



Washington State Voter Perception of Forest Management

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INTRODUCTION

The timber industry has always struggled with public perception, the industry has been vilified by ideologues in the environmental movement for harvesting timber and managing thousands of acres across the United States. While the timber industry has been slow to tell the story of beneficial forest management, the Washington Forest Protection Association (WFPA) did some polling in February to help people understand how managed forests can provide many tangible and intangible benefits. While there remains loud opposition to tree cutting, recent public opinion polling shows that the public is beginning to understand and correlate the benefits of managed forests with many benefits that they value.

APPLICATION

WFPA conducted this polling in Seattle and Spokane to get a better understanding of how these constituencies view the term ‘managed forests.’ To begin the polling, the WFPA stated the definition of ‘managed forests’ as “...practices used by the forest products industry of sustainability harvesting forest lands for wood products and to keep forests healthy, including replanting at least three trees for every one harvested, thinning of dead and dying trees and removal of underbrush.” Once the definition was given, respondents were asked to whether they approve or disapprove of ‘managed forests.’ Results of the polling show that an overwhelming number of people in the urban demographic approve of ‘managed forests.’

	Seattle DMA (n=400)	Spokane DMA (n=100)
Total Approve	85%	84%
Total Disapprove	11%	12%

Polling continued to build on this definition to better understand how these urban voters believe ‘managed forests’, which includes timber harvest, is important to maintain healthy forests.

	Seattle DMA	Spokane DMA
Total Important	82%	90%
Total Not Important	11%	9%

WFPA also explored themes such as wildfire risks, carbon sequestration, and climate change in association with managed forests. These themes are used by a vocal few to attempt to reduce management opportunities on state and federal forests. WFPA found some surprising results from these urban areas regarding managed forests and their contributions. The majority of the respondents believed that managed forests, including sustainable harvesting, reduced the risk of wildfire, reduced carbon emissions by capturing carbon in healthy trees, and agreed that managed forests are critical for fighting climate change and preventing catastrophic wildfire.

“When it comes to Washington’s forest lands, do you think that managing forest lands, including sustainable harvesting.” (Q22)

	Seattle DMA	Spokane DMA
Reduces the risk of wildfire	65%	76%
Increases the risk of wildfire	10%	10%

“And when it comes to Washington’s forest lands, do you think that managing forest lands, including sustainable harvesting.” (Q23)

	Seattle DMA	Spokane DMA
Reduces carbon emissions by capturing carbon in healthy trees	52%	50%
Increases carbon emissions and contributes to climate change	15%	13%

“Do you agree or disagree that managed forests are a critical tool for fighting climate change and preventing catastrophic wildfire?” (Q24)

	Seattle DMA	Spokane DMA
Total Agree	83%	85%
Total Disagree	7%	12%

Additionally, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1-5 with five being important and one being not important, other beneficial uses of managed forests. Respondents were fairly consistent in their response, rating these benefits of managed forests as important (4-5).

% Important (4-5)	Seattle DMA (n=400)	Spokane DMA (n=100)
A source of oxygen and clean air (Q15)	88%	88%
Fish and wildlife habitat (Q14)	87%	84%
A source of clean water (Q12)	87%	82%
Carbon storage in trees that helps to slow climate change (Q17)	75%	67%
A source of family wage jobs (Q16)	65%	69%
A source of wood for furniture, paper and other wood products (Q19)	58%	63%

CONCLUSION

This polling, conducted and analyzed by WFPA, showcases how the public views managed forests in Washington State. The amount of support and understanding by the voters in this region is offset by a vocal minority who oppose managed forests and actively support federal and state policy to “lock-up” this valuable natural asset. While state and federal legislators debate the benefits placing more forest land off limits, it is clear that the voters understand that managed forests are the solution to the current wildfire/climate change crisis. The message is making its way into urban audiences and it is important that the industry continue to tell our story and provide a part of the solution to climate change by scientifically managing forests to provide the multitude of benefits that the public has come to expect from these landscapes. The challenge will be to get the state and federal governments to listen to the voters and begin managing public lands for the benefit of the landscapes and public.