



In The News

Agriculture Secretary Announces \$224 Million for Hazardous Fuels Reduction

In May, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced \$224 million for 110 hazardous fuels reduction and ecosystem improvement projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The projects are located on forested lands in over 26 states and territories.

“President Obama’s efforts will provide for public health and safety by reducing the risk of wildland fire near communities in the wildland urban interface and will restore healthy forests,” said Vilsack. “These projects provide benefits to current and future generations, including improved water quality and quantity, healthy forests that provide clean air, and recreation opportunities while reducing wildfire risks.”

Through financial assistance and partnership agreements, hazardous fuels activities include reducing the volume of hazardous fuels on Federal forests and grasslands and on lands owned by States, local governments, private organizations, and individual landowners. Ecosystem improvement activities include thinning, removal of competing vegetation, planting native species, and constructing new stream channels and ponds.

For a listing of the hazardous fuels and ecosystem restoration projects, log on to www.usda.gov/wps/portal.

Smith Sentenced for Defrauding Tacoma Lumber Mill

A 24-year-old Puyallup man, Brett Smith, will serve 10 years in prison and be required to pay approximately \$2.4 million in restitution to Manke Lumber Co.

Smith was the ringleader of a group who conspired to defraud the Tacoma lumber mill.

The Seattle Times reported that Smith had been a “scaler” — weighing, measuring, and inspecting logs to determine their value. Using that information, he devised a scheme to falsify paperwork that resulted in checks being sent to co-conspirators for logs that were never delivered to the mill.

“Brett Smith, and several under him, seduced 25 others into lives now marred with criminal records with the lure of easy cash,” wrote Assistant U. S. Attorney Arlen Storm in a sentencing memorandum.

Wilkes Withdraws

President Obama had chosen Home Lee Wilkes as his choice for the new agriculture undersecretary. When confirmed he would have been the first person without a forest policy background to hold the position.

In early June Wilkes withdrew his nomination explaining that it was a bad time to move his family to Washington. Wilkes has two sons in high school moving his family from Mississippi would have been difficult.

Wilkes has the first black nominee to be appointed to the post and had worked nearly 30 years with the Natural Resources Conservation Services.



Trucking Legislation Introduced

Productivity, safety, and competition in the world of trucking transportation all got a boost this week when Congressman Mike Michaud introduced H.R. 1799, the Safe and Efficient Transportation Act of 2009.

H.R. 1799 would give the option to individual states to increase their allowable weight on a single-trailer truck up to 97,000 pounds on their Interstate highways. These vehicles would be required to add a sixth axle for better braking and handling. Every truck that added the additional axle would be required to pay a higher fee to ensure that this legislation will be a financial net-gain for the federal government.

In a report issued in January of this year, the Wisconsin DOT found that if a proposal similar to Rep. Michaud's bill had been in place in 2006, there would have been 90 fewer heavy truck-related accidents on the highways of Wisconsin.

"This reform is long overdue for forest and agricultural producers," said AgTEC's Richard Lewis. "We need to improve flexibility for haulers of basic raw materials, to pull costs out of the system and to reduce congestion and accident exposures on local roads."

Wood Fiber Costs Fell

North American Wood Fiber Review reported that pulpmills and sawmills took a great deal of market-related downtime in the 4Q/08 and 1Q/09, with no region of North America being immune to the deteriorating markets for most forest products. Market pulp production in North America was 29% lower in December 2008 than in the same month of 2007. The operating rate was a record-low 69% in December, which can be compared to 87% in Europe and 85% worldwide.

Lumber production and residual chip supply were also much lower this winter than last year. In the 4Q/08, lumber production was down 23% in the U.S. compared to the same quarter in 2007. Production continued down in 2009, and sawmills in western U.S. reported 35% lower output in January 2009 than in 2008.

Managing Douglas-Fir Forests for Diversity

A study conducted in southwestern Oregon provides forest managers with information that offers choices when managing land for a variety of objectives, including a high level of wood production, a moderate level of wood production with some wildlife habitat features, or low wood production that provides cover and forage for a wider variety of wildlife species.

Connie Harrington, research forester with the PNW Research Station in Olympia, Wash., and John Tappeiner, an emeritus Oregon State University forestry professor, initiated a study in 1983 in southwestern Oregon on Douglas-fir plantations near Cave Junction and Glendale, Ore.

According to Harrington, they found that "managing stands with moderate hardwood densities enables a stratified structure to develop with conifers and hardwoods occupying dominant and intermediate canopy layers, respectively. Combining high hardwood densities with pre-commercial thinning of Douglas-fir creates a co-dominant stand structure with conifers and hardwoods occupying the same canopy layer. Managers may also want to retain some hardwoods in areas prone to black stain root disease, since the hardwoods may reduce mortality of planted Douglas-fir following thinning." Read the full report in the April issue of the Canadian Journal of Forestry.