



Montana Wood Products Association

Transfer of federal lands to states
Policy Statement - February 13, 2015

Background

The governor of Montana has important responsibilities concerning the land, air, forest, wildlife, and water resources, as well as energy and mineral development within our borders. Unfortunately, over time, the strength of the federal-state partnership regarding resource management has diminished.

In the West, timber harvest on federal lands has decreased 80 percent over the past 20 years. Timber harvest in Montana has decreased from 1.6bbf in 1986 to roughly 540mmbf in 2013. The decline in harvest has directly led to the closure of 28 mills and the loss of 3,252 primary jobs within Montana's forest products industry.

The erosion of this partnership and management of federal lands within our borders has led to a growing sense of frustration by communities, neighbors and businesses that rely on federal lands for their well being. This frustration has led to the conversation regarding states taking over the ownership and control of federal properties within respective state borders.

Policy Statement

It is the position of the MWPA Board of Directors, that even though we are intimately aware and are directly affected by the decline in resource management within our borders, we do not – at this time – support the movement to transfer federal lands to the state of Montana for either ownership or management responsibilities. With the exception of the Good Neighbor Authority permanently authorized in the 2013 Farm Bill; which allows for cooperative management of National Forest System lands by states, counties and municipalities with certain defined restrictions.

It is unclear what "transfer of federal lands" to states means. Our concern is with any proposal to transfer federal property or "timberland" to state ownership or management could act as a distraction to national efforts and not provide the timely progress needed. Such an action would not only catapult the timber industry back into the "timber wars" of past decades, but it also does not address or resolve the root of the problems we are currently facing with litigation and over-regulatory policies. Regardless of who holds the deeds to the land, we must first address, change, and fix the hurdles to active management.

Congress is working hard to find solutions to federal timber management. Uncertainty surrounding the state's rights issue and any continued discussion or investigation into such an action only serves to distort, distract and derail the important work with regards to the implementation of the forestry provisions in the 2013 Farm Bill and other federal forest reform efforts currently underway.

Board of Directors