Resource Management and Forestry Overview

Managing Natural Resources: California is rich in natural resources. Of the 85 million acres classified as wildlands, nearly 17 million are commercial forest land, half privately-owned and half government-owned. This forest land grows 3.8 billion board feet yearly. From 2002-2011 the average annual timber harvested in California from non-federal timberlands was 1.5 billion board feet with a value of over $385 million. In addition to timber, the state's wildlands also provide valuable watershed, wildlife habitat, and recreation resources. CAL FIRE's mission emphasizes the management and protection of California's natural resources. The CAL FIRE Resource Management Program is an integral part of that responsibility.

Forest Practices: The California Forest Practice Act was adopted in 1973, resulting in a comprehensive process where CAL FIRE oversees enforcement of California's forest practice regulations. Under the Act, Timber Harvesting Plans (THPs) are submitted to CAL FIRE for commercial timber harvesting on all non-federal timberlands. The plans are reviewed for compliance with the Forest Practice Act, rules adopted by the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, and other state and federal laws that protect watersheds and wildlife. CAL FIRE foresters conduct on-site inspections of proposed logging sites in conjunction with biologists, geologists and water quality specialists from sister resource departments. THPs must be prepared by Registered Professional Foresters and harvesting operations carried out by timber operators licensed by the Department. On average, department foresters review 200-300 THPs and conduct over 4,000 field inspections. THPs represent only a fraction of the harvested acreage in any given year; when all harvest documents are considered, CAL FIRE is responsible to enforce the State's Forest Practice Rules on over 3.1 million acres of non-federal timberland each year.

Urban Forestry: Trees and vegetation play an important role in the vitality of California communities. They affect property values, energy consumption, air quality, noise pollution, and wildlife. CAL FIRE foresters promote improved planning and management, as well as tree planting and maintenance in our state's urban areas. Grant programs managed by the Department make money available to communities for tree planting and other urban improvements. In an effort to to teach conservation and the importance of trees and forests to California's, CAL FIRE partners with California ReLeaf during Arbor Week each year. California Arbor Week works to unite our members, cities, businesses, and individuals to educate Californians on the value trees provide to building successful, healthy cities and neighborhoods.

Fuel Reduction: Through prescribed burning and other fuel reduction methods, the risk of wildfire can be diminished. Prescribed burns remove the thick underbrush in wildland areas in a controlled manner rather than through destruction from a wildfire. Fuel reduction not only improves the growing conditions of native plant and wildlife species but, a treated site can act as a fire break, stopping a wildfire in its tracks, or providing firefighters with safe areas to make a stand against a fire. Specialized CAL FIRE personnel coordinate with landowners to determine sites and create plans for prescribed burns. CAL FIRE works with other cooperators, such as air quality and wildlife agencies, to ensure burning is done with minimal impact on air quality or biological diversity.

State Forests: CAL FIRE operates eight Demonstration State Forests totaling 71,000 acres. The forests represent the most common forest types in the state. Annually, the State Forests grow approximately 68 million board feet while the timber harvest level from these forests averages about half of the growth. With this conservative approach, habitat for fish and wildlife is improved and the number of trees and inventory on the forests continues to increase while still providing enough timber to build over 3,000 single family homes.

Pest Management: Forest pests (insects and diseases) annually destroy 10 times the volume of timber lost due to forest fires. Pests such as Sudden Oak Death, an organism that is killing oak trees, has spread through numerous central and north coast counties; bark beetles have reached epidemic levels after many years of drought that have devastated the Central Sierra Region and left over a million trees dead and/or dying across the state; and the insect-carried Pitch Canker Disease, which has severely attacked Monterey Pine along the state's coast, are just three of the many pests foresters are battling. CAL FIRE's forest pest specialists help protect the state's forest resources from native and introduced pests, conduct surveys and provide technical assistance to private forest landowners, and promote forest health on all forest lands.

Landowner Assistance: CAL FIRE administers several state and federal forestry assistance programs with the goal of reducing wildland fuel loads and improving the health and productivity of private forest lands. Federal programs that CAL FIRE administers, along with the California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP), offer cost-share opportunities to assist landowners with land management planning, conservation practices to enhance wildlife habitat, and practices to enhance the productivity of the land. The Department also delivers the Forest Stewardship Program to assist communities with multiple-ownership watershed and community issues related to prefire fuels treatment, forest health, erosion control, and fisheries issues.

Environmental Protection and Regulation: CAL FIRE guides the maintenance of ecosystem health and environmental law compliance for projects approved, permitted, funded or undertaken by the Department and those projects approved by other agencies where the Department has environmental review responsibility. This program also represents the Department's forest management and policy interests for Climate Change and Wood Utilization, including the use of biomass for wood based energy. This program is also responsible for facilitating statewide forestry and fire protection polices and assuring regulations adopted by the Board and Department meet the administrative and environmental compliance standards for adoption of regulations.

Archaeology: Within the Environmental Protection Program is the Department's Archaeology Program. CAL FIRE archaeologists provide resource surveys, technical assistance, project reviews, resource identification and training to CAL FIRE staff, and to hundreds of foresters and other resource professionals working in the private sector. The program strives to identify and manage archaeological and historical resources located within CAL FIRE's jurisdiction, and to develop methods to protect them. This is accomplished through regulations and policies that require surveys of project areas to evaluate potential impacts and incorporate protection measures before damage can be done. CAL FIRE staff are also often able to identify and take steps to save historical sites during raging wildfires.

Fire and Resource Assessment: Current information on the supply, availability, and condition of California's forest and rangeland resources is needed to develop appropriate policies to ensure the health and productivity of these wildlands. The Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP) identifies emerging resource issues on wildlands, analyzes the results of different types of land use and management on wildland conditions, reviews and evaluates policies by federal, state, and local agencies as they relate to wildland protection, and identifies and analyzes policy options for the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection. The program has established a statewide geographic information system (GIS) of biological, physiographic, demographic, and other types of data needed to address CAL FIRE's mission, including information on vegetation, wildlife, soils, watersheds, fire behavior, and ownership.

Nursery: CAL FIRE has significantly curtailed its nursery operations due to budget constraints, and closed its Magalia Reforestation Center in June 2011. The L.A. Moran Reforestation Center (LAMRC) in Yolo County specializes in forest tree cone and seed processing and seed bank storage. CAL FIRE staff at the center continues to provide technical assistance to forest industry, other agency, and private landowners on cone and seed matters and seed collection activities. The LAMRC has also partnered with several private nuseries throughout the state to provide additional resources to landowners.