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Comments: As a practicing Forester (feet on ground) for over 40 years and a Certified Forester by the Society of American Foresters since 1997, I feel it's imperative that I express my thoughts on the current state of forest stewardship on our National Forest System.

From our history with the National Forests from its inception, the principle of "multiple use" as envisioned by Gifford Pinchot and the early leaders of the forest service organization - the management of the public lands and their various resource values so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people. While the interpretation of multiple use has evolved and changed based on our learning from both research and experience of successful and unsuccessful forest management activities on the ground.

Over that last 70+ years research and science has been increasingly "pushed aside" by groups that have a "conflicting" vision of our national forests. While there has been a broadening of our values of these forests as total ecosystems and that we need to "balance" our management to reflect the total ecosystem value.

Regrettably some of our policies have led to devastating consequences such as:

1. Forest Fire suppression and prevention, based on the "all fire is bad" rationale has led us to millions of acres of forests that have become ripe for catastrophic fires that leave devastation to both the ecosystem and communities.
2. Wilderness "set asides" that prevent sustainable forest ecosystem management. These areas benefit a very small slice of the population of users and again has led to millions of acres that are ripe to both fire and disease that leave highly impaired ecosystems.
3. The current political favorite of "old growth". While we have done research and scientific investigation and as a community of Forestry professionals, have a working knowledge of this concept... this varies widely based of forest ecosystems across the entire National Forest system. The people who are in the best position to make those determinations are the foresters and allied professionals that work and live in those ecosystems. There is no one person or group of people in a central location that can make these determinations. Forests are biological entities that have a cycle of life from seedling to mortality, they can be "conserved" but they cannot be "preserved". Nature will eventually reclaim the ecosystem either through mortality incrementally from insect, disease or other pathogen or violently from fire, tornado, hurricane or other destructive natural event. Either way the desires of man have no bearing on what nature does.

If our objective, as politicians and environmental organizations state, is to use forests to mitigate climate change, then we have a significant headwind of past decisions to overcome. Science has proven through repeated research efforts that we as professional foresters and allied professions know what we need to do "on the ground" to turn our forests - public and private ownerships - to more resilient and effect carbon sequestration tools. We need to have healthy forests that are at "peak performance" to be able to sequester carbon efficiently and effectively. We know that as forests age, the level of carbon sequestration begins to decline and at a point in time over mature forests essentially become "net zero" sequestration. We can keep the forests healthy by thinning and harvesting trees that has reached a low level of sequestration and used the wood for sustainable buildings and structures that keep the carbon sequestered.

The public and the politicians have yet to muster the political will to set a course for long term environmental stewardship and economic security. To be able to adjust as science and natural events dictate in an honest and transparent methodology. The focus of our efforts at all levels of government need to focus on empowering the people with the knowledge to do the right thing on the ground...not a centralized bureaucratic organization. The more remove the decisionmaking is from the situation, the stronger the chance that it will be the wrong decision

too late

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