

**Statement of Laura McCarthy for  
The Forest Guild**

**Regarding the  
Restoration of Forests After Catastrophic Fire  
Submitted to the  
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health  
House Resources Committee  
July 15, 2004**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide this written statement on restoration of forests after catastrophic fire. I am the Policy Program Director for the Forest Guild, an organization of foresters and natural resource professionals based in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The Guild has a membership of about 500 foresters and natural resource professionals who manage over 41.4 million acres in the United States and Canada. The Guild's mission is to promote ecologically responsible forestry with active management to sustain the entire forest across the landscape.

This statement about the restoration of forests after catastrophic fire is derived from the experience of our member foresters, who spend most of their workdays planning and implementing timber sales. We are pleased to provide this statement because the issue of how to manage forests after catastrophic fire illustrates perfectly how the Guild's principles are put into practice.

*The Oregonian* recently published an editorial that echoes the principles of Guild members. Jack Williams, who was formerly the Forest Supervisor of the Siskiyou National Forest and is now a professor at Southern Oregon University, wrote the editorial. Mr. Williams suggested that a goal of a post-fire operation should be to determine the level of salvage that will produce net economic values in a timely manner without risking long-term harm to the land and water. The decisions about where and how much to salvage are key to achieving this goal. For members of the Guild, the optimal salvage level is determined by using ecological information as screens to filter out lands where salvage would impair ecosystem recovery. The screens usually remove from consideration lands with high erosion potential, steep slopes, and stream habitat, as well as roadless areas. Operational constraints are also factored in, such as road access and endangered species habitat.

The use of science in forest management is claimed by many, but demonstrated in practice by the forestry of Guild members. For example, the February 2004 issue of *Science* has an article by seven renowned ecologists on salvage harvesting after natural disturbance. The ecologists make three main points backed up by national and international data. First, salvage harvesting activities undermine many of the ecosystem benefits of major disturbances such as wildfire. Second, removal of large quantities of timber can have negative impacts on many plant and animal species. Third, salvage logging can impair ecosystem recovery. The scientists conclude that large-scale salvage

harvesting needs to happen quickly after a wildfire and, since managers are making rapid decisions with long-lasting ecological consequences, salvage harvesting policies should be formulated before major disturbances occur. Guild foresters use this kind of scientific information to plan and implement timber salvage.

For example, the 2002 Borrego Fire in New Mexico illustrates how a Guild member put the information into practice. The Borrego Fire burned out of the Santa Fe National Forest onto private land. A Guild member managed the private land, and had recently completed a fire management plan for the landowner. The plan included an assessment of the extent and location of hazardous fuels, a plan to remove fuels with mechanical thinning and prescribed fire, and other information that was critical for planning a salvage sale. The plan made it possible for the forester to determine where salvage logging would be appropriate, and where it needed to be prohibited to protect the recovery of the forest. Within a few months of the fire, burned trees, cut in areas that did not harm the prospects for ecological recovery, were delivered to the mill.

The Guild believes that the management of forests after large-scale fire events needs to be considered in the context of the entire landscape. Dr. Tom Swetnam at the University of Arizona's Laboratory of Tree Ring Research has discussed the idea of using the large catastrophic wildfires, such as Rodeo-Chediski and Biscuit, as templates for restoration of forests at a landscape scale. For example, severely burned areas, which usually account for about 25% of the area within the fire perimeter, are already acting as a fire break for the remaining green forest and for communities in the vicinity. If these areas are maintained as fuel breaks, then salvage logging on stable soils and gentle slopes and where roadless areas and endangered species habitat are not involved, could be recommended. The moderately burned areas will probably need fuel inventories and follow-up treatments that, depending on the fuel load, could include some timber salvage. Finally, the stage will be set to restore the low severity and unburned areas, in both structure and process, with the fuel breaks serving both to protect communities and to establish a landscape pattern for recovery of the forest.

In conclusion, the Forest Guild is not categorically opposed to salvage logging because its members have demonstrated that ecological constraints can be successfully applied to timber salvage operations after wildfire. The key considerations are how much is harvested, where trees are cut, applying the necessary environmental, social and economic constraints, and timing the operation. When making these decisions, the Forest Guild always considers the well-being of the forest first. The Forest Guild offers the following guidelines for salvaging burned timber:

1. Salvage timber at the level that will produce net economic values in a timely manner without risking long-term harm to the forest ecosystem.
2. Only salvage the trees that can be removed in the short-term without harming the prospects for long-term ecological recovery.

3. Do not salvage burned timber in roadless areas, on steep slopes, on highly erosive soils, or in stream corridors and use existing road systems for access. Avoid salvaging timber where the sale will compromise the protection of endangered species.
4. Develop timber salvage plans in the context of a larger wildfire restoration plan. For example, salvage trees in burned areas that will be managed in the future as fuel breaks that provide community protection.
5. Add planning for salvage logging to community wildfire protection plans that, under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, consider broad forest landscapes, enabling land managers to salvage timber appropriately if wildfire occurs.