



Revitalizing management of the Jackson Demonstration State Forest Modeling the Future of California State Forest Stewardship

Summary: Reflecting nearly a century of stewardship, the Jackson Demonstration State Forest is a special place cherished by many.

Just as our climate and ecological trends are changing, so must our management of this critical natural resource. Based on feedback from a wide array of community members, scientists, environmental groups, and local Tribal leaders, the State has outlined a new blueprint for managing the Jackson Demonstration Forest (JDSF) that balances the requirements of state law with current state climate goals, opportunities for Tribal co-management, and restoration economies.

The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) and CAL FIRE are committed to a new forward-looking vision for managing the JDSF, which is outlined below. To accomplish this, the State has dedicated resources to improve management activities, brought in new voices to make the Jackson Advisory Group more representative, and has begun a process for updating the Jackson Management Plan four years early. The State is committed to seeing the updated management vision for the forest include a renewed focus on climate science, restoration ecology, and a new model for Tribal co-management.

Background on the Jackson Demonstration State Forest

California's state forest system was established to demonstrate sustainable forestry and to improve scientific understanding of forested ecosystems. JDSF is the largest of California's nine demonstration forests—and the only one in the northern "Redwood Region" of the state—with the most common tree being the coast redwood.

Nearly a century ago, state leaders established JDSF in Mendocino County and began to transform an area heavily impacted by extensive logging activity into a thriving second growth redwood forest.

Over time as the forest regenerated, JDSF, following its statutory mandate, modeled economically viable sustainable timber harvest activities and hosted scientific studies that have spanned decades and informed California's environmental regulations for eight million acres of commercial timberlands. Management of JDSF also expanded to protect areas as no-cut zones and established recreation across the forest. Half of the forest has already been dedicated to promoting old growth forest conditions, which provides an opportunity to study late seral development in the face of climate change.

A New, Updated Vision for Jackson Forest

Accelerating climate change, evolving wildfire conditions, the role of forests in carbon sequestration and resilience—as well as input from Tribal leaders, local communities, environmental groups and forestry companies—all demonstrate the need to update JDSF’s management plan to reflect modern realities. This involves revisiting goals of the JDSF, removing financial pressures on the management actions and enabling conversations for how the forest should be managed. To begin these discussions, CAL FIRE and CNRA conducted, and will continue to conduct, extensive consultations, listening sessions and field visits with Tribal leaders, forest ecologists and community members.

As a result of these discussions—and to enable an update of Jackson management to incorporate these visions and the ideas and perspectives of Tribal governments, and a range of stakeholders—CAL FIRE is taking important actions. Key pillars of these updates include:

- **Updating the Jackson Management Plan**

The Jackson Management Plan serves as the governing document for the Jackson Demonstration State Forest, guiding all management activities and research priorities. The plan is developed in a public forum by the Jackson Advisory Group, a representative advisory group consisting of scientists, foresters, conservation non-government organizations, and now Tribal representatives. The Jackson Management Plan, once presented by the JAG, is evaluated and accepted, modified, or rejected by the Board of Forestry.

In hearing feedback from Tribal leaders, redwood conservation biologists, and other stakeholders, it became clear that the guiding principles of JDSF management should evolve to meet the needs of our time. The current management plan was adopted in 2016 and was scheduled to be updated in 2026. On May 5, 2022, CNRA and CAL FIRE requested a full review of the Management Plan from the JAG and Board, initiating an update four years early. To maximize transparency and public input, development of this strategy will build on feedback from stakeholders and occur in open meetings subject to the Bagley-Keene Act.

In the years since the current management plan was established, the nature of the climate crisis and our society has shifted, including questions around the stewardship of coast redwood ecosystems in the face of harsh climate conditions and high severity wildfire. Opportunities for restoration ecology and restoration economies can be developed through the updated management plan, demonstrating the numerable benefits of restored redwood forests.

Local tribes will continue to be consulted early and often for their recommendations throughout this review process. For all future Timber Harvest Plans (THPs), CAL FIRE is committed to collaborative government-to-government consultations with all California Native American tribes that have the JDSF within their ancestral lands.

- **Demonstrating Restoration Ecology and Restoration Economies**

This involves redoubling efforts to model both restoration ecology and restoration and recreation economy through Jackson forest management.

In restoring previously over-logged forests, Jackson has the opportunity to study how to restore the structure and function of old-growth forests and set second- and third-growth forests on this trajectory. Science shows that formerly harvested redwood forests need active management to advance towards old growth form and function. “Let the trees grow old” is not a stand-alone strategy. These forests need gaps, variable densities, uneven-age stands from seedlings to decaying logs, and other measures of forest resilience. Resilience actions on Jackson, from silvicultural prescriptions to removing old logging roads and restoring streams for wildlife, provide the opportunity to understand ecosystem function and resilience in a large complex forests; and then use these findings to guide restoration towards an old-growth forest structure.

From the value of carbon-storing forests to the forest products removed to achieve the desired stand structures, managing for a robust restoration and recreation vision on the Jackson will show that good jobs and a productive forest reinforces good ecological and economic outcomes.

- **Expanding the Jackson Advisory Group (JAG)**

Since the Jackson Advisory Group leads the update of the Management Plan that shapes the future management of the forest, perspectives of members on the Advisory Group are critical. The Advisory Group already has traditionally included a cross-section of foresters, ecologists, and community members. It is important to expand this breadth of experience and expertise to help shape an updated vision for the forest. Earlier this year, a new Tribal seat was established, and a Tribal leader joined the Advisory Group. The Director of Science and Conservation Planning at the Save the Redwoods league was also recruited to join the group. These new members are:

- **Reno Franklin**, Former Chair, Kashia Band of the Pomo Indians
- **Dr. Joanna Nelson**, Director of Science and Conservation Planning, Save the Redwoods League
- **Al Lawrence**, Lawrence Timber

- **Establishing Tribal Co-Management**

Nearly a dozen tribes hold an ancestral claim to the land that is currently the Jackson State Demonstration Forest. Moving forward, the forest can serve as a model of innovative Tribal co-management where Tribal expertise and experience shapes how the forest is managed, and Tribal communities can fully utilize the forest. CAL FIRE is pursuing distinct co-management agreements with

individual tribes, recognizing the sovereignty of each Tribal government. It will also seek to establish a Tribal co-management structure in the Jackson Management Plan to ensure Tribal capacity is not an inhibiting factor for Tribal engagement.

Integrating Tribal Co-Management into the Jackson Management Plan

The revision of the Jackson Management Plan presents a critical opportunity to establish a bold new model for substantive Tribal co-management.

A clear and concrete vision for Tribal co-management, grounded in the principles of improving Tribal access, Tribal influence and transparency will be built into the Jackson Management Plan. While the details will continue to be developed, the broad vision for Tribal co-management on the Jackson includes:

- Establishing a Tribal Advisory Council for the Jackson with a representative from each of the local tribes, supported by several staff from CAL FIRE. This council would have input into the update of the Jackson Management Plan and be presented with planned management activities on the Jackson for early input. This Tribal Advisory Council would not replace CAL FIRE's obligations to government-to-government consultations with the individual tribes.
- A percentage of the revenue generated from the Jackson State Demonstration Forest from timber sales, camping fees, etc. will fund projects on the forest to be developed and directed by the Tribal Advisory Council to meet Tribal needs and priorities.
- Ensuring that economic opportunities on the Jackson Forest include and prioritize local tribes and their members.
- Provide training for Tribal members, State workers and potentially local contractors on how State can best engage with tribes and how tribes can more easily navigate the State bureaucracy.
- Expand opportunities for professional training and certification for Tribal workforce development in natural resource management, recreation management, restoration forestry and conservation biology.

Individual Tribal Co-management agreements

CNRA and CAL FIRE have invited Tribal consultations with tribes claiming ancestral land on the Jackson. Each tribe will have co-management needs and priorities based on their unique needs. This will involve formalizing co-management agreements with willing Tribal partners to allow access and co-management for traditional, natural, and cultural resources.

A few detailed examples of what activities under a Tribal co-management agreement might include are:

- Building in authorization to enter into co-management agreements with individual California Native American tribes.
 - Increased protections of cultural resources.
 - Increased Tribal access and use of natural resources and materials, including timber. Examples include waiving permit requirements for Tribal members, sharing cut logs, conducting cultural burns, and managing stands of oak trees for improved acorn production. This also could result in increased cultural burning.
 - To note, other tribes have requested consultation to discuss sustainable forestry and natural resource harvesting in a broader context.
- **Making Strategic Investments to Improve the Forest**

Until now, the JDSF as an entity has never been able to utilize an operating budget from the State's general fund. Historically, timber sale revenue from JDSF funded research and operations across the State demonstration forest system. This funding structure has created a perception that the driving factor of timber harvest in the Jackson is to maximize revenue and that ongoing investments to care for the forest were ignored.

CAL FIRE will utilize new funding provided by Governor Newsom and the Legislature to make specific improvements to the forest, in consultation with Tribal and community partners, including slash pile treatments, research on protection of large trees within managed forests, various restoration and treatment projects throughout the forest, and various recreational improvements and signage. Funds will also be used to support cultural resource protection including the re-creation of traditional Tribal features on the landscape.

To support this, the State has now invested \$10 million to fund personnel costs on the State Demonstration Forest System, including the Jackson, and is working to establish permanent funding to support the multiple uses of the demonstration forests. Recent funding from the state to support operations of the demonstration forests means that revenue from sustainable harvesting can be reinvested in wildfire fuels reduction and restoration projects, recreational improvements, new scientific research, public outreach and education, and Tribal co-management projects.

The FY 21-22 budget included \$10 million for the State Demonstration Forest System including JDSF. The FY 22-23 budget requests an additional \$5 million for the year. CAL FIRE and CNRA are working toward ongoing permanent funds to support the components of this vision statewide.

- **Implementing Important Immediate Improvements**

A portion of recent funding is already being used to improve wildland fire resiliency and general forest resiliency, through cleaning up slash piles, and identifying and removing decked and down logs posing a fire risk or a pathogen/insect risk. Recent funding has also launched important research projects on carbon storage and provided resources for preparing a large-scale prescribed burn.

Operationally, CAL FIRE will modify all current THPs to focus timber harvest operations on smaller trees and halt removal of trees over 48 inches in diameter. CAL FIRE will include permanent protection of large, specified trees to enhance future carbon sequestration over time and prioritize forest management that demonstrates climate resiliency outcomes, and enhanced or accelerated “large complex forest” conditions.

Lastly, communication and public engagement will remain a top priority. Community and stakeholder site visits for education, public engagement and feedback will be made available and a collaborative communication and outreach plan will be drafted to elevate stories related to the JDSF and all state demonstration forests. This includes important Tribal partnerships and the value of coast redwood forests as stable, resilient carbon sinks.