
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Josh Becker, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

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Author:	Rogers		
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Consultant:	Edith Hannigan		

Subject: State forests: forest management

SUMMARY

This bill would redefine “management” for the purposes of managing the Demonstration State Forest system and further establish the goals, appropriate forestry techniques, research efforts, and other activities allowable on the demonstration forests pursuant to the definition of “management.”

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (Board). In 1885, the Governor of California approved an act that authorized the appointment of a three-man State Board of Forestry, the first such body in the nation. That original Board of Forestry was abolished in 1893. In 1905, an “Act of March 18, 1905”, became law, creating a new Board of Forestry and the first State Forester. In 1927, the Division of Forestry was organized.

In 1947, the original Forest Practice Act was passed by the State Legislature. Throughout the period of the 1950s and 1960s, the Board of Forestry functioned under the mandate of the 1947 Act by formulating forest policy for the state.

At the time of passage of the Z'berg-Nejedly Forestry Practice Act of 1973, the Legislature reorganized the Board and concomitantly expanded its powers and responsibilities (Public Resources Code (PRC) §§ 730 *et seq.*). For example, the 1973 statute changed the Board's function in relation to forest practice rules from a ratification role to an adoptive role. In addition, the present membership ratio of five general public members, three forest products industry members, and one range-livestock industry member was enacted to increase the public input into Board matters.

Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Department). The Department, in accordance with a plan approved by the Board, is responsible for the prevention and suppression of forest fires (PRC §§4113, 4114).

Demonstration State Forest System. The Department owns and manages 14 forests, totaling 85,000 acres across the state, known as the Demonstration State Forests (DSFs). According to the Department's website:

These forests represent the most common forest types in California and serve as a living laboratory for how to care for California's timberlands. The forests produce multiple benefits: wood products

and timber production, recreation, watershed protection and habitat restoration.

Demonstration State Forests offer a special opportunity to conduct research on different forest management practices - providing key knowledge that can be used by the forestry industry. Not only do these forests matter for government-owned areas, but their findings are essential in informing private owners of California's 40% privately owned forest land across the state.

DSFs are managed pursuant to a plan developed by the Department and approved by the Board.

Jackson is by far the largest DSF – it was established in 1949 and covers 48,652 acres of redwood forest in Mendocino County. There is a long history of logging on the property, beginning in 1862, but today more forest growth occurs than is harvested. While the most common species is coast redwood, there is also Douglas fir, grand fir, hemlock, bishop pine, tanoak, alder, madrone, and wax myrtle.

LaTour is in Shasta County and is the oldest DSF – the state acquired the property in 1930 by exchanging a scattered 10,957 acres of land with the U.S. Forest Service for one 9,033-acre tract. In 1946, the California State Lands Commission deeded it to the Department (then the “Division” of Forestry) for \$100,000. Current average harvest on LaTour is between 2 and 4 million board feet per year. The forest supports ten different coniferous tree species of commercial value. They include sugar pine, ponderosa pine, Jeffrey pine, western white pine, lodgepole pine, Douglas fir, white fir, red fir, incense-cedar, and mountain hemlock.

Mountain Home was established in 1946. The forest covers just over 5,000 acres in the Southern Sierra Nevada about 20 miles east of Porterville. The land was purchased from a logging company to protect some of the largest and oldest giant sequoia trees in the world. More than 4,500 old-growth giant sequoias are preserved through the active management of the mixed conifer forest that surrounds them. Archaeological sites have evidence of occupation dating back 9,000 years. John Muir called the redwoods in this tract “the finest in the Sierra.”

Boggs Mountain was established in 1949 in Lake County. In 2015, the Valley Fire burned 99% of the forest, killing about 80% of the mature trees and 95% of the understory vegetation. Reforestation has included salvage logging and planting over 700,000 tree seedlings of Ponderosa Pine and Douglas fir. At lower elevations, manzanita is a prominent species, but the forest transitions to a mixed conifer forest at upper elevations.

Soquel is a more recent acquisition. On the central coast in Santa Cruz County, the state took ownership of 2,700 acres from logging companies in 1988. Being so close to the San Francisco and Monterey Bay Areas, Soquel is an excellent place for the public to view a working forest, recreate in the area, and experience hands-on forestry education. Soquel is quite seismically active – the San Andreas and Zayante Faults pass through the property, and the epicenter of the 1988 Lone Prieta earthquake was just two miles south.

There are 9 other DSFs throughout the state, managed for timber harvest, restoration, research, and recreation.

<u>STATE FOREST</u>	<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>ACRES</u>
Jackson	Mendocino	48,652
LaTour	Shasta	9,033
Big Bend	Shasta	6,982
Mountain Home	Tulare	5,069
Boggs Mountain	Lake	3,493
Soquel	Santa Cruz	2,700
Emigrant Gap	Nevada/Placer	2,618
Miller	Shasta	2,246
Noble	Shasta	2,050
North Fork Mokelumne	Amador	1,052
Las Posadas	Napa	796
Mount Zion	Amador	164
Ellen Pickett	Trinity	160
Sawmill	San Bernardino	120

What happens on the DSFs? The DSFs provide a land base, where the long-term ownership is assured, for research, the demonstration of forestry management techniques, and the restoration of “cutover” land, or land where the original timber has been already harvested.

The DSFs are currently supporting about 500 research projects, such as:

- “Forest Management to Promote Resilient Coast Redwood Forests,” at Jackson.
- “Effects of dead tree removal on the resilience and successional trajectory of high-mortality forests,” at Mountain Home.
- “Sierra Nevada-wide provenance trials to support climate-based seed zones and reforestation efforts,” at LaTour.
- “Mitigating Potential Sediment Delivery from Post-Fire Salvage Logging,” at Boggs Mountain.
- “Impacts of Timber Harvest on Communities of Small Mammals, Ticks and Tick-Borne Pathogens in a High-Risk Landscape of Northern California,” at Soquel.

Timber harvest occurs on the DSFs to support a sustainable wood products industry in the state. Timber harvesting on the DSFs demonstrates the productive and economic possibilities of good forest practices toward maintaining forest crop land in a productive condition. The DSFs grow approximately 75 million board feet of timber annually and harvest an average of 20 million board feet each year, enough to build 12,500 single-family homes.

Forested lands in California. According to the University of California Agricultural and Natural Resources (UC ANR): ¹

California's forests, which cover approximately one third of the state's land area, provide a wide range of economic, environmental, and recreation services. Today, forests are under increasing pressure from urban expansion and related land use conversion, along with increased risk of devastating forest fires, extreme droughts, and insect and disease epidemics (Cohen et al. 2016; Radeloff et al. 2018). Active forest management can help control these risks by reducing tree mortality and increasing forest health. Reducing tree density through timber harvesting allows more space for healthy trees to grow and thus reduces tree competition for water, which also reduces the risk of catastrophic fire and outbreaks of insects and disease. Such proactive forest management not only helps sustain forests but also provides a renewable natural resource that is also beneficial to the state's economy.

Table 1. Forest area by ownership class

Ownership type	Ownership class	All forest land		Unreserved timberland	
		Thousand acres	% of total	Thousand acres	% of total
public	National Forest Service	15,586	47.5%	9,141	53%
	other federal	3,279	10%	326	2%
	state/local government	1,127	3.4%	168	1%
private	corporate	4,543	13.8%	4,058	24%
	noncorporate	8,280	25.2%	3,435	20%
Total forest acreage		32,815		17,128	

Source: Christensen et al. 2016. (Table A2-2).

The forestry and forest-products industries contribute approximately \$39 billion and 177,000 jobs to the California economy. This economic impact includes \$22 billion and 82,800 jobs in direct contribution and \$17 billion and 95,100 jobs in indirect or induced contribution. The forestry and logging industries directly contribute \$437 million and 5,700 jobs to the state economy and \$500 million and 3,600 jobs in indirect or induced economic impacts.

Table 2. Direct economic contribution of the forestry and forest-products sectors

Sector: Direct contributions	Employment	Labor income	Output	Value-added
		\$MM	\$MM	\$MM
forestry and logging	5,748	267	437	238
wood biomass electricity	365	70	539.6	258
solid wood-products manufacturing	26,456	1,352	5,760	1,747
pulp and paper manufacturing	22,238	1,982	11,074	2,657
wood furniture manufacturing	27,005	1,287	4,195	1,454
Total direct contribution	81,812	4,958	22,007	6,354

¹ UC ANR Publication 8670 "Economic Contribution of California's Forestry and Forest Products Sector." March 2020

Formal apology and tribal stewardship. With Executive Order (EO) N-15-19, Governor Newsom recognized over a century of state-sanctioned “depredations and prejudicial policies” against California Native Americans, and apologized on behalf of the citizens of the state to California Native Americans for the violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on the tribes.

Earlier this year, the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) published a Tribal Stewardship Policy. The policy sets a goal of expanding tribal stewardship of at least 7.5 million acres of California land and coastal waters, and establishes standard practices to advance meaningful and durable tribal stewardship through three pathways: ancestral land return, collaboration, and access.

Tribal collaboration. In the Tribal Stewardship Policy, “collaboration” is described as “the act of building a relationship between one or more California Native American tribe(s) and one or more non-tribal entities for the stewardship of a defined areas, infrastructure, project, species, or natural resource.”

The parties to a collaborative relationship need to discuss whether the decision-making in the relationship is a shared process, a process where one party defers to the other, or if a party is transferring or delegating the decision making to the other.

Existing law:

- 1) Pursuant to the Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practices Act, prohibits a person from conducting timber operations unless a timber harvest plan (THP) prepared by a registered professional forester has been submitted for such operations to the Department. (PRC §§ 4511-4630)
- 2) Pursuant to the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund (TRFR Fund) (PRC §§ 4629 - 4629.13):
 - a) Establishes the intent of the Legislature to identify and implement efficiencies in the regulation of timber harvesting between state agencies.
 - b) Imposes an assessment on a person who purchases a lumber product or an engineered wood product, as determined by the Board, for storage, use, or other consumption in this state, at the rate of 1% of the sales price.
 - c) Requires moneys deposited in the TRFR Fund to be used, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for specified purposes and identifies specified proprieties for appropriations from the TRFR Fund.
- 3) Pursuant to the State Forest Law (PRC §§ 4631-4664):
 - a) Declares it to be in the interest of the welfare of the people of this state and their industries and other activities involving the use of wood, lumber, poles, piling, and other forest products, that desirable cutover forest lands, including those having young and old timber growth, be made fully productive and that the holding and reforestation of such lands is a necessary measure predicated on waning supplies of original old growth timber. (PRC § 4631)
 - b) Declares it to be in the interest of the welfare of the people of this state that the state retain the existing land base of DSFs in timber production for research and demonstration purposes, and cooperate with local governments in mitigating the

- impacts on school enrollment of geothermal development which occurs in proximity to state-owned forest lands. (PRC § 4631.5)
- c) Defines “management” as the handling of forest crop and forest soil so as to achieve maximum sustained production of high-quality forest products while giving consideration to values relating to recreation, watershed, wildlife, range and forage, fisheries, and aesthetic enjoyment. (PRC § 4639)
 - d) Requires the management of DSFs and the cutting and sale of timber and other forest products from DSFs to conform to regulations prepared in conformity with forest management practices designed to achieve maximum sustained production of high-quality forest products while giving consideration to values relating to recreation, watershed, wildlife, range and forage, fisheries, and aesthetic enjoyment. (PRC § 4651)
 - e) Authorizes the Department to permit a limited amount of commercial timber operations on the property within the Soquel DSF in order to provide funds for the maintenance and operation of the state forest and to allow fulfillment of the objectives for the Soquel DSF. Income from the state forest property shall sustain all costs of operation and provide income for research and educational purposes. (PRC § 4661)
- 4) Creates the Forest Resources Improvement Fund (FRIF) from which moneys may only be expended, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for the cost of operations associated with management of lands held in trust by the state and operated as demonstration state forests by the Department, including restoration activities, and to reimburse the Department’s cost of maintaining and improving the campground facilities, associated recreational facilities, natural environment, and access thereto. (PRC § 4799.3)
- 5) Establishes the California Timberland Productivity Act of 1982, to (1) maintain the optimum amount of the limited supply of timberland to ensure its current and continued availability for the growing and harvesting of timber and compatible uses; (2) discourage premature or unnecessary conversion of timberland to urban and other uses; (3) discourage expansion of urban services into timberland; and, (4) encourage investment in timberlands based on reasonable expectation of harvest. (Government Code §§ 51100 *et seq.*)

PROPOSED LAW

This bill would:

- 1) Authorize the TRFRF to fund the DSF system, if necessary.
- 2) Require the annual TRFRF report include the number of staff and costs dedicated fully or partially to reviewing permits and notices filed pursuant to the Z’berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act and Forest Practice Rules.
- 3) Require the annual TRFRF report include the number and costs of staff dedicated fully or partially to other activities that are funded by TRFRF.
- 4) Establish the purpose of the DSFs to acquire lands in need of reforestation or restoration to manage those lands for public benefit.
 - a) Establish that public benefit includes biodiversity conservation, recreation, ecosystem health, watershed health, and as a living laboratory for healthy forest structures.

- 5) Authorize research on the DSFs that inform management strategies that promote science-based decision making.
- 6) Require that the DSFs be managed to habitat and ecosystem conditions that provide a foundation for robust research programs.
- 7) Recognize the importance of providing a level of staffing that supports research project development, implementation, monitoring, and maintenance.
- 8) Authorize the secretary of CNRA to enter into comanagement agreements with California Native American tribes for the management of the DSFs.
- 9) Authorize research on the DSFs that inform:
 - a) Forest management strategies.
 - b) Science-based decision making.
 - c) Biodiversity.
 - d) Durable onsite carbon storage or sequestration.
 - e) Habitat.
 - f) Water or soil quality.
 - g) Watershed health.
 - h) Tribal stewardship.
 - i) Other goals that further a healthy and resilience ecosystem.
- 10) Authorize timber harvest on the DSFs in furtherance of:
 - a) Research.
 - b) Demonstration of management strategies available to nonindustrial landowners.
 - c) Applying proven techniques or testing novel or emerging management approaches to address vulnerable stand conditions to restore them to resilient ecosystems.
- 11) Require that the DSFs reasonably provide for recreation opportunities.
- 12) Specify that nothing in these sections shall be construed as to limit the use of all forest management practices authorized under the Forest Practice Act and Rules.
- 13) Require the Department to annually report to the Board its progress toward meeting restoration and conservation targets identified in forest management plans.
- 14) Authorize metrics or targets to track progress that may include, but are not limited to, invasive species control, durable onsite carbon storage or sequestration, acres treated with prescribed fire, or improved habitat connectivity, water quality, or other ecosystem conditions.
- 15) Define "California Native American Tribe."
- 16) Define "comanagement."
- 17) Define "management."

- 18) Authorize the board to adopt regulations that establish a preference for small or local sawmills.
- 19) Require funds generated by a DSF to be deposited into the Forest Resources Improvement Fund.
- 20) Authorize prescribed herbivory, recreation concession, and surface mining on DSFs pursuant to regulations established by the Board, and for those activities to reflect the definition of “management.”

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

According to the author, “California is home to 14 Demonstration State Forests, which span 85,000 acres. The largest being Jackson Demonstration State Forest in my district in Mendocino County, which accounts for more than half of the total acreage. Under current statute, Demonstration State Forests must be managed by the Department to achieve maximum sustained production of timber products as the top priority.”

“These management principles haven’t been updated in over 50 years. They’re completely outdated and do not reflect the state’s current climate resiliency goals.”

“This bill will update the management principles to prioritize biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, wildfire resiliency, recreation, and research in the Demonstration State Forest System.”

“This bill does not ban commercial timber harvesting. There’s no denying that some timber harvesting is necessary in order to restore our forests to ecological health. However, commercial timber harvesting should not be the top priority of our public lands.”

“Lastly, AB 2494 seeks to elevate our state’s 30x30 framework, enhance ecotourism, and increase Tribal co-management in Demonstration State forests.”

The sponsors of the bill, the Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC), writes, “After decades of an extraction-oriented approach to forest management, this bill aims to finally codify the public trust values and multi-use purposes of demonstration forest lands and the critical nature of demonstrating forest management that adapts to and mitigates climate change. While this bill does seek to codify existing efforts by CAL FIRE to do these things, it puts forth several new directives to guide forest management towards ongoing restoration and conservation and to create accountability for CAL FIRE in achieving these goals. This bill shapes forest management in a new way that allows demonstration forest lands to aid in the state’s ambitious goals to conserve 30% of its lands and coastal waters by 2030 as well as to tribally steward 7.5 million acres of lands.

“Given these goals that align with existing public trust values that have already been codified by the legislature, we have received broad support for the bill from tribal nations, rural counties, environmental organizations, recreation organizations, and small businesses. However, there are still misunderstandings on the types of management activities that are not just allowed but expressly encouraged under the bill.”

“[...] Nothing in the bill prevents [the Department] from using specific forest management tools. Importantly, the bill directs [the Department] to manage and demonstrate wildfire resilience techniques, and encourages experimentation with emerging techniques and methods. By giving [the Department] this specific direction, this bill supports wildfire resilience efforts across the state and aligns with the recently released Draft Wildfire and Landscape Resilience Action Plan.”

[...]

“The bill does not restrict sustainable timber harvest; to the contrary, the framework it establishes is expected to increase restoration forestry activity by resolving the conflicts that have historically delayed or halted operations. Recent timber harvest plans at Jackson Demonstration State Forest illustrate the kinds of projects that could continue and expand under the bill. “AMEX” Timber Harvest Plan (THP), (1-25-00044-MEN) allowed for the harvest of 484 acres to facilitate research focused on understanding how different forestry approaches can adapt to and mitigate climate change impacts. The proposed “Camp 8 South” THP would allow for timber harvest across 461 acres while incorporating conservation measures — including protections for “Potentially Exceptional Trees” — designed to develop late seral forest conditions and test methods for creating wildlife habitat characteristics. Both plans generate revenue while advancing ecological goals, and both are consistent with the vision AB 2494 establishes.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

Writing in opposition, the County of Tulare states “AB 2494 raises significant concerns regarding its potential to restrict responsible timber harvesting and active forest management activities that are widely recognized as essential tools for reducing hazardous fuel loads and improving forest resilience. Limiting these practices may inadvertently increase wildfire risk and undermine ongoing efforts to protect communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.”

A coalition letter from Farm Bureaus, forestry professionals, forested landowners, Resource Conservation Districts, Rural County Representatives, Local 2881, former directors of the Department, and individual scientists write in an “oppose unless amended” position. They raise several issues with the bill:

“[The] bill removes the foundational purpose of the Demonstration State Forest system and conflicts with the land-use designations that govern much of the Demonstration State Forest land base. While we appreciate that amendments have addressed some of these concerns, and we remain engaged with the author and sponsors to identify a workable path forward, we continue to oppose the bill unless it is amended to ensure that the Demonstration State Forest system’s foundational priority— sustainable forestry—is preserved, and other concerns related to funding and definitional clarity are addressed.”

[...]

“To ensure that the Demonstration State Forest program continues to deliver world-class research and restoration projects that inform the regulations and best practices governing California’s timberland owners, agencies, and other stakeholders under what

is arguably the most environmentally sustainable regulatory framework in the world, AB 2494 should be amended to clarify that long-term sustained yield of all forest products is an equal co-benefit alongside the other goals articulated in the definition of management. Additionally, terms such as “maximize” and “climate mitigation and resiliency goals” should be reconsidered or more clearly defined.”

“In addition to the policy concerns listed above, we remain concerned about AB 2494’s impact on funding for the Demonstration State Forest program. Since its inception, the program has been self-sustaining, with funding derived from timber operations approved by the Department in accordance with management plans and approved Timber Harvest Plans (THPs).”

[...]

“Unfortunately, recent disruptions to approved forest management operations at JDSF have halted operations, temporarily eliminating revenue that would otherwise have sustained the Demonstration State Forest program. The updated management plan is expected to be approved later this year by the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, which should allow JDSF operations to resume and help address these temporary funding challenges. The coalition appreciates the amendments adopted in the Assembly Appropriations Committee that maintain FIRF as the primary source of funding for the Demonstration State Forest system; however, the continued reference to the Timber Regulation and Forest Restoration Fund (TRFRF) as an alternative funding source remains problematic.”

[...]

“While we must oppose the bill as currently drafted, we appreciate the conversations we have had with Assemblymember Rogers regarding our shared goal of ensuring healthy, fire-resilient, biologically diverse, fiscally sound, and publicly accessible Demonstration State Forests. To that end, we look forward to working with him and the Committee on amendments to ensure that active forest management—including the long-term sustained yield of forest products, robust and ongoing longitudinal research, protection of rural communities and economies, wildfire prevention, and fiscal certainty—remains central to the Demonstration State Forest system.”

COMMENTS

A modern mandate to address modern problems. The statutes authorizing the DSF system were adopted in 1946 and haven’t seen major updates since then. In the intervening 80 years, social and environmental forces have radically changed the public’s perception of timber harvesting, especially in the redwoods; illuminated the importance of forested lands towards combating climate change; and established policies to rectify past harms towards Native Americans.

This bill reframes the mandate of the DSF system from one preoccupied with timber production and maintaining the state’s wood product industry to a mandate that encourages forestry management that, through the use of timber harvesting management techniques, improves habitat function, forest resiliency, and carbon storage.

What are we “demonstrating?” The midcentury Legislature declared it the policy of the state to acquire cutover lands – those lands where the original timber on the property had been harvested – to restore them to productive forests; provide for investigation, demonstration, and education in timber counties with many small landowners; and to demonstrate economical forest management. The Department was prohibited from acquiring virgin timber for these purposes. (PRC § 4631)

As the 21st century Legislature contemplates revising this policy, it is worth noting that, according to Forest Landowners of California, there are over 30,000 non-industrial family-owned forests, some as small as five acres. Small landowners hold nearly a quarter of California’s forested lands. Promoting sound forest management for these landowners improves wildfire resiliency, habitat conservation, and carbon storage and sequestration, and the proceeds of the resultant timber harvest can help pay to complete that work.

There are several organizations committed to sharing knowledge and expertise in forest management for these small landowners, but few areas in the state where land is dedicated to physically demonstrating those ideas on the ground. The DSF system is where theory can be put into practice for small landowners.

The University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) and UC ANR host workshops and other activities for small landowners. In a report to the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force in 2022, UC ANR staff outlined some of the goals of small landowners who are motivated to manage their forests and the barriers they face in doing so. The survey respondents were participants in the Forest Stewardship Education Initiative, a landowner educational effort launched in 2019 by UC ANR and funded by the Department.

Forest landowners primarily owned their land for the aesthetics, recreation, and habitat it provides. 93% of respondents want to keep their wooded land wooded, and commercial logging was a low priority.

However, respondents also indicated concerns about wildfire and climate change impacts on their forests, and the management actions they prioritized reflect those concerns. From the report:

The management activities interviewees described having implemented directly reflected their attitudes about forest management and their desire to improve forest health. Participants frequently mentioned ‘cleaning-up’ the forest, hand thinning, pile-burning and activities focused on water quality or quantity as management activities they have undertaken to work towards their forest health goals.

Additionally, chipping, commercial or non-commercial thinning, defensible space, road building or maintenance and invasive or non-invasive species removal were often mentioned as management activities.

However, forest landowners report feeling overwhelmed by long-term management planning and the cost and time needed to implement projects. Many projects were non-commercial in nature, yielding no profit, but potential revenue from commercial projects

is often moot once Registered Professional Foresters, contracted labor, and permitting fees are paid.

The report made several recommendations that align with the mandate of the DSF system:

- Help landowners with concerns about wildfire to broaden their understanding of forest stewardship practices and plan for fire resilience actions.
- Help landowners who have merchantable timber on their property to understand that this value can be used to reach other goals.
- Help landowners to develop forest management plans to enable them to plan out their stewardship activities and potentially apply for cost-share funds.
- Help landowners learn skills to conduct forest management activities themselves.
- Create opportunities for landowners to learn about implementing stewardship activities from each other.
- Work with landowners to realize income from their properties to further their stewardship goals.
- Help landowners understand the permitting requirements and help landowners find professionals to help with the permitting process.
- Increase outreach to forest landowners about issues, strategies, and resources for forest stewardship.
- Support landowners in networking with each other about forest stewardship.
- Help raise awareness about forest stewardship in forested communities and across the state.

Given the ongoing need for small landowner education and outreach, the DSF system continues to be a relevant source of knowledge, demonstration, and networking for small landowners in the state.

Cirque de la Foresterie: looking for balance. In establishing the Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act of 1973 (FPA), the Legislature enumerated a number of key findings regarding the role of California's forests:

From PRC § 4512:

(a) The Legislature hereby finds and declares that the forest resources and timberlands of the state are among the most valuable of the natural resources of the state and that there is great concern throughout the state relating to their utilization, restoration, and protection.

PRC § 4512.5

The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) State forests play a critical and unique role in the state's carbon balance by sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it long term as carbon.
[...]

(e) The board, the department, and the State Air Resources Board should strive to go beyond the status quo sequestration rate and ensure that their policies and regulations reflect the unique role forests play in combating climate change.

PRC § 4513

It is the intent of the Legislature to create and maintain an effective and comprehensive system of regulation and use of all timberlands so as to ensure both of the following:

- (a) Where feasible, the productivity of timberlands is restored, enhanced, and maintained.
- (b) The goal of maximum sustained production of high-quality timber products is achieved while giving consideration to values relating to sequestration of carbon dioxide, recreation, watershed, wildlife, range and forage, fisheries, regional economic vitality, employment, and aesthetic enjoyment.

These statutes have been amended over time to address emerging issues such as carbon storage and sequestration, climate change, and wildfire resiliency, but the DSF system mandate has not followed suit.

This bill updates the DSF mandate to reflect the new balance expected of California's forested landscapes, where timber harvest is utilized on non-industrial lands to support carbon storage, climate and wildfire resilience, rural economies, and to provide a landscape for research projects to inform the same, rather than for the exclusive purpose of commercial wood products.

Not quite a Philippe Petit high-wire act. While this bill provides for an overdue examination of the purpose of the DSFs, opponents of the bill argue that it swings too far in the other direction. Primarily, opponents and stakeholders are concerned that the bill's emphasis on "durable, onsite carbon storage and sequestration" and "mature forest conditions" will lead to monocultures of late seral stage forests rather a variety of stand conditions that provide fertile research grounds.

Forests impact carbon storage in two ways – young, fast-growing trees sequester a significant amount of carbon as they mature, and older, slower growing trees store carbon. Young and old trees are necessary to provide climate benefits by removing and storing carbon from the atmosphere. However, stakeholders fear that the proposal in bill will ultimately limit the DSFs' ability to sequester carbon through young trees by overemphasizing the importance of onsite carbon storage in older trees.

Few disagree that the Department should take carbon storage and sequestration into consideration during management decisions on the DSFs. However, stakeholders are concerned that "durable onsite carbon storage" in the proposed definition of "management" refers to carbon that is expected to remain stored on the landscape in older, larger trees that are not harvested, as opposed to carbon that may be sequestered by growing young trees.

Relatedly, language in the bill regarding "mature forest conditions" also concerns forestry and forest research organizations. These organizations argue this language would push the DSF system into "mature," "late seral," or "late successional" conditions as a determinative outcome. Opposition organizations state that maintaining a diversity

of seral stages, including late successional conditions, across forested landscapes provides important ecological and climate-related benefits.

A mosaic of different seral types promotes biodiversity by providing a wide range of habitat conditions that support species with varying life-history requirements. Many wildlife and plant species depend on open, recently disturbed habitats, whereas others require the structural complexity and canopy cover associated with mature forests. A balanced distribution of seral conditions creates a variety of microclimates, food resources, and shelter opportunities. As a result, forests containing multiple seral stages are often more resilient to disturbance and better able to simultaneously support biodiversity conservation, habitat diversity, and long-term carbon management objectives.

Research opportunities that are only able to test or investigate mature forest conditions can limit scientific understanding of the full range of ecological processes that occur across forested landscapes. Many important questions related to biodiversity, wildlife habitat use, carbon sequestration rates, forest resilience, disturbance recovery, and ecosystem function can only be adequately studied when multiple seral stages are represented or available. A narrow focus on mature forests reduces opportunities to evaluate how species respond to different habitat conditions, how edge effects influence ecological communities, or how carbon dynamics vary through forest development. Maintaining access to a diversity of seral conditions supports more comprehensive research, improves the ability to test management strategies across varying forest structures, and generates findings that are applicable to a broader range of real-world forest landscapes.

Given the needs of small landowners, who are interested in sustaining the ecological health of their forests and for whom commercial timber production is a low priority, deprioritizing timber harvest for timber harvest's sake aligns with the modern desires of the nonprofessional forestry community. However, as the DSF system provides a broad land base for research, education, and economic development, the Legislature should be wary of enacting statute that limits opportunities to demonstrate forest management techniques in the full spectrum of ecotypes found in California's forested landscapes.

The Committee recommends the author continue engaging with opposition stakeholders and Committee staff to avoid pre-determinative outcomes that would prevent the DSFs from being managed for a variety of forest conditions, while maintaining the emphasis on developing healthy and resilient forest conditions.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS: None

SUPPORT

Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC) (sponsor)

350 Bay Area Action

350 Humboldt

Amah Mutsun Tribal Band

Barefoot Naturalist Press

Bay Area Coalition for Headwaters

Biofuelwatch

Bolsa Chica Land Trust

California Environmental Voters
California Institute for Biodiversity
California Native Plant Society
California Native Plant Society Sequoia Chapter
California Wilderness Coalition (CALWILD)
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Stockton
California Democratic Party Rural Caucus
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Health
Central Valley Partnership
Clean Water Action
Cleaneearth4kids.org
Coalition to Save Jackson State Forest
Council of Mexican Federations (COFEM)
County of Humboldt
County of Mendocino
Endangered Habitats League
Energy Associates
Environmental Action Committee of West Marin
Environmental Center of San Diego
Fog Eater Cafe
Folklore
Fortunate Farm
Friends Committee on Legislation of California
Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks
Friends of the Lost Coast
Friends of the River
Grassroots Institute (GRI) of Mendocino County Forest Working Group
Green Latinos
Hispanic Access Foundation
Intertribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council
Klamath Forest Alliance
Latino Outdoors
Lynne Paschal Massage Therapy
Mendocino Fire Protection District
Mendocino Producers Guild
Mendocino Stone Ranch
Mendocino Trail Stewards
Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center
Moving Parts Press
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Northern California Land Trust
Planning and Conservation League
Prodemocracy Workgroup, Grassroots Institute
Redwood Valley Little River Band of Pomo Indians
Resource Renewal Institute
Rise and Be Well
Service Employees International Union, Local 1000
Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians
Sierra Club California

Sierra Club, Redwood Chapter
Sierra Nevada Alliance
Siskiyou Crest Coalition
Siskiyou Land Conservancy
Stanford Inn by the Sea - Historic Farm & Eco Resort
Symbiotic Restoration
The Bell
The Climate Center
The Study Club
The Wildlands Conservancy
Three Springs Institute
Trout Unlimited
Valerie
Wildlands Network

1,760 individuals (1,757 via online petition)

OPPOSITION

County of Tulare
Manu Koenig, Santa Cruz County Supervisor

Oppose Unless Amended

AB Forestry
Amador County Farm Bureau
Associated California Loggers
Association of Consulting Foresters
Auten Resource Consulting
Big Creek Lumber Company
Butte County Farm Bureau
Cal Fire Local 2881
Calaveras County Farm Bureau
California Farm Bureau
California Forestry Association
California Licensed Foresters Association
California Women in Timber
County of Madera
Dkm Forestry
Forest Landowners of California
Hamey Woods
Hearst Forests
Humboldt County Farm Bureau
Jefferson Resource Company, INC.
Madera County Farm Bureau
Mariposa County Farm Bureau
Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood Companies
Mendocino County Farm Bureau Federation
Nevada County Farm Bureau
Plumas-Sierra County Farm Bureau
Redwood Region Logging Conference
Resource Conservation District of Tehama County

Rural County Representatives of California
Sacramento County Farm Bureau
San Benito County Farm Bureau
San Joaquin County Farm Bureau
Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau
Shasta County Farm Bureau
Siskiyou County Farm Bureau
The Buckeye Conservancy
Tulare County Farm Bureau
Tuolumne County Farm Bureau
Western Wood Preservers Institute
Willits Redwood Company

Four individuals

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