



For Immediate Release

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Environmentalists, policymakers, timber industry gather for two-day conference on CA forests

BERKELEY – An upcoming conference in Sacramento about California's disappearing forests will bring together traditional adversaries - environmentalists and timber industry representatives - as well as scientists, policymakers and others to seek solutions to the problem.

At the May 23-24 conference, California Forest Futures 2005, sponsored by the Pacific Forest Trust and the University of California, Berkeley's Center for Forestry, a wide variety of experts will discuss the powerful forces reshaping the landscape and lay out a strategy to stop the loss of forestlands and to spur progress. The central goal of the event is to ensure the financial and ecological viability of California's forests in the face of both global economic competition and rising real estate values.

"This looming crisis must be addressed now, while there are still functioning ecosystems and a viable forestland base to conserve," said conference co-chair Richard Standiford, associate vice president for the Division of Agricultural and Natural Resources at the University of California.

"We are at a turning point for the integrity of our forests," said conference co-chair Constance Best of the Pacific Forest Trust. "It will take real political will to save them, but it can and must be done if we are to prevent the loss of millions of acres of forests - and with them, all their benefits of wood, water, wildlife and a well-balanced climate."

Among the solutions to be unveiled at the conference are:

- Implementing smart growth initiatives in forest counties
- Expanding the use of working forest conservation easements to keep forests productive
- Developing markets for forest ecosystem services, such as the new forest carbon program of the California Climate Action Registry and others for water quality, flow management and biodiversity
- Increasing sources of public and private conservation capital to invest in California's forests
- Regulating environmental protection with greater efficiency and fewer burdens
- Promoting the purchase of California-grown wood products
- Embracing forest certification and the green building movement to increase the market share for California's best forest stewards
- Using multi-partner forest stewardship projects to heal fragmented forests

California's forestlands are disappearing at an alarming rate, according to new data released by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, with nearly 35,000 acres of oaks and conifers - an area larger than the city of San Francisco - lost to development every year.

By the year 2040, according to the data, California is projected to lose at least 1.2 million acres of privately owned forests and woodlands to development, and many millions more will be effectively lost due to the impacts of fragmentation, a process in which surviving forests suffer dramatically due to the loss of neighboring forest parcels. This loss and fragmentation pose dramatic economic and ecological threats that affect all Californians as wood supplies, wildlife habitat and watersheds are degraded along with these forests, the department says.

Best said that the comprehensive strategy to be discussed at the conference "can change the course we are on of accelerating forest loss."

"We can, in fact, reduce regulatory costs without sacrificing environmental values," she said. "We can also increase the profitability of investments in California's forests through bringing added revenue and market recognition to California's forest stewards for the ecosystem services that our forests provide."