

After 1990: National forest timber sales drop precipitously

National forest timber sales had been relatively consistent between 1960 and 1989. After 1989, however, as a result of court decisions, public pressure and management plans imposed to protect the northern spotted owl and other endangered species, national forest timber sale levels went into free fall. Between 1989 and 2004, they dropped by more than 80 percent, from about 50 million m³ annually to between 9 million and 13.5 million m³ annually²⁴ (Figure 4).

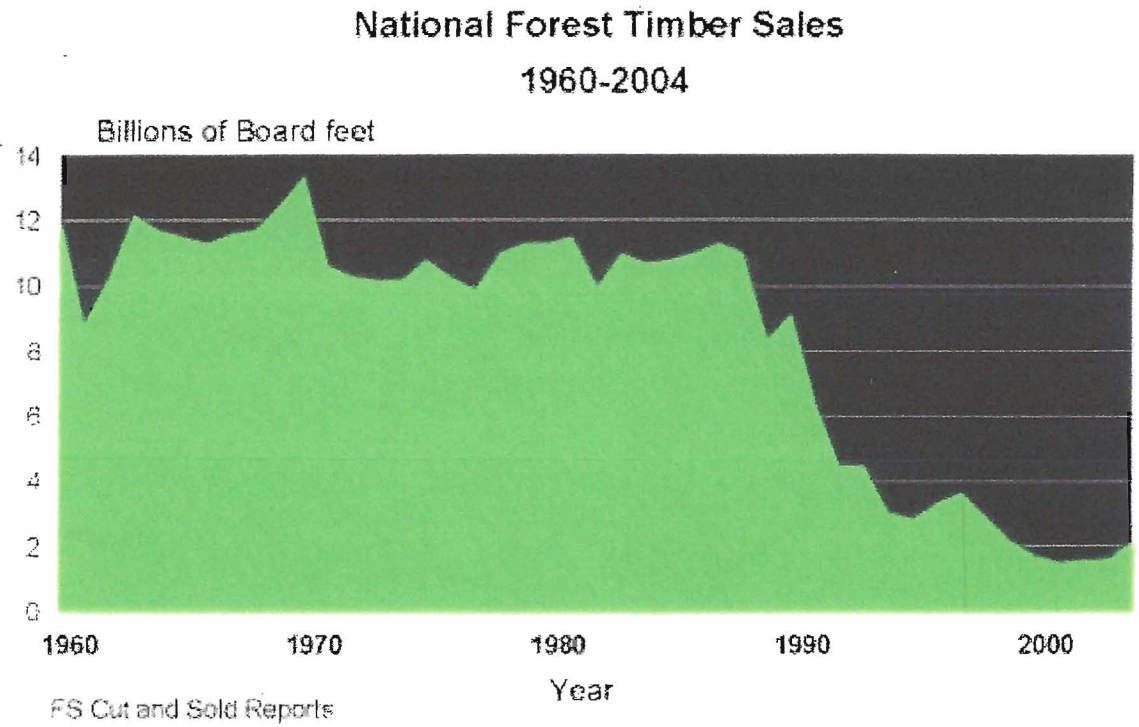


Figure 4. National forest timber sales (1960–2004)

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

The Fire This Time

In December 1995, a storm hit the Six Rivers National Forest in northern California, tossing dead trees across 35,000 acres and creating dangerous fire conditions. For three years local U.S. Forest Service officials labored to clean it up, but they were blocked by environmental groups and federal policy. In 1999 the time bomb blew: A fire roared over the untreated land and 90,000 more acres.

Bear this anecdote in mind as you watch the 135,000-acre Hayman fire now roasting close to Denver. And bear it in mind the rest of this summer, in what could be the biggest marshmallow-lasting season in half a century. Because despite the Sierra Club spin, catastrophic fires like the Hayman are not inevitable, or good. They stem from bad forest management—which found a happy home in the Clinton Administration.

In a briefing to Congress last week, U.S. Forest chief Dale Bosworth finally sorted the forest from the tree-huggers. He said that if proper forest-management had been implemented 10 years ago, and if the agency weren't in the grip of "analysis paralysis" from environmental regulation and lawsuits, the Hayman fire wouldn't be raging like an inferno.

Mr. Bosworth also presented Congress with a sobering report on our national forests. Of the 192 million acres the Forest Service administers, 73 million are at risk from severe fire. Tens of millions of acres are dying from insects and diseases. Thousands of miles of roads, critical to fighting fires, are unusable. Those facts back up a General Accounting Office report, which estimates that one in three forest acres is dead or dying. So much for the green mantra of "healthy ecosystems."

How did one of America's great resources come to such a pass? Look no further than the greens who tramped into power with the last Administration. Senior officials adopted an untested philosophy known as "ecosystem management," a bourgeois bohemian plan to return forests to their "natural" state. The Clinto-

nites cut back timber harvesting by 80% and used laws and lawsuits to put swathes of land off-limits to commercial use.

There's a reason forests on private land don't burn down.

Millions of acres are choked with dead wood, infected trees and underbrush. Many areas have

more than 400 tons of dry fuel per acre—10 times the manageable level. This is tinder that turns small fires into infernos, outrunning fire control and killing every fuzzy endangered animal in sight. In 2000 alone fires destroyed 8.4 million acres, the worst fire year since the 1950s. Some 800 structures were destroyed—many as a fire swept across Los Alamos, New Mexico—and control and recovery costs neared \$3 billion. The Forest Service's entire budget is \$4.9 billion.

That number, too, is important. Before the Clinton Administration limited timber sales, U.S. forests helped pay for their own upkeep. Selective logging cleaned up grounds and paid for staff, forestry stations, cleanup and roads. Today, with green groups blocking timber sales at every turn, the GAO says taxpayers will have to spend \$12 billion to cart off dead wood.

It's no accident that two of the main Clinton culprits—former director of Fish & Wildlife Jamie Rappaport Clark and former Forest Service boss Michael Dombeck—have both landed at the National Wildlife Federation, which broadcasts across its Internet homepage, "Phes Are Good."

Fixing all of this won't be easy. After 30 years of environmental regulation, the Forest Service now spends 40% of its time in "planning and assessment." Even the smallest project takes years. Mr. Bosworth has identified the problems, but fixing them will require White House leadership and Congressional cooperation.

One solution would be to follow the lead of private timber companies, whose forests don't tend to suffer such catastrophic fires. Their trees are an investment; they can't afford to let them burn. Americans should feel the same way about theirs.

Mistakes Made in The Past

In 1995 a task force appointed by the Elko County Commission found that decisions by federal agencies beginning in 1985 had caused a 33 percent decline in livestock use on the public lands within Elko County the state of Nevada.

The task force found that there Livestock grazing is an important tool for preventing wildfire, and that there is a direct correlation between the height and density of grazable grasses and the spread, duration, and intensity of wildfires.

Public Health and Safety

Rights-of-way as have been recognized and claimed by the Elko County Board of Commissioners are critically important for aiding in the prevention of catastrophic wildfire, which, as everyone knows, can be the greatest threats to human life and safety known in our area. **Keeping existing roads open leading into the public lands is “a public health and safety” issue.**

One of the greatest threats to life and limb is when persons responsible for the property and lives of family members take it upon themselves to do whatever it takes to stop a wildfire. Let us not forget, roads left unused, become overgrown and un-assessable in a very short period of time.

Loss of Wildlife Habitat

In 1999 alone we lost 45,000 acres of bighorn sheep habitat, 668,000 acres of antelope habitat, 144,000 acres of sage grouse habitat, 481,000 acres of chukar habitat, 303,000 acres of deer summer range and 341,000 acres of deer winter range to wildfire in the state of Nevada.