.

My assessment of the situation is that much progress has been made but that we are not done. Things are still evolving. Not all efforts are finished and some are taking a long time. I still read about subdivisions being approved that some citizen groups complain remove too many hardwoods. While this reaction of neighbors is usually focused on individual projects or portions of a county, it is a bellwether of the future. Population growth is still tremendous in central Sierra Nevada and southern California counties. This will continue to put severe pressure on hardwood rangelands and forestlands for living and recreating space.

My sense also is that we will need to rely on the hardwood network to address most of these issues. Threats of state intervention only work to some degree, but often just make local people angry. This is especially true when people are moving to get away from governmental restrictions. What works is when people start to talk and to find some common ground that fits their community; this has been proven again and again. The Sustainable Landscapes project in the central coastal counties and the Tehama Hardwoods Committee are very different but very good examples of this.

The state still will be involved. The Board maintains its basic policy: to conserve and encourage wise management of hardwoods in California. It has put this into a joint policy with the Fish and Game Commission, and we review its implementation at least once a year. And later this year the Board will make another assessment about the success of locally based programs. We still must determine how to judge this, but I am optimistic that we will like what we see.

Both the Commission and the Board will remain very interested in the status of the hardwood resource. The bad news is that budget cuts are lessening the role played by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) and constraining that played by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDF&G). Neither the CDF nor CDF&G will be able to monitor the status of hardwoods, at least directly. We will be revising the joint policy to reflect this fact. Fortunately, the University of California has reaffirmed its commitment to the Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program, and U.C. Extension will be able to do some work in the monitoring area.

I want to close with a reflection. It seems evident that very little State General Fund money will be available for hardwood programs in the Resources Agency. Perhaps some limited federal funding for urban forestry will be maintained. Some special funds for habitat acquisition will continue from a variety of sources, but they also will be constrained. This further increases the importance of the network solution. It will be vital to find ways locally to deal with conservation and management issues, including the generation of funding for programs or landowner reimbursement.

I hope that the real estate and development communities will become an increasingly important part of the network. Environmental professionals, landscape architects, and developers hold as much or more of the future than the Board does. We have to keep encouraging, facilitating, sharing, and even arguing for conservation and management of hardwoods. In many cases the best advocates for hardwood conservation are the developers and landowners themselves.

I started this talk by describing the perspective of one timber company in particular and the timber industry in general. In the past decade I have seen a

significant increase in general understanding of hardwoods as a component of the ecosystems of which they are a part. Whether by conscience, public pressure, or forest practice rules, this understanding is reflected in better hardwood conservation and management. This has been uneven in its evolution, but it is real.

The same is true on hardwood rangelands, but with much greater variety in approach. There is great strength in this diversity and in a framework that encourages people to help find their own answers. Ultimately we all want the quality of life that good stands of hardwoods represent. We could not have gotten very far without our hardwood network. So I want to end by saying "thanks" to all of you. Keep up the good work.

