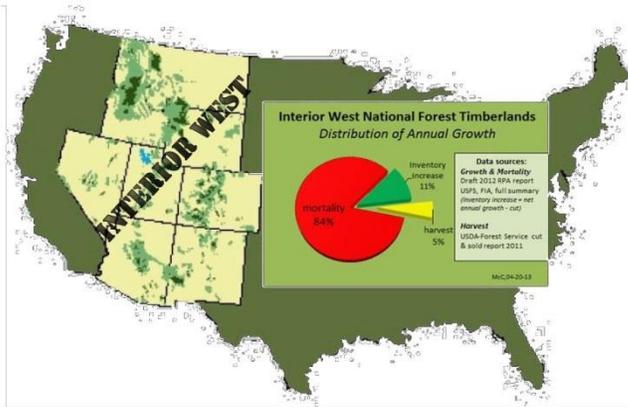


TIME FOR CHANGE?

The halls of Congress and western state legislatures have been filled recently with debate on federal timber management and non-management together with proposals for change. Environmental activists, encouraged by their successes in past battles, decry the possible return of the “timber barons” while opposing increased local citizen control over federal lands. They continue to litigate for reduced harvests and increased protection for endangered and possibly endangered species, old growth, potential old growth, and stands of dead and dying trees. To illustrate - the Alliance for the Wild Rockies and the Native Ecosystems Council are currently suing the Forest Service in an attempt to prevent salvage of the dead timber on the national forest land (Cabin Gulch Vegetation Treatment Project) shown in photo right.

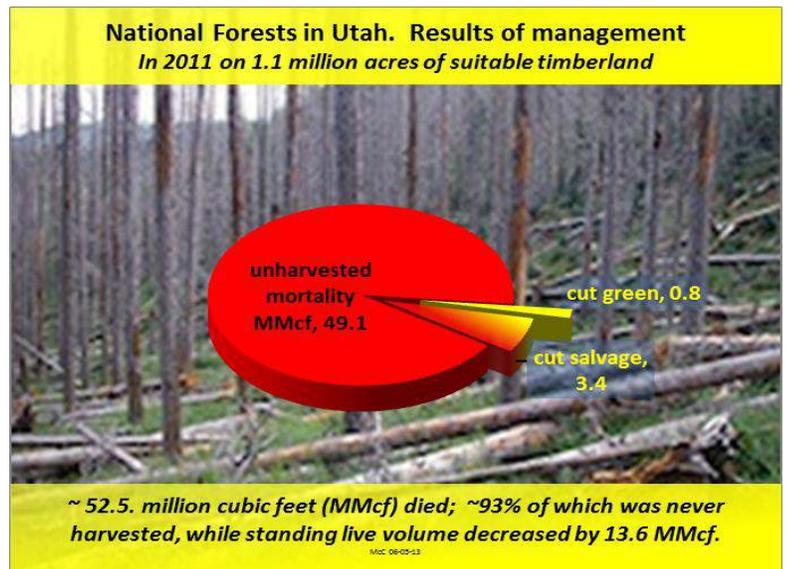


Meanwhile, fire, insects, and disease ravage unmanaged federally-owned, over-mature and over-dense timber stands, industries close their doors, jobs are lost, forest-dependent communities die, children are deprived of adequate schooling, families are destroyed, and local governments face bankruptcy.



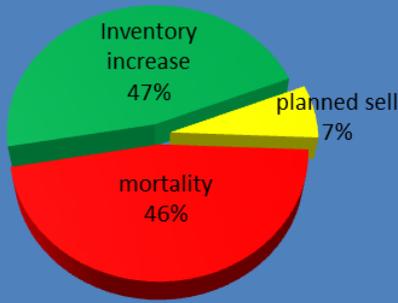
The 5 National Forests in Utah are a harbinger of the conditions we can expect nationwide in the absence of major revisions in our public land policies. In 2011 these forests collectively experienced a negative timber growth rate. More timber died than was grown, with an estimated net annual growth of **-13.6 million cubic feet** on the 1.1 million acres of land classified in the Forest Plans as “suitable” for harvesting timber. The graphic on the right portrays the current situation on this land. As a pie chart cannot show negative values, it is a partial display that suggests, rather than defines, existing conditions.

Timber mortality varies widely across the nation, with the Interior West, arguably the region hardest hit by drought and insect attack, suffering the highest mortality rate. In this region, in 2011, 84% of the total annual growth died while 5% of the growth was harvested. Some forests, and entire states, are currently experiencing negative annual timber growth on federally owned timberland.



National Forest System Timberland

Distribution of gross annual timber growth - 2014



Data Sources

Growth & mortality -

Draft 2012 RPA report, USFS FIA , full summary
(Inv. increase = Net Annual Growth - planned sell)

Planned sell -

USDA-FS, FY 2014 Budget Justification, Page 5-4

McC 05-02-13

PLANNED SELL, 2014

In response to these challenges, in 2014 the USDA Forest Service proposes to reduce the volume of timber sold by 15%. The agency will sell about 7% of the total timber grown on its non-reserved timberlands, while ~7 times that volume (nearly half of the growth) will die.

Local impacts vary greatly. Eastern forests, with younger stands, have lower mortality rates. Communities and industries with private timber available have suffered less than those depending on federal timber. Counties with taxable land are less affected than those with a high percentage of government owned land. Mill closures and lost harvesting infrastructure in some areas have made management impossible, even if the timber were made available.

Solving these many and diverse local problems require local solutions based on local know-how. The current top-down, one-size-fits-all land management by the feds has proven itself ill-suited to problem-solving at the forest level. Removal of selected lands from federal oversight and transferal to local autonomous authority, similar to state trust lands, would seem to be the most direct and efficient way - perhaps the only way - to secure reliable, adequate funding and cut through the tangle of shifting, restrictive, and often conflicting laws, regulations, executive orders, litigation, and judicial mandates that make federal management a hopeless cause.

http://www.wvmcconnell.net/?page_id=591 offers an in-depth look at this option.

What could the Congress and the Administration do to return rational management to our federally owned timberlands? What should they do? Most importantly, what will they do?

W.V. McConnell

U.S. Forest Service (Retired)

June 15, 2013

wvmcconnell@comcast.net

Data sources –

The data used to support the growth and mortality estimates shown in the graphics are taken from the preliminary USDA, FS Forest Inventory and Analysis 2012 Report, required by the Resources Planning Act of 1974. The 2011 cut is actual reported volumes while 2014 sell volume is that planned under the proposed Forest Service budget for that year. Percentage of total volume harvested as salvage in Utah is a weighted average of estimates by F.S. staff of the involved forests. "Suitable land", a subset of "timberland", is assumed to have the same conditions as its superset. The data appear to be consistent with past estimates and with observed conditions on the ground and are the best information available at this time