

forest GUILD

Position Statement:

Forest Guild Statement Regarding “Citizen’s Call for Ecological Forest Restoration: Forest Restoration Principles and Criteria”

The Forest Guild (Guild) is a national, membership-based organization based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. We are a consortium of ecologically minded professional foresters who are dedicated to progressive, holistic forestry. Based upon our reading of the “Citizen’s Call for Ecological Forest Restoration”, we can see that an enormous amount of time and effort has gone into designing and developing this document. We believe that the vast majority of the text is well written and well reasoned. As such, we are in agreement with virtually all principles included within this document.

However, we cannot agree with several aspects of Principle V., the “Ecological Economic Principle and Criteria”. Specifically, paragraph b, subsection ii states;

Contracting mechanisms should separate forest restoration from the sale or utilization of forest restoration by-products from public lands, **as current timber sale contracting practices are not appropriate for restoring forests**. However, restoration by-products may have value secondarily as small diameter logs, poles, and firewood. (emphasis added).

While we are quite sympathetic to the concerns with past performance of commercial timber sales, and resulting distrust of the USFS, we do not agree that de-coupling the “log from the logger” is the correct or most effective means of improving on-the-ground conditions. Our opposition to the language quoted above is based upon the following assertions:

1. A core principle of the Guild states that; “The forest has value in its own right, independent of human intentions and needs.” As such, we believe that good forestry necessarily puts the needs of the forest before that of the forester or any other human-centered interest. However, within the realm of legitimate, ecologically driven forestry, some commercially viable by-products may accrue. Income derived from the sale of such commercially marketable products, if any, is therefore merely incidental to the fundamental purpose of promoting ecologically driven forest restoration.
2. Many USFS timber sale contracts are presently intended to restore our public lands, particularly in areas where fire suppression, high-grade logging practices, and associated road construction, have severely degraded the forest landscape. The ability to sell any commercially viable by-products of such contracts, rather than “perverse”, provides an incentive to the contractor to take extra care not to cause unnecessary damage to such by-products (i.e. trees removed). This extra care also necessarily enhances the protection of the remaining forest, thereby furthering the goal of the forest restoration.

Notwithstanding the foregoing points, the Guild recognizes that the current timber sale program has faults. Indeed, as noted above, Guild members are acutely aware of the fact that many of our public lands have been degraded by poor logging practices under the current timber sale program. However, many of the concerns associated with poor logging practices would be more effectively addressed by instituting threshold contracting criteria through which the USFS would filter out foresters and practitioners with poor logging or unethical contracting practices. Such threshold criteria may include third party assessment of past performance and labor practices. This process would annually evaluate and assess the work

performed and labor practices of each contractor, based upon a set of environmental standards and practices established by a consortium of environmental, progressive forestry, and labor interests.

Additional concerns regarding sale administration, post-sale monitoring and reporting, and enforcement of all environmental restrictions on logging practices can be addressed through adequate and consistent funding of the USFS such that sound restoration projects are not dependent upon the sale of by-products. This fact is recognized in Principle V, paragraph b, subsection i, which states;

Specific appropriations must commit consistent, adequate multi-year funding for all aspects of restoration – assessment, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and adaptation.

The Guild fully supports subsection i of Principle V.

Implementing the above criteria would, over time, eliminate or significantly reduce poor logging practices on our public lands, while rewarding sound forestry practices. We believe this is a common goal amongst many environmental, labor, and progressive forestry interests. Moreover, through modifying the current timber sale program in the manner described above, this common goal would be achieved without precluding the opportunity for contractors to sell any by-products which may accrue through proper implementation of ecologically based forestry practices.

In general, the Guild is in favor of the principles of restoration as expressed in this document. However, ecologically based restoration can be accomplished through the current timber sale program, given additional criteria as described above. Therefore, our membership strongly supports modifying the present timber sale program in the manner described above, rather than abandoning the program all together. In short, we cannot support Principle V, paragraph b, subsection ii as currently written and therefore cannot endorse the principles.

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