

The Forest Stewards Guild Public Lands Policy Statement

(Approved March 6th, 2017)

Publicly owned forestlands (federal, state, and local) comprise almost 42% of all forestlands in the United States.¹ Public forests are a valuable national asset providing multiple benefits for all citizens and they enjoy broad and overwhelming public support.

Public policy and land management practices on public forestlands must protect and enhance a broad range of long-term, multiple-use values that include economic productivity, recreation, wildlife habitat, conservation of biodiversity, and mitigation of climate change.

The multiple-use concept codified in the 1976 adoption of the Federal Land Policy Management Act and the National Forest Management Act has provided sound guidance for the management of federal forestlands for over four decades. Federal and state policies need to recognize that while revenues from timber and other commercial and recreational activities on public forests are important sources of revenue that benefit taxpayers, those revenues may only partially offset the investments needed to adequately and sustainably manage those lands.

Just as with other critical public infrastructure, maintaining investments in public forests allows forests to continue to provide clean air and water, wildlife habitat, recreation, long-term job creation, and other public benefits with significant economic values that are only realized in longer time frames.

The work of the U.S. Forest Service and the National Forest system, numerous other federal agencies within the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, and Interior, forestry agencies and state universities within all 50 states, and within the natural resource agencies of many American Indian tribes also impact the remaining 58% of private forests in the U.S. in meaningful ways.

Funding for programs from urban tree pest control, to fire management, to core forest research often involve longstanding partnerships between federal agencies, state agencies, academic institutions, and Indian tribes. These partnerships have been tremendously successful at allowing applied research to be exported directly into the hands of forest owners of all types. Maintaining these initiatives and connections is vital.

Human-caused climate change is a scientific certainty. While the multitude of effects that climate change will cause forests may never be perfectly understood, the beneficial effects of forests on a changing climate have been well documented. Forests in the United States sequester more than 15% of greenhouse gas emissions released annually, however the ability of forests to continue to play this and other critical roles in offsetting greenhouse gas emissions and reducing global warming depends on continued and sustained investment in forest productivity and forest health. Public agencies need sufficient resources to maintain these investments.

It is critically important that we maintain the many benefits from forests in public ownership and the supporting work of public agencies that have helped contribute to a large and growing base of public lands, support forest-based economies, and contribute to healthy forest-communities in the United States for more than 100 years.

- The Forest Stewards Guild joins the conservation community in calling for public lands to remain in the public domain for the benefit of all citizens. We strongly oppose the outright sale or privatization of federal or state lands, or the privatization of their management. We also strongly oppose the transfer of federal lands to states.
- Goal-setting, management planning, timber harvest levels, and management activities on public forest lands must demonstrate long-term sustainability and should be planned and performed by professionals, based on robust and broad-based public participation, well-founded silviculture and stewardship, and a full-range of ecosystem sciences that reflects up-to date scientific knowledge.
- While timber revenue can support state and federal agency programs (and thus benefit taxpayers) in a variety of ways, it is particularly important that timber harvest levels on public lands be based primarily on land capability. Timber harvest levels should be determined by land managers first and revenue projections should then be reported to policy makers rather than having revenue targets established by policy makers and reported to forest managers as directives.
- We support the concept of public private partnerships to assist in managing public lands where it can be done in a way that retains public oversight and community benefits, and where the arrangements can be supported by objective cost-benefit assessments.
- The Guild joins a broad coalition of conservation and environmental organizations throughout the United States calling on Congress to “fix federal fire funding”. Congress needs to treat wildfire expenditures as emergency spending and stop forcing federal land agencies to pay for management of wildfires from their core budgets. In addition, Congress and state legislatures need to continue increasing funding for the growing cost and need for forest health, fuel reduction, and Fire Adapted Community programs.
- We support continued and expanded state and local investments in service forestry programs and outreach to private forest landowners. These investments support and increase forest productivity, both because of their demonstrated efficacy and because of the opportunities these investments generate for private sector forest professionals. In addition to continuing well-established traditional roles such as forest plan assistance, federal and state agencies should increase their investments in forest-owner outreach around emerging topics including invasive species, developing

markets for ecosystem services, changing timber markets, and evolving forest owner demographics.

- As one of the more than 30 conservation and forest product organizations supporting the Forest Climate Working Group (FCWG), the Guild strongly supports the FCWG federal and state policy platforms on climate change. We call on policy makers, federal and state agencies, and public universities to significantly increase investments in climate change research, and take all appropriate actions to recognize, monitor, adapt to, and help mitigate the effects of climate change in forestry and natural resources policy, science, and management.

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *U.S. Forest Resource Facts and Historical Trends*, US Forest Service FS-1035, August, 2014.