CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH WOOD UTILIZATION FOR ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

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Design and layout of activities that remove timber from federal land inevitably must address issues other than the efficiencies of the forest operations or the economic value of the timber removed. In fact, many of the most difficult challenges presented to the National Forest personnel who plan and implement these activities are political rather than technical. It is often difficult to reach consensus on what type of treatments should be implemented even when there is an acknowledged hazard due to fire, insects, or disease. It is especially difficult for groups that oppose commercial harvest of timber from public lands to accept treatments involving timber removal when more abstract objectives, such as altering stand structure in ways that increase plant species diversity, improving wildlife habitat, or making conditions more appealing to humans are the stated reasons for a proposed activity. Compromises made to clear the way for implementation of treatments almost always lower the total economic value of timber removed and increase the costs of removing it. Another challenge is the move away from planning treatments at the stand level toward a greater consideration of the landscape, or even regional, context when implementing relatively small-scale treatments. Landscape level plans often indicate a need for treatments in stands where the opportunity for financial return is lower in spite of these constraints, those involved with designing management activities on federal land can benefit by considering the economic costs associated with timber removals and by understanding local markets and the types of raw materials that local processors can use.

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Published in *Small Diameter Timber: Resource Management, Manufacturing, and Markets* proceedings from conference held February 25-27, 2002 in Spokane, Washington. Compiled and edited by D.M. Baumgartner, L.R. Johnson, and E.J. DePuit. Washington State University Cooperative Extension. (Bulletin Office, WSU, PO Box 645912, Pullman, WA 99164-5912. MISC0509. 268 pp.