

81.0 NATURAL ENVIRONMENT: FOREST RESOURCES

81.1 OVERVIEW

LEGAL BASIS AND REQUIREMENTS

As required by the Conservation and Open Space Elements of the General Plan Guidelines (Government Code Sections 65302(d) and 65560(b)(2)), the General Plan shall include a conservation element for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources including water and its hydraulic force, forest, soils, rivers and other waters, harbors, fisheries, wildlife, minerals, and other natural resources.

81.2 PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this analysis is to provide a synopsis of current forest resources within Tehama County with historic context and to identify important issues that should be addressed within the General Plan. Information contained in this report is based on a review of documents pertaining to the forest resources of the general plan area and examination of biological resources and vegetation maps.

81.3 EXISTING SETTING

Generally bisected by the Sacramento River, Tehama County rests approximately midway between the city of Sacramento and the Oregon border. The western boundary of the county traces the east interior slope of the Pacific Coast Range and its eastern boundary extends into the southernmost area of the Cascade Mountains.

Natural vegetation in the region consists primarily of oak, pine and some Douglas fir. Along Tehama's rivers, profusions of elderberries, wild grapes, and seasonal wildflowers spot the landscape with color.

Although Tehama's cash crops include walnuts, olives, wheat, sugar beats and rice, the predominant vegetative production in Tehama County comes from its forestlands.

TIMBER PRODUCTION

Timber resources cover a substantial portion of land in the Eastern and Western areas of Tehama County. The 1983 General Plan summarizes that, of the county's 1,909,000 acres, 460,000 (24.1%) are commercial forestlands. This term is defined as lands capable of producing at least 15 cubic feet per acre per year of industrial wood.

Historically, Tehama County has been one of the leading counties in timber production in California. But over the last two decades, timber harvests in Tehama County have dropped significantly. Between 1980 and 2003, harvests fell from an average of 147,208,000 board feet per year to 74,207,000 board feet per year, a drop of 49.6%. The decline of public timber harvests since the end of the 1980s is primarily due to increased harvesting restrictions on public lands.

TABLE 81-1
TEHAMA COUNTY TIMBER PRODUCTION 1996-2003 (IN THOUSANDS OF BOARD FEET)

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
103,753	113,011	83,428	98,816	100,887	63,783	74,207	74,207

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Labor within the timber industry in Tehama County also dropped considerably over the last 20 years. Whereas there were 2,062 people working in this industry in 1980, that number fell to 1,714 in 1990 and to 1,238 in 1999, a decline of 40%.

Tractor logging is, by far, the most common technique on the gently sloping majority of the Forest. It is generally suitable for slopes up to about 35%, or 20% on cinder cones. Cable logging is being used more often as harvests extend into steeper, remote areas. Helicopter logging is used in the relatively infrequent cases where both tractor and cable logging would be prohibited by physical, environmental or economic factors.

OWNERSHIP

The largest timberland owner in Tehama County is the Federal Government. According to the 1983 General Plan, the National Forest Service holdings account for 215,000 acres, or 46.7% of the total commercial forest land in the county. These holdings are located in the Lassen, Mendocino and Shasta-Trinity National Forests. An additional 4,000 acres (0.9%) are owned by other public agencies.

Private holdings account for 241,000 acres or 52.4% of the County's total commercial forestlands.

Tehama County's timberlands are highly valued for their economic contributions in terms of revenue and employment as well as for their benefits to wildlife habitat watershed protection, erosion control, open-space, scenic amenities and recreation.

TIMBER MANAGEMENT

For those private timberlands that are intended primarily for the production of high quality timber products, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) strives to maintain forests that are healthy and naturally diverse, with a mix of trees and understory plants. The CDF's objectives of these forests are to:

- Achieve a balance between growth and harvest over time
- Maintain functional wildlife habitat in sufficient condition for continued use by the existing wildlife community within the planning watershed
- Retain or recruit late and diverse seral stage habitat components for wildlife concentrated in the watercourse and lake zones and as appropriate to provide for functional connectivity between habitats
- Maintain growing stock, genetic diversity and soil productivity.

The CDF considers individual Timber Harvest Plans in the context of the larger regional forest and watershed planning in order to maintain biological diversity and watershed integrity and limit adverse cumulative impacts. Addressing long-term sustained timber production, and cumulative effects analysis can be further addressed in the Sustained Yield Plan (SYP) that may be submitted at the option of the landowner. The SYP supplements, but does not replace, the Timber Harvest Plan process. Cumulative landscape-level effects on fish and wildlife and watersheds can be addressed in the SYP.

FOREST-RELATED FUNDING

Public Law 106-393 (also known as the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act) was passed and signed into law in 2000 as a result of efforts by a broad-based national

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coalition of counties and school districts having U.S. National Forests within their boundaries to reenergize the compact that was made with the people in these counties when the U.S. National Forest System was established.

Since 1908, a portion of the gross proceeds from all economic activity (forest products, land rental, recreation, etc.) of National Forests has been paid to counties for roads, bridges and to schools as mitigation for the removal of these lands from the public acquisition and development. In the past decade these receipts have steeply declined and virtually disappeared in some counties. Public Law 106-393 provides a six-year "safety-net" for schools and counties. For Tehama County, this guarantees that at least two million dollars in Forest Reserve funds will be available annually for schools and roads.

The Resource Advisory Committee was recommended by the Tehama County Board of Supervisors and approved by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. It represents a broad array of community groups including county government, education, recreation, environmental groups, labor, Native American, industry and other similar interests.

The Tehama County Resource Advisory Committee has been authorized by the Supervisors to allocate Title II funds from Forest Reserve Dispersements towards qualifying projects in Tehama County. The Committee is allocating the funds based on the approximate percentage of acreage within Tehama County of each of the three National Forests.

Tehama County recognizes the value of its timber resources by affording protection through the use of Timberland Preserve Zoning (TPZ).

81.4 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Much of the county's timber resources are protected from conversion to other uses and from adjacent potential land use conflicts under the TPZ provisions.

Timber Preserve Zoning was developed as the primary means of implementing the Forest Taxation Reform Act of 1976, designed to "promote prudent and responsible forest resource management calculated to serve the public's need for timber and other forest products, while giving consideration to the public's need for watershed production, fisheries and wildlife, and recreational opportunities" (Chapter 176, Statutes of 1976, Section 1). The Act restructures timber and timberland taxation by replacing an ad valorem property tax on standing timber with a yield tax in harvested timber and by establishing a statewide system of preferential assessment for timberlands.

The intent of Timber Preserve Zoning not only seeks to protect the integrity of timber resources but also to prevent the occurrence of adverse impacts from timber harvesting operations on non-timbering land uses. The Timber Preserve Zoning Ordinance of Tehama County designates land uses, which are compatible with timber operations and therefore allowable in Timber Preserve Zones. These uses only include those necessary for the management of watershed, fish and wildlife habitat and grazing; erosion and fire control; gas, electric, water or communication transmission facilities; and buildings or structures accessory to timber growing and harvesting or other listed compatible uses. The ordinance also lists allowable conditional uses requiring permit approval, as well as parcel size and TPZ eligibility requirements.

Despite the numerous biodiversity issues, forest policies such as the Timberland Productivity Act allow for continued timber harvesting by designating certain highly productive timber areas specifically for timber harvesting. According to the CDF, "The Timberland Productivity Act

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restricts use of lands zoned Timberland Production Zone to growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses and establishes a presumption that timber harvesting is expected to and will occur on such lands."

The 1983 Tehama County General Plan expressed its concerns for continued management of timberland plans with the following objectives:

- T-1: Preservation of prime timberlands.
- T-2: Protection of prime timberlands from adjacent development that has the potential to adversely impact timber growing and harvesting operations.
- T-3: County recognition of the various timber management improvement and education programs as a means to improve timber yields and protect wildlife habitat and watershed lands.

The 1983 Tehama County General Plan included the following policies:

- T-a: The Timberlands land use category shall be used to identify and protect lands currently under Timber Preserve Zoning.
- T-b: Development of Timberlands shall be subject to the conditions established in the Zoning Code.
- T-c: Lands adjacent to Timberlands shall be assigned land use classifications that do not adversely impact timber growing and harvesting operations. These land uses shall be restricted to Natural Resource, Habitat Resource, Significant River or Creekside Corridor, or Grazing Classifications. Commercial Recreation may be a conditional use, subject to use permit approval.
- T-d: The County shall promote the use of recognized forest improvement practices and programs.
- T-e: County shall encourage timber production by providing tax incentives to timberland owners through a reduction in the minimum acreage requirement for entrance into a new TPZ District according to the schedule in the Tehama County Zoning Code.
- T-f: The County shall not preempt the State of California's regulatory authority over forest practices on timberlands. Because the current forest practice rules and regulations already provide protection and consideration for watershed, wildlife, fisheries, range and forage, recreation and aesthetic enjoyment values.