

# If you Forget the Forests, will you Forget the Farms?

**T**he lack of proper forest management is literally killing our forests.

*By Marshall Matz*

The U.S. Forest Service is the largest agency within the Department of Agriculture with some 24,000 employees. The 155 national forests, and the 20 national grasslands, are a vast national resource comprising 193 million acres ... almost 10 percent of the total US land mass.

Yet, the U.S. Forest Service is not always recognized as a part of USDA. Physically, the Forest Service is removed from the Department, located across the street. The Forest Service's constituency groups do not regularly interact with other USDA stakeholders. The appropriation to fund the Forest Service is approved by the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, not the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee. Finally, the Forest Service is headed by a "Chief," who is typically a career Forest Service employee, not an appointed administrator.

Many of the challenges faced by the timber industry, however, are very similar to the challenges faced by production agriculture. The public does not understand the mission of the Forest Service and how it differs from the National Park Service. Trees are a renewable resource, yet some environmental groups oppose all logging in the national forests. In towns and communities located close to the 155 national forests, the local

economy is driven by Forest Service policy, the size of the timber harvest and federal funding. Over the years, harvest decisions have been based on philosophy, not sound forest management science.

The result has been catastrophic. Mills have closed, and the rural unemployment rate has spiked. In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, over 10 billion board feet of timber (10 bbf) were harvested each year from the national forests. Today, that number is less than 3 bbf. The Obama administration is trying to address the problem but the goal for this year is only 2.6 bbf, an increase of 200 million board feet over last

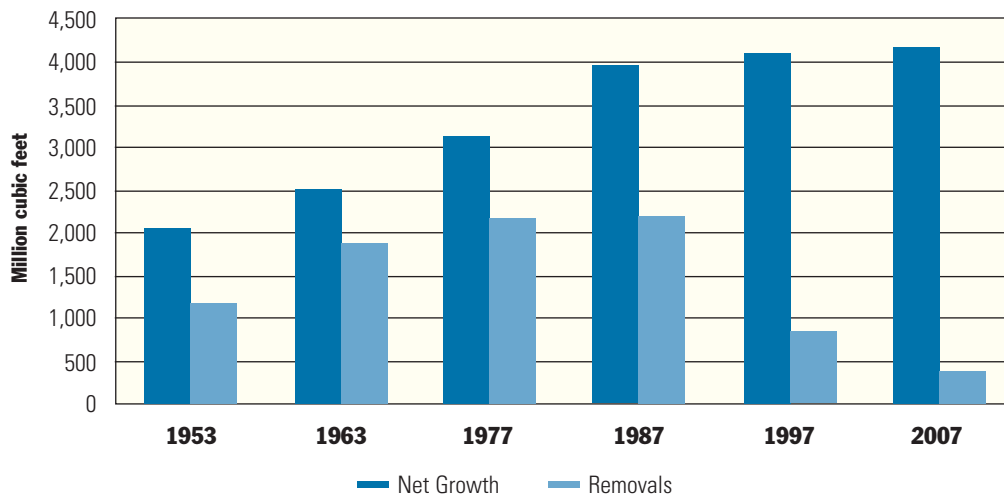
>> Overgrown forests pose significant wildfire threats and put critical water resources at risk. Managing forests can improve forest health and create jobs more efficiently than investing in virtually any other business sector.

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## National Forest Growth and Removals

All National Forest Timberlands — 1953 – 2007



⚡ With less than 10 percent of growth being removed, forests continue to grow denser and often accumulate uncharacteristic fuel loads. Thinning forests can reduce wildfire severity.

Instead of using wood to build homes and create jobs, trees are becoming food for beetles and fuel for fires.

“Harvest decisions have been based on philosophy, not sound science. The result has been catastrophic.”

year. *The bottom line: Only 10 percent of each year’s annual growth is being harvested.*

This lack of proper forest management is literally killing our forests. It is hurting the environment, increasing the frequency and intensity of forest fires, increasing the potential for catastrophic insect epidemics, and threatening recreation, wildlife habitat and clean water. “The most pressing issue” according to Governor Freudenthal, D-Wyo., is the bark beetle outbreak that is “taking a heavy toll on the Intermountain West” with over 20 million acres affected in the past 15 years.

### Wasted resource

Instead of using wood from the national forests to build homes and create jobs, the trees are becoming food for the beetles and fuel for the fires. In fact, investing in federal forest timber products is the most productive way of producing jobs of any federal program. Each one million dollars of federal money invested in the timber products budget produces 39.7 jobs. That job ratio is better than an investment in mass transit, building roads or even investing in biomass.

In an effort to address this challenge, national and regional timber organizations have joined together as the Federal Forest Resource Coalition to work with the administration and Congress on annual appropriations, the next Farm Bill, new forest planning regulations, and other pending issues. The organization is coordinated by Tom Troxel with the Intermountain Forest Association in Rapid City, South Dakota.

With skillful management of our national forests, we can reduce the potential for catastrophic fires and insect epidemics, and assure abundant supplies of clean water, a diversity of wildlife habitats, wood products that we all depend on, plus economic diversity and crucial jobs. It is time to follow sound science and rebuild the forest products industry as provided for under approved USDA forest plans. ■

Only 10 percent of each year’s annual growth is being harvested from the nation’s national forestlands.