

**POSITION STATEMENT ON  
NATIONAL FOREST OLD GROWTH VALUES**

The Forest Service recognizes the many significant values associated with old growth forests, such as biological diversity, wildlife and fisheries habitat, recreation, aesthetics, soil productivity, water quality, and industrial raw material. Old growth on the National Forests will be managed to provide the foregoing values for present and future generations. Decisions on managing existing old growth forests to provide these values will be made in the development and implementation of forest plans. These plans shall also provide for a succession of young forests into old growth forests in light of their depletion due to natural events or harvest.

Old growth forests encompass the late stages of stand development and are distinguished by old trees and related structural attributes. These attributes, such as tree size, canopy layers, snags, and down trees, generally define forests that are in an old growth condition. The specific attributes vary by forest type. Old growth definitions are to be developed by forest type or type groups for use in determining the extent and distribution of old growth forests.

Where goals for providing old growth values are not compatible with timber harvesting, lands will be classified as unsuitable for timber production. Where these goals can be met by such measures as extending the final harvest age well beyond the normal rotation or by using silvicultural practices that maintain or establish specific old growth values, lands will be classified as suitable for timber production. In making these determinations, consideration shall be given to the extent and distribution of old growth on National Forest lands that are Congressionally or administratively withdrawn from timber harvest, as well as adjacent ownerships.

Old growth values shall be considered in designing the dispersion of old growth. This may range from a network of old growth stands for wildlife habitat to designated areas for public visitation. In general, areas to be managed for old growth values are to be distributed over individual National Forests with attention given to minimizing the fragmentation of old growth into small isolated areas. Old growth on lands suitable for timber production and not subject to extended rotations is to be scheduled for harvest to establish young stands which more fully utilize potential timber productivity and also meet other resource objectives.

Regions with support from Research shall continue to develop forest type old growth definitions, conduct old growth inventories, develop and implement silvicultural practices to maintain or establish desired old growth values, and explore the concept of ecosystem management on a landscape basis. Where appropriate, land management decisions are to maintain future options so the results from the foregoing efforts can be applied in subsequent decisions. Accordingly, field units are to be innovative in planning and carrying out their activities in managing old growth forests for their many significant values.

## GENERIC DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF OLD GROWTH FORESTS

10/11/89

### Purpose and Scope

The following describes the ecologically important structural features of old growth ecosystems. Measurable criteria for these attributes will be established in more specific definitions for forest types, habitat types, plant associations or groupings of them. The intent of the generic definition is to guide design of specific definitions and new inventories that include measurement of specific attributes. Although old growth ecosystems may be distinguished functionally as well as structurally, this definition is restricted primarily to stand-level structural features which are readily measured in forest inventory.

### Definition

Old growth forests are ecosystems distinguished by old trees and related structural attributes. Old growth encompasses the later stages of stand development that typically differ from earlier stages in a variety of characteristics which may include tree size, accumulations of large dead woody material, number of canopy layers, species composition, and ecosystem function.

### Description

The age at which old growth develops and the specific structural attributes that characterize old growth will vary widely according to forest type, climate, site conditions and disturbance regime. For example, old growth in fire-dependent forest types may not differ from younger forests in the number of canopy layers or accumulation of down woody material. However, old growth is typically distinguished from younger growth by several of the following attributes:

1. Large trees for species and site.
2. Wide variation in tree sizes and spacing.
3. Accumulations of large-size dead standing and fallen trees that are high relative to earlier stages.
4. Decadence in the form of broken or deformed tops or bole and root decay.
5. Multiple canopy layers
6. Canopy gaps and understory patchiness.

Compositionally, old growth encompasses both older forests dominated by early seral species, such as fire-dependant species, and forests in later successional stages dominated by shade tolerant species. Rates of change in composition and structure are slow relative to younger forests. Different stages or classes of old growth will be recognizable in many forest types.

Sporadic, low to moderate severity disturbances are an integral part of the internal dynamics of many old growth ecosystems. Canopy openings resulting from the death of overstory trees often give rise to patches of small trees, shrubs, and herbs in the understory.

Old growth is not necessarily 'virgin' or 'primeval.' Old growth could develop following human disturbances.

The structure and function of an old growth ecosystem will be influenced by its stand size and landscape position and context.

## FOREST SERVICE OLD GROWTH TASK GROUP

Draft Action Plan

2/15/89

1. Develop a generic definition of ecological old growth. It will identify characteristics for which measurable criteria would be established in more specific definitions for forest types, habitat types, or plant associations; and would help guide the design of new inventories that will include the measurement of old growth attributes.

Responsibility: Jerry Franklin and Tom Speis, PNW

Timeframe: First draft by February 21. WO-TM will send out to Task Group members, Regions, and Stations for review. Task group will consult with other agencies and national interest groups. Final by March 23.

2. Regional definitions of ecological old growth for specific forest types, habitat types, or plant associations will be developed within the framework of the generic definition. Definitions for those vegetative classes which occur in more than one Region should be developed with coordination between the applicable Regions.

Responsibility: Regional Foresters, All Regions

Timeframe: Begin after generic definition is final.

3. Conduct long-term inventories that measure ecological old growth in accordance with the Regional definitions using the best available technology -- this will be done on both the national forests and on the other land ownerships inventoried by Forest Service FIA units. For national forest lands, these inventories will include maps of existing ecological old growth. For all the land ownerships, they will include estimates of the acreage of forest lands that will develop the characteristics of ecological old growth within the next 50 years.

Responsibility: Regional Foresters and Station Directors

Timeframe: In accordance with inventory schedule.

4. Complete forest plans in Regions 5 and 6 based on existing Regional Guide definitions, but update information on old growth to FY 1988 to the extent possible and practicable prior to release of the final plans.

Responsibility: Regional Foresters, R-5 and R-6

Timeframe: By time of release of final plans

5. Final forest plans in Regions 5 and 6 will clearly distinguish between the old growth classification as defined in the Regional Guides and the interpretations for specific resource use, such as wildlife habitat or large sawtimber. In these plans, when projecting conditions through the fifth decade, estimates should be made to the degree possible of the additional area which is likely to succeed into an old growth condition and of projected depletions resulting from timber harvest or other events.

Responsibility: Regional Foresters, R-5 and R-6

Timeframe: By time of release of final plans

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6. The FEIS's for the final Forest Plans which have not yet been approved for printing by the Regional Forester will document the old growth estimates published by other organizations and explain how and why they differ from Forest Service estimates.

Responsibility: Regional Foresters. R-5 and R-6

Timeframe: By time of release of final plans

7. Provide testimony for FY90 appropriations hearings that explains how the FY89 old growth inventory appropriation was used and presents the Forest Service's strategy for future old growth inventory. Develop options for further accelerating old growth inventory nationally.

One common paper for the testimony will be developed jointly by R-5, R-6, PNW, and PSW. A map of old growth will be prepared for one Forest in each of R-5 and R-6. The paper will include a description of how we will work with interest groups in the future in assessing old growth.

Responsibility: R-6 (Lead), R-5, PNW, PSW, WO-TM, and WO-Research.

Timeframe: By April 1, 1989

8. Only one estimate of old growth per Region will be displayed in RPA, and this will be based on the Regional definitions of old growth. This will be distinguished from estimates of forest lands meeting late seral stage habitat needs for wildlife.

Responsibility: WO Staff Directors - TM, WL&F, and RPA

Timeframe: By March 24, 1989

9. The national old growth task group will continue. Its responsibility will include both internal coordination and coordination with other agencies and interest groups at the national level. Regions will provide similar leadership at the Regional level. The TM staffs will serve as clearing houses for current information on old growth.

Responsibility: Deputy Chief, NFS and Regional Foresters

Timeframe: Continuing

10. Develop an information strategy paper that will clarify issues related to controversy over Forest Service management of old growth and include a proposed public information action plan that will help resolve the identified issues. It will address research efforts as well as NFS management.

Responsibility: Director, WO-PAO and Director, Region 6 PAO

Timeframe: Draft by March 24. Draft to be reviewed by task group members and final prepared by April 14.

11. Develop direction on discussion and analysis of ecological old growth in NFMA planning. The direction will be included in FSM 1920 and FSH 1909.12.

Responsibility: Director, WO-LMP

Timeframe: Draft for presentation to task group by May 1.