



January 11, 2006

The Honorable Greg Walden
1210 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3702

Dear Chairman Walden:

Current discussion in Congress on recovery and reforestation of forests following catastrophes such as wildfires, hurricanes, floods, and outbreaks of insects and disease has now been joined by the recent publication of a study comparing restoration treatments with natural recovery on portions of Oregon's 500,000-acre Biscuit Fire of 2002. Because of the controversial managerial, conservation, and policy aspects of this topic, the Society of American Foresters, consisting of over 15,000 scientists, resource managers, and consultants offers the following insights:

- **Rapid damage assessment is imperative following forest catastrophes.** Where large areas are involved, the amount of damage and the appropriate response may vary depending on the physical environment (topography, slope, aspect, soils and vegetation) and the forests' uses. An immediate assessment allows resource management professionals to determine the extent to which active restoration is required to restore diverse forest values. It is likely that some areas will not require treatment.
- **Artificial regeneration is often needed to speed recovery, reduce erosion, and prevent spread of invasive species and other competing vegetation.** Experience with numerous forest catastrophes demonstrates that, because of multiple years between adequate seed crops or the common rapid development of shrub and grass species, it can take decades for desired tree species to become established in some forest types. In some forests, the combination of seed availability and favorable weather enables prompt natural regeneration. Depending on management objectives and site conditions, artificial regeneration can benefit wildlife and other forest values and can speed the establishment and growth of new forests. Proper spacing of trees is needed to reduce the risk of crown fires and enhance development of mature forest conditions. The uncertainty and variability of conditions within a damaged area make it necessary for forest managers to have flexibility in responding to diverse situations and differing restoration needs.
- **The desirability of salvage varies with site conditions and management objectives.** Normally, some damaged trees should be retained to provide wildlife habitat, to slowly add to down woody material, or because removing them might damage the site. In other areas some damaged trees can be salvaged to reduce fire hazard, for human safety, or to contribute to society's need for wood products and offset the costs of other restoration activities.
- **If salvage is appropriate, harvest must be done promptly.** Dead trees rapidly deteriorate and lose economic value. Additionally, timely salvage and reforestation, where necessary, can prevent further damage to the site. If needed, debris resulting

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from salvage harvest can either be treated or removed to avoid contributing to the amount of fuels on the ground.

- **Research and monitoring should be long-term to permit reliable conclusions.** Ecosystem recovery is a long-term phenomenon. Prudent management, stewardship, and policy decisions are therefore best based on the results of both research studies and direct management experience over long periods of time. Because results from short-term studies depend on particular conditions and weather, they can only provide interim insights into processes and behaviors. Results from studies in one location and species type cannot usually be applied to other locations, species, or climates.

In determining the appropriate action for restoring forestlands damaged by catastrophic events, forest managers must base their evaluation on their experience with similar events, their professional judgment, and the site-specific characteristics of the area. Incorporation of relevant research is one of several factors considered during this decision making process, but research alone is not the only basis for decision making when managing dynamic forest landscapes on a sustainable basis.

For further information, please see the attached recently-produced brochure illustrating the common need to take positive and prompt action following natural catastrophes in various forest areas of the nation or visit: http://www.safnet.org/policyand_press/forestrecovery.cfm

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael T. Goergen Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael T. Goergen Jr.
Executive Vice-President, CEO