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# Views of a Commodity Producer on Natural Resources Conflicts

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## **Abstract**

*Developing consensus about desirable choices in public land and resources management requires an informed public. People must understand our nation's dependence upon forest products, its sources of wood and fiber supply, and the economic and lifestyle consequences of limiting United States timber harvests when demand remains strong. Gridlock caused by people polarized over timber harvest issues has diverted their attention from the more unifying concept of preserving forest ecosystem processes. Forest products companies have much to contribute to understanding and preserving forest ecosystems.*

## INTRODUCTION

I began my career in the forest products industry, planning to work in the lumber business. The year was 1965. As in most long journeys, my destination changed and today, more than ever, the exact terminus is uncertain. Kaibab Forest Products Company, for whom I work, is no longer just in the lumber business. Our company is performing many services and producing a number of products. The company's activities benefit the renewable resource of forests, American society, and rural economies. Not only does our company pay its way, but its activities are desired and necessary.

## INFORMED CHOICES

Our company is dependent upon public timber for raw materials for our mills. As people in our society continue to govern themselves and to provide direction for the management of public agencies, it is important that they understand what choices are available to them. With adequate options supported by the appropriate data, an informed public hopefully can develop consensus about desirable choices.

Let me provide a brief test of our knowledge about wood and forests through a series of questions and answers.<sup>1</sup>

Which of the following raw materials are used in the greatest quantity by weight in the United States today: steel, brick, wood, plastics, aluminum, or concrete? The answer is wood. In fact, wood exceeds the total of all of these except brick.

The raw material that can be produced with the best impact on our environment is: steel, brick, wood, plastics, aluminum, or concrete? Wood is the answer.

True or false: The United States is currently a net importer of lumber and other wood products. The answer is true. Lumber imports in 1990 amounted to 20 percent of the United States' consumption.

True or false: If managed intensively under sustained yield for wood volume, privately owned forest lands in the United States could meet our nation's wood fiber demand. The answer is false. The fact is that at any point in time, depending upon demand, we will require that 20-40 percent of the United States' consumption of wood and fiber products come from public lands. This amounts to about 10-20 billion board feet per year.

Timber from the national forests is currently being harvested at what rate per year? The answer is one-half of one percent per year since 1984. The average number of acres harvested annually on the national forest since 1984 has been 760,000 of the 191 million acres in the National Forest System.

The public owns approximately what portion of the nation's total timberland? One-third is the answer. The vast majority of this land is located in the twelve western states where the public owns well over half the total land base and 70 percent of the timberland.

Approximately what percentage of publicly owned timberland is permanently restricted from timber harvest? The answer is 20 percent of the public land nationwide which is capable of growing commercial timber is, by law, permanently restricted from harvest.

There are presently how many acres of existing old-growth forest? The answer is 15 million acres, with 8.2 million acres of old-growth forest located in Oregon and Washington, at least 2.5 million acres located in California, and 6 million acres located in Idaho and Montana. Well over half of these acres of existing old-growth forest are permanently off limits to timber harvest.

### INGREDIENTS OF GRIDLOCK

Why have lumber prices doubled in the last year? Is it because of increased demand caused by lower interest rates? Is it because of speculation in the commodities and futures markets? Is it because of hoarding by the wholesalers, retailers, and builders? Is it because of hurricane Andrew and its aftermath? Is it because of restrictions on the availability of timber to harvest?

Several birds, because of the threatened, endangered, and sensitive species provisions of the Endangered Species Act, have become icons of the anti-harvesting and, specifically, the anti-clearcutting movement. These birds are the Northern Spotted Owl in the Pacific Northwest, the California Spotted Owl, the Mexican Spotted Owl in the Southwest, the Marbled Murrelet on the West Coast, the Red-Crowned Woodpecker in the Southeast and, finally, the Northern Goshawk in the West. The Endangered Species Act has given the anti-harvest interests the perfect vehicle through the courts to dictate the direction of public land management. The forest industry's vulnerability has been its single-minded adherence to the silviculture practice of clearcutting. These are the perfect ingredients for the gridlock we find ourselves in today.

Appeals on Forest Service decisions (there were 1,659 in 1992) and lawsuits on various forest management issues have ground the public forest management agencies to a standstill, reducing harvest levels by nearly 70 percent on public lands. As a reality check for the environmental movement, if the United States Postal Service and its operations were similarly attacked, it would take weeks, not days, to receive a single letter.

An April 2, 1993, a *Wall Street Journal* editorial entitled "Ecosystem Babbitt-Babble," noted that Andy Stahl, a resource analyst with the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, revealed at a law clinic how best to

devise an ecosystem approach. He said, "Until legislation is adopted which protects these forests, we need at least one surrogate, if you will, that will provide protection for the forests. . . As a strategy for protecting old-growth (forests) matured, it appeared that wildlife would offer the most fruitful hunting grounds. . . Thank goodness the spotted owl evolved in the Northwest, for if it hadn't, we'd have to genetically engineer it." The editorial went on to say that, "the Northern Spotted Owl has been shown to thrive in second-growth forests."<sup>2</sup>

The following table demonstrates the trends and potential problems resulting from restrictions on timber supply (due to anti-harvest pressure) in the face of relatively strong demand for and national consumption of wood and fiber.<sup>3</sup> Between 1987 and 1992, timber production on western and federal lands declined dramatically without offsetting increases in supply from other areas or sources. The drop in federal timber harvests between 1987 and 1992 is equivalent to 404,000 average-sized houses.

#### Forest Supply and Demand (Billion Board Feet)

|                     | 1987      | 1992      |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Western Production  | 23.9      | 18.6      |
| Federal Harvest     | 11.4      | 5.8       |
| Lumber Imported     | 14.6      | 13.3      |
| Lumber Exported     | 2.4       | 2.6       |
| Southern Production | 12.5      | 13.9      |
| Other Sources       | 1.8       | 1.6       |
| Total Consumption   | 50.4      | 45.3      |
| Housing Starts      | 1,600,000 | 1,200,000 |

Our southwestern forests today are overstocked with all sizes of trees, one-inch DBH to over twenty-four-inch DBH trees.<sup>4</sup> On the North Kaibab, the total standing inventory in 1909 was 1.9 billion board feet. By 1992, 1.5 billion board feet had been harvested. But by 1993, there were 3.1 billion board feet in standing live tree inventory. There are more trees today in all tree sizes than there were at the turn of the century. In 1909, trees per acre averaged about 46; today there are over 113 trees per acre average on the Kaibab Plateau portion of the Kaibab National Forest.

The reason for this forest abundance is simply because of aggressive fire protection and prevention. Since the 1920s, by greatly reducing fires in the Kaibab ecosystem, we have increased the forest's total growth and yield, while at the same time providing the world's largest known concentration of Northern Goshawks. We now have over 92 known pairs in an area of one-quarter million acres. To date we know of only three Goshawk nest sites on over 100,000 adjacent acres on the North Rim of Grand Canyon Na-

tional Park. Surveys have been conducted there as well as in the National Forest.

The Kaibab National Forest management is being switched from even-aged shelterwood harvests to uneven-aged group selection cuts of one-quarter to one-third acre in size. The Forest Plan is now to manage for the Goshawk and its nineteen prey species, which require a healthy forest in each stage of size, age, composition, and stand structure. Interestingly, the Goshawk and its prey species are dependent upon forest regulation, not preservation.

#### FOREST ECOSYSTEMS AND THE NEW FOREST SERVICE'S BUSINESS

The important concept that we must all understand and accept is that it is not necessary to preserve the resource on the land; rather, it is critically important that we preserve the ecological processes that forests evolved under in the first place. To this end we must engage in historical reconstruction and define the presettlement forest. We must assess the current condition of the forest. Then, in some manner yet to be developed, we must establish the future forest condition that people can agree upon, factoring in the capabilities and biological realities that have evolved on each unique land area.

My choice would be to have a more restored, pre-European condition in our western forests. Then my company's efforts could be to directly support the American people and our forest ecosystems. We could then contribute directly to the yield and bounty of healthy and sustainable forest ecosystems, locally, regionally, and nationally.

#### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup>National Wooden Pallet & Container Association. 1993. What's your environmental IQ? Newsletter item in Green Speak, National Hardwood Association, Memphis, TN.
- <sup>2</sup>Wall Street Journal. 1993. Ecosystem Babbitt-babble. (April 2).
- <sup>3</sup>American Forest and Paper Association. 1993. Where will the wood come from? An update on the lumber market situation. (March 9).
- <sup>4</sup>Powell, D. S., et al. 1993. Forest resources of the United States, 1992, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, General Technical Report RM-234.