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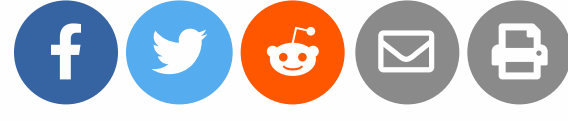
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COMMENTARY

Comment: Keep state's working forests in climate change fight

Timberlands in production result in the higher rates of carbon storage than do closed-off forests.

Saturday, March 18, 2023 1:30am | OPINION COMMENTARY



By Jason Spadaro and Travis Joseph / For The Herald

In Olympia there is an effort underway to close more of our state-managed working forests to combat climate change.

That would be a mistake if the goal is to sequester and store more carbon. A growing body of science is finding our most effective climate solution is to actively manage our forests and use Washington-made wood products.

For example, a University of Washington study estimated the carbon mitigation potential of the state's forests across different ownerships. The study looked at how different forests are managed and how carbon storage and emissions are affected, including privately owned timberland, state trust lands managed by the Department of Natural Resources, as well as U.S. Forest Service lands that are left largely unmanaged.

While the study found that all Washington forests offer carbon storage benefits, it concludes that managed forests provide greater climate benefits, thanks to the ability of our forest professionals to maintain the growth, health and resiliency of forests and provide renewable wood products that store carbon.

Some are saying working forests should be shut down because operations on these lands emit carbon. However, the University of Washington study found that working forests provide a net carbon benefit, even after factoring emissions from the processing, harvesting and manufacturing of wood products. It also finds managed forests experience less carbon loss caused by tree mortality, disease and wildfire.

Managed forests can sequester more carbon compared to unmanaged forests thanks to the cycle of forestry that requires continuous planting, growing, harvesting and replanting of healthy growing trees. By comparison, unmanaged federal forests have higher tree mortality and lower rates of tree growth that limit carbon sequestration and storage potential. High volumes of dead and dying trees can also fuel devastating, carbon-emitting wildfires.

DNR state trust lands are working forests because they are intentionally managed by forest professionals using the best science and modern technology to achieve many benefits. Washington's working forests help support K-12 school construction and community service providers, such as fire districts, libraries, hospitals and others; while also delivering clean water, clean air, wildlife habitat and renewable wood products.

In Snohomish County, we're talking about 61,141 acres of state forestlands and \$4.7 million in revenue for area schools and small taxing districts.

Closing off these working forests would not only reduce funding for local public services that Washingtonians depend on, but it would also reduce the potential of these lands to meet our climate goals.

Working forests ensure our forests remain forested; forever.

Washington and its elected officials should be proud that our state is among the top producers of wood products that are also the greenest building materials available. Just as many of us choose to substitute fuel-burning vehicles with electric and hybrid vehicles, we should choose to grow more trees and use more Washington-made wood products over other building materials that require more energy to produce and transport.

Shutting down our working forests undermines Washington's leadership in producing these green building materials. Further restricting forest management, including harvest, can also enlarge the state's carbon footprint when we have to import more wood products from other countries, choose more energy-intensive materials, and watch more of our forests die and burn.

If the policy objective in the Evergreen State is to combat climate change and reduce net carbon emissions — an important goal — we should support working forests whether they are public or privately owned.

Jason Spadaro is executive director of the Washington Forest Protection Association. Travis Joseph is president of the American Forest Resource Council.

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