

Testimony of  
State Senator Bob Morton

August 29, 2005

Quality forests forever: Fiber for the future

There is a religion which is adversely impacting our forest health. The Religion of "Tree Worshipers" blocks the process of caring, curing and saving our diseased, dying and dead forests. Their actions prevent crop rotation and management until the senior trees have passed their time for harvest on a rotating forest plan. These mature trees become more susceptible to disease, checking and spiral cracking, increasing infestation.

Crop rotation and farming our forests as working forests provide species growth and allows for harvest intervals that produce quality wood fiber.

Personally, my wife and I operate a forest plot with selective harvest of 60 year old trees every 20 years. We harvest the 60-year-old trees, which, for our soil, rainfall, and south slope exposure, is when our tree fiber is at its prime. We reseed, and the 20 and 40-year-old trees are left to mature to their 60-year potential and, at the same time, provide a beautiful landscape, and sustain vegetation and habitat for wildlife.

Too many mid-management personnel have been programmed to address forest harvest with the byword "can't" rather than "can."

An example is the Mt. Leona fire in Ferry County of 5000 acres and only 200 acres being salvaged primarily because USFS personnel had been programmed to address forest salvage in terms of "can't!"

"Can't" has resulted in so many mill closures, we now have no milling facilities between the two mountain passes in Ferry County to process the diseased and wildfire-damaged trees. The infrastructure is gone!

When the window of salvage time is stretched by bureaucratic paper work, the timber to be salvaged deteriorates in value. And, equally important, the fall window for re-seeding the salvaged area loses a year of growth because seedlings were not seeded before snow and frozen ground.

Maybe the purpose is to delay so the fiber can only be used for pulp to create more paper for bureaucrat paper work!

USFS needs to increase sales that improve the health of the forest. Placing a greater focus on sales that cull and cure. Instead, the USFS has resorted to timber sales encompassing a large sale area in terms of acres but no volume of timber, that misleads the public into believing a big harvest is being sold when it is simply a small volume on large area, plus the logging costs skyrocket because of the long distance to chase and retrieve the logs.

Needed is a more feasible salvage process to remove wildfire-damaged trees, blow downs, bugs, or fungus-killed stands. Emergency salvage rules should provide for immediate restoration.

A visual example is on the southwest slope of the valley in which I live. Twelve years ago, the root rot and mistletoe diseases were notable. Immediately, Vaagen Brothers Lumber Company selectively harvested all standing dead and dying trees on their private land. Their plan worked, providing the remainder of the stand a healthier environment in which to grow and resist disease.

Five years later, the adjacent state DNR parcel was also selectively logged and now shows considerable improvement. However, adjacent to the state parcel is the USFS, which has been managed not by the USFS but by the beetles, bugs and fungus. It is a prime example of letting nature have its way.

Achieving healthy forests is a shared responsibility between the federal agencies and their counterparts at the state level and private landowners. All must work collaboratively to lower fire risks, prevent disease and protect our precious forest resource.

The present anesthetized approach to our forest illness only puts the issue to sleep with no action or leadership for a cure. Stop allowing the religion of the tree worshipers from letting us healthily manage our forest resources.

Thank you for this congressional hearing of consultation and attempt to cure our dying forests and dying industry.

Cordially yours,

BOB MORTON

State Senator

P.S.: I sponsored the Washington State Forest Health Bill which resulted in Washington State's strategic plan for healthy forests. It is attached with hopeful anticipation the federal agencies will work with us in its achievement.