



CALIFORNIA  
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March 31, 2003

The Honorable Hannah-Beth Jackson  
California State Assembly  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Reference: A.J.R. 11  
CLFA Position: Oppose

Dear Ms. Jackson,

The California Licensed Foresters Association (CLFA) believes that the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan preferred alternative selected during the waning hours of the Clinton Administration was an unworkable and overly prescriptive approach for the management of eleven California national forests stretching across millions of acres. Therefore, we oppose your A.J.R. 11 which seeks to uphold that Plan as written. We would like to explain why we believe that your position is mistaken.

The subject is immensely complex, but for brevity we will focus on just a couple of points. First and foremost, the Clinton Plan represents an opposite extreme of the pendulum from the management regime which was favored for several decades after World War II. We believe that the Plan alternative selected in early 2001, out of a sense of reaction and mistrust, went too far in the direction of total preservation. As the pendulum swung, it bypassed the socially and ecologically optimal middle ground needed for public forest management to once again become a less partisan issue.

Federal forestry officials in the post-war era (1950-1980s) felt very comfortable in aggressively harvesting portions of Sierra national forests, both to provide wood for the American people and to ensure the establishment of new “crops” of trees for the distant future. This utilitarian paradigm of “maximum sustained yield” fell apart by 1990, when changing societal attitudes (as reflected in increased concern for non-commodity values such as wildlife habitat and biological diversity) found expression in protests and court decisions.

The Sierra Nevada Forest Plan is the latest in a series of Forest Service planning efforts designed to come to grips with that “train wreck” and to bring Sierra Nevada national forest management into harmony with contemporary societal values. However, the Clinton Plan adopted a management regime closely akin to the rigid “zero cut” scenario favored by some environmental organizations. This is unfortunate, because what is needed is a fundamentally new management paradigm that incorporates today’s values while still actively managing the forest landscape to protect it from unnaturally large wildfires and to both preserve and stimulate biological health and productivity.

Modifications that the Forest Service has recently proposed will preserve the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan but bring it down to earth, out of the clouds of untested theory and intemperate ideology.

The truth is that some of the prescriptive standards in the Plan as originally adopted were so inflexible that efforts by federal managers to thin forests in an effaceable and efficient manner were thwarted. Rigid “no cut” diameter limits, for example, were set so low in extensive areas that beneficial forest thinning activities are effectively precluded. As well, the original Plan’s heavy reliance on prescribed fire to achieve forest health and fuel reduction goals was also unrealistic. There is no way that, given its potential risks and serious impacts to air quality, prescribed fire alone will be a sufficient tool to treat overstocked and fire-prone portions of our national forests.

Ms. Jackson, there is a rich and sustainable middle ground between the old “maximum sustained yield” vision and that which has been characterized as “the doctrine of forest fragility” – a management regime of fear-based forest neglect. California’s professional foresters in overwhelming numbers support the Regional Forester’s plan to rework and improve upon portions of the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan.

CLFA therefore opposes your resolution. However, we are delighted that you are interested in forest management and therefore invite you, colleagues and staff up to the Sierra forests to tour some diverse ownerships in order to discuss these and related issues on the ground. I hope that you can take us up on this offer, and will personally stop by your office soon to make sure that you know that our organization as well as the Northern California Society of American Foresters would truly be honored if you and your colleagues could dedicate the time to take a woods tour and meet with some of California’s professional forestry leaders.

Sincerely Yours,

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cc: Assembly Natural Resource Committee Staff.  
Brad Seaberg, Chair, Northern California Society of American Foresters

*The California Licensed Foresters Association, with approximately 900 members, represents the common interests of Registered Professional Foresters in the State of California. The Association provides opportunities for continuing education and public outreach to its membership, which includes diverse professionals affiliated with public agencies, private timber companies, consultants and the academic community. Governed by an elected Board of Directors, CLFA was established in 1980 after the passage of the landmark California Professional Foresters Law.*