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National Forest Fact Sheet

Myths and Facts of Logging National Forests

MYTH: The U.S. has the best environmental laws. If we don't log here, we will have to import wood that is produced under worse conditions.

FACT: With only 3% of the U.S. wood supply coming from National Forests, all of our paper and building materials needs can be met by decreasing the amount of wood we waste, recycling, and using non-wood substitutes. Every year the U.S. throws away over 29 million tons of usable wood derived from municipal solid waste, construction and demolition, and the timber milling process. This needless waste is more than fifteen times greater than the amount of lumber cut from national forests annually. Ending the subsidized timber sale program will eliminate competitive barriers to recycled and non-wood products. Any demands for fiber or building materials that cannot be met by recycled or non-wood products can easily be met from private timberlands, which represent 73% of the commercial forest base in the U.S.

MYTH: Only a few extreme environmentalists support an end to commercial logging on America's National Forests.

FACT: Poll after poll shows that the majority of the American public supports protecting National Forests from commercial logging, and commercial exploitation in general. Over 200 conservation organizations, businesses, social justice and religious organizations endorse the National Forest Protection and Restoration Act (HR 1396) a bill in Congress that would end commercial logging on National Forests. NFPA is working with an alliance of conservationists and organized labor to dispel the myth of jobs versus the environment. Joining with us, organized labor is calling for support of the HR 1396 because it is a vehicle to put people to work restoring our forests. HR 1396 is expected to reach 100 bipartisan cosponsors by the end of the 106th Congress. Ultimately, the passage of HR 1396 will hinge on the election of a "greener" Congress that is more responsive to the American public.

MYTH: We need to log our National Forests to prevent forest fires and disease.

FACT: Commercial logging does not prevent catastrophic fires, it causes them. Fire is a natural and beneficial part of forest ecosystems. Avoiding catastrophic fire risk is often used to justify logging. Ironically, according to a 1996 report by the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project, "Timber harvest, through its effects on forest structure, local microclimate, and fuel accumulation, has *increased* fire severity more than any other recent human activity." Another Forest Service report, "Forest Resources of the United States" (1994), revealed that tree mortality in the West due to fire and disease *increases* in logged areas. According to Arthur Partridge (former logger, Forest Service employee, and professor at the University of Idaho), "Claiming harm to forest health is merely an excuse to log.... In terms of disease and insects there has been no difference in true forest health for at least 50 years. In fact, a report from the U.S. Forest Service indicated that between 1952 and 1992 the amount of damage from disease, insects and all other major causes—including fire—was less than 1% of the standing commercial timber throughout the U.S. And the numbers stayed at those levels the entire time, with no ups and downs."

MYTH: Some communities rely exclusively upon National Forest timber supplies.

FACT: There simply are no communities dependent on National Forest logging. In the states with the most federal commercial timberland, logging and wood products employment represents a minor share of overall jobs and income. Most communities near our National Forests rely instead on the many uses and values associated with unlogged forests. In Alaska, for example, jobs related to environmental quality outnumber wood products jobs by a ratio of 16:1. According to the U.S. Forest Service, 74% of the jobs in National Forests are related to recreation, hunting and fishing, whereas, only 3% are related to logging.

Economic transition in communities that once received large amounts of federal timber has already occurred. Between 1988 and 1999, the amount of timber logged from National Forests dropped by 75%, from over 12 billion board feet to about 3 billion board feet. This drastic decline has already spurred economic transition in rural communities near our National Forests. Restoring the damage caused by a century of logging will provide additional long-term employment opportunities. The National Forest Protection and Restoration Act (HR 1396) addresses the long-term health of National Forests and surrounding communities by redirecting the timber subsidy to create a scientifically-based ecological restoration program for National Forests. Displaced timber workers are given a hiring preference. In addition, the HR 1396 allocates funds for retraining of these workers to build the skills to conduct restoration activities.

MYTH: National Forest logging generates scarce public revenues which support schools, roads, and other public works.

FACT: National Forest logging is a net loser from an economic standpoint, and costs federal, state, and county governments far more than the revenues it generates. The federal logging program operates at a net loss of over \$1 billion each year. These financial losses, however, are just the tip of the iceberg. The National Forest logging program generates many billions more in "externalized" costs that are passed on to businesses, communities and individuals when National Forests are logged. These include costs incurred by municipal water providers when rivers are polluted by logging as well as jobs and revenue lost by businesses that support recreation and tourism. In addition, heavily logged National Forests are scenic eyesores, diminishing property values and thwarting the ability of communities to attract businesses and residents to enjoy high quality environments. The National Forest Protection and Restoration Act (HR 1396) will end the subsidized federal logging program, saving government at all levels billions each year. In addition, HR 1396 provides funding to replace 25% timber sale revenue sharing payments to States for Counties and local governments.



Perhaps the biggest myth about America's National Forests is that they are protected from commercial logging and other forms of commercial exploitation. Join NFPA as we work to make the myth of National Forest protection a reality.

Photo by Francis Eatherington.

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