

***Excerpt from the 2013 Priorities
Report in Regards to Small
Landowner Regulatory Improvement***

**Board of Forestry and Fire Protection,
Management Committee Meeting**

September 10th, 2013

Small Landowner Regulatory Improvement

California's small forest landowners find it difficult, if not impossible, to practice sustainable forest management on their private family ownerships. Non-corporate forest landowners control approximately 3.2 million acres of the state's nearly 8 million acres of private timberlands. Of these, the smallest landowners owning less than 160 acres of timber are particularly sensitive to costs and are geographically dependent on local revenue opportunities. These family ownerships are often not well represented in local and state venues that formulate tenets that regulate commercial forest management. The unintended consequence is the adoption of policies, often based on intensive industrial practices, which have culminated in a disproportionately burdensome regulatory system. This drives small ownerships towards more aggressive harvesting of timber to recoup costs or to engage in actions that would produce other sources of revenue. These alternative revenue generating projects including sub-dividing, forest conversion and fragmentation, all of which are in opposition of what was intended during the multi-decade development of the California Forest Practice Rules.

Management Strategies of small forest landowners:

This cohort of landowner consists generally of family ownerships. These properties are the location of a primary or secondary residence or undeveloped parcels that are utilized for purposes of recreation. Given this pattern of land use, the resulting management practices of these ownerships, including timber harvesting activities, are conducted under a conservation ethic. The goals of these landowners, with assistance of their Registered Professional Forester, often include:

- “Light Touch” single tree and “Group” selection
- Preservation of aesthetic values
- Hazard reduction for wildfire
- Timber stand improvement
- Maintenance of wildlife trees and other biological legacies
- Extended period of time between harvesting activities

Proposed Solution:

Various stakeholders including agencies, industrial landowners, mid-sized landowner and environmental advocates, have been working on solutions to identified problems within the forestry sector.. The solutions are proportional to the identified problem and/or type of timberland use. The low impact, diminutive scope and general stewardship demonstrated by these landowners should result in a contemporary permitting structure that represents a “streamlined” and cost effective approach. An administrative permit that provides for the necessary protection of public trust resources, including wildlife, water, archaeology, carbon sequestration, social and economic factors can be an effective permitting vehicle that will supply this cohort of landowner with the understanding that the state recognizes the importance of these family ownerships.

Benefits of the Administrative Permit:

The benefits of administrative permit are multifaceted and do not apply only to the landowner, but also to the State of California. These benefits span ecological, social and economic spectrums:

Ecological Benefits:

- Maintains terrestrial habitat values of forested landscapes
- Protects, maintains and enhances aquatic resources by incorporating standards that are more rigorous than current Forest Practice Rules
- Working forests are recognized for the long term sequestration and storage of green house gases.

Social:

- Incentivizes forest practices that are accepted by many conservation groups
- Promotes the conservation ethic within private small scale working forests
- Promotes long term sustained yield of high quality forest products
- Compatible with all Certification systems

Economic:

- Allows the small landowner to achieve compliance of the California Forest Practice Rules and CEQA in a cost effective manner
- Provides employment opportunity to rural communities
- Provides state agencies with cost effective review process
- Could generate additional revenue for the state

Conclusion:

The policies of the State of California have disproportionately affected the small timberland owners. This unintentional consequence has resulted in unfortunate circumstances as they relate to responsible forest management. Small family timberland ownerships contribute considerably to both the forest products industry and conservation of public trust resources within the state. To continue to disregard these landowners due to lack of representation will result in further degradation of the industry and the forested environment. Given that this is a policy level issue, it seems appropriate to address the issue with policy level reforms. Legislative action has been taken in the past to develop administrative permits to address other problems that face our forested landscapes. The

scope of management practiced by these landowners certainly warrants consideration of this proposed permitting structure.

Recommendations

- Utilize an administrative permit for low impact, small scale, harvest projects for small landowners to allow economic management to occur.