



## Restoration Mantra Has Created a Bump for Logging

Logging is up in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest under the U.S. Forest Service timber program that focuses less on commercial sales and instead sees logs as a byproduct of restoration and efforts to cut the risk of fire.

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LEWISTON, Idaho (AP) — Logging is up in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest under the U.S. Forest Service timber program that focuses less on commercial sales and instead sees logs as a byproduct of restoration and efforts to cut the risk of fire.

Last year the forest sold 60 million board feet of timber, compared with nearly 58 million the previous year, The Lewiston Tribune (<http://bit.ly/2pTRdSC>) newspaper reported. The average since 1999 has been just under 38 million board feet.

Forest Supervisor Cheryl Probert said more restoration is needed because of insects and disease in the forest, and that means logging volumes could increase in the near future.

"Our harvest is more about ecological processes, and the volume is a byproduct. We are emphasizing restoring species and structural diversity," Probert said.

Forest officials are using so-called "strike teams" to craft the National Environmental Policy Act documentation required for each timber sale. Forest stewardship officer Scott Godfrey said gathering specialists from multiple forests on the single strike team allows the agency to share expertise. That helps speed the pace of restoration efforts, he said.

Forest officials also are partnering with the Idaho Department of Lands to help the timber program grow. Employees of the Idaho Department of Lands carry out some implementation work on federal timber sales, while the federal agency still designs the projects and carries out the needed environmental analysis and public involvement.

State foresters are able to do things like cruise the timber, lay out the sale, put the timber out for bid and award the logging to a contractor. The state can also oversee the logging.

Profits are then pumped back into the timber program, where they can pay for things like additional environmental analysis.



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"We are trying to be efficient and creative in a time of flat or decreasing budgets," Godfrey said.

Not everyone is supportive of the program. Some environmentalists and stakeholders fear the Forest Service won't do enough to protect the environment as logging increases.

Gary Macfarlane, ecosystem defense director for the Moscow-based Friends of the Clearwater, said he is warily watching the forests' upward trend in timber harvest. He fears it is coming at the expense of water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. But he contended that neither he nor the agency knows for sure because forest officials haven't done the ongoing environmental monitoring promised under the 1987 Forest Plan, which outlines management policies.

"They are not meeting the water quality and fish habitat standards on the two forests in places they are doing the logging as far as we know," he said. "The Forest Service isn't doing the monitoring it promised to do in the forest plan. The limited data seems to indicate they are not meeting the standards."

If that is the case, he said cutting more trees isn't going to reduce the amount of sediment that leaches into streams.

"Calling logging restoration is really fallacious. It isn't restoration," he said. "I think it's probably better and people will take the Forest Service at its word if they say we are going to log for the community and we can argue about how big that sale should be and whether it's in a sensitive area."

Probert said the timber program is vital to forest management and without it, the agency would have a much more difficult time implementing some of the programs designed to improve fish passage or protect water quality.

For example, many of the timber sales call for the replacement of old and undersized culverts or the removal of old logging roads and they help to pay for the work. Some harvest is designed to provide habitat for animals like elk.

"It provides a lot of secondary benefits for recreation and certainly for water quality improvement, and we are able to do a whole lot of other work through the timber program," Probert said.

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