

FORESTERS QUESTION OBJECTIVITY OF SENATE STAFF REPORT

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California's professional foresters are taking exception to a January 24th report on the state's timber industry issued by the Senate Natural Resources Committee, chaired by Senator Sheila Kuehl. The "Kuehl Report," although containing some positive insights, is not credible because its recommendations are based upon an patently false claim – that "California harvests far more timber than its forests can replace¹."

In fact, California forest inventory and growth data point to a completely opposite conclusion. We are currently harvesting far less wood fiber than the state's private and national forest ownerships are growing² -- less than 25% of growth³, in fact.

State timber harvest levels have plunged from 4.0 BBF (billion board feet) as recently as 1990, to a new low of 1.6 BBF in 2001⁴ – the most recent year for which complete timber yield tax data is available. As a result, we now import over 80% of the wood that we use in California from other states and foreign countries⁵ that have lower standards of environmental protection than exist here in the Golden State.

The reality is that in the past decade California has effectively exported thousands of productive rural jobs and idled or dismantled half of its forest products industry's basic infrastructure. In so doing, the Golden State has forfeited untold billions of dollars in tax revenues that would have been received by state and local governments.

Responding to the Kuehl Report, Bonnie Burchill, President of the California Licensed Foresters Association (CLFA) stated, "Everyday, California's professional foresters face the consequences of negative public perceptions of the health and condition of our forests. The Kuehl Report continues an ongoing climate of distortion and half-truths when it comes to forest management in this state. The Report states that we are overharvesting our forests, yet in the last decade timber harvest has declined 60% and California imports more wood than ever. This Report is another example of advocacy that does not agree with the facts."

CLFA is concerned that effective natural resource policies cannot result from slanted or incomplete information provided to state legislators. CLFA is committed to providing accurate, science-based information to policy makers and the public.

Other aspects of the Kuehl Report contain hopeful insights, such as “...this report concludes that the ultimate goal of leveraging better environmental performance will be better obtained from landowner incentives than from additional regulations⁶” and, “It is worth emphasizing that the maintenance of a timber-based economic sector in California is important (1) to keep timber lands in production and (2) to avoid those timber lands from being converted to other uses such as rural subdivision or agricultural crops.⁷” CLFA agrees with these concerns, and is pleased to see them clearly expressed in the document.

The Report contains numerous policy recommendations, many of which are sketched out in very generalized terms. These include a new tax on retail wood products, a ban on clearcut harvesting, state support for “green” certification of forest products, and additional regulatory authority for regional water quality boards. Because these proposals are preliminary, CLFA will wait to take formal positions on these and related issues until legislation has been introduced and thoroughly reviewed by our Legislative Committee.

CLFA looks forward to an open and factual exchange of viewpoints on all issues affecting the practice of forestry in California, a state with 18.5⁸ million acres of commercially, aesthetically and ecologically precious forests.

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.

¹Kuehl Report, Page 5. The full sentence is as follows: “In a trend that is still continuing, California harvests far more timber than its forests can replace, and, as a consequence, the amount of harvestable timber available today has declined precipitously.”

²USDA Forest Service, 1997: “Forest Resources of the United States.” Also, see Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experimental Station, Forest Inventory and Analysis, California Statewide Results, http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/fia/statewide_results.htm (1 cubic foot = 5.55 board feet.)

³For 2001, 22.5% of California timber growth was harvested.

⁴State Board of Equalization, Timber Tax Division. “California Timber Harvest Statistics Compiled from Timber Yield Tax Records”, 2002.

⁵California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection board foot consumption data (5/96). CDF states we use 10 to 11 BBF each year. Comparing consumption with above Yield Tax harvest (production) data demonstrates that California now produces less than 20% of the timber that is consumed in the state.

⁶Kuehl Report, Page 3.

⁷Kuehl Report, Page 6.

⁸California has 18.5 million acres of commercial timberland – 19% of its total land base. Total forest land area, including non-commercial timberland, is 38.5 million acres. Commercial timberland is defined by the Society of American Foresters as land capable of growing 20 cubic feet/yr./acre of wood fiber on a continuous basis. Of California’s commercial timberland, roughly half (8.7 million acres) is managed by the USDA Forest Service. Of the remainder, 3.8 million acres are owned by industrial, and 3.4 million acres are owned by non-industrial, forest landowners. 2.0 million acres are in public reserves such as National and State Parks.