

# US national forests face the hatchet

Administration order aims to boost logging

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USA TODAY

The United States has announced sweeping changes to encourage more logging in the country’s national forests. A new emergency order requires rolling back environmental protections on almost 60% of the national forests, more than 112 million acres of land mostly in the West.

The secretarial memo issued by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins established an “Emergency Situation Determination” and will allow the Forest Service to bypass many existing environmental rules. Protections against wildfires and the need to boost the U.S. timber industry were cited as reasons.

“I am proud to follow the bold leadership of President Trump by empowering forest managers to reduce constraints and minimize the risks of fire, insects, and disease so that we can strengthen American timber industry and further enrich our forests with the resources they need to thrive,” Rollins said in a statement.

A follow-up letter from the U.S. Forest Service called for an increase of 25% in the volume of timber being offered for logging.

Whether or not logging would solve the wildfire problem is a contentious issue. Many U.S. forests are considered to be at high wildfire risk due to climate change and almost a century of wildfire suppression policies that have resulted in overgrown, fire-prone land. Neither are mentioned in the memorandum.

The order follows two earlier executive orders in March by President Donald Trump to expand U.S. timber production and address wood product imports.

In the memo, Rollins said streamlining permitting for sharply increased logging production will help “to achieve relief from threats to public health and safety, critical infrastructure, and/or mitigation of threats to natural resources. ... These actions will improve the durability, resilience, and resistance



A big question for forestry economists is whether the U.S. is in need of significantly larger lumber production. MARK HENLE/ARIZONA REPUBLIC FILE

to fire, insects, and disease within national forests and grasslands across the National Forest System.”

Expanding reach for logging industry

Rollins’ memo requires the U.S. Forest Service to take steps to significantly expand the amount of public forest lands that can be logged. These include:

- Increasing timber outputs
- Simplifying permitting
- Removing or streamlining environmental assessment hurdles to logging
- Reducing implementation and contracting burdens

The goal is to work with states, local governments and forest product producers to ensure the U.S. Forest Service delivers a reliable and consistent supply of domestic timber.

The Forest Service has been directed to complete an action plan to implement the new strategy within 30 days, acting associate chief Christopher French said in a letter to Forest Service regional foresters. It instructed them to develop five-year strategies to increase the volume of timber they are offering, “leading to an agency wide increase of 25% over the next four to five years.”

The majority of U.S. National Forest lands are in the western part of the country, predominantly Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and Wyoming. There are also national forests in the South, the Great Lakes region and New England.

Industry, environmental advocates weigh in

The timber industry applauded the new order.

“These are common sense directives,” the American Forest Resource Council said in a statement.

“Only 35% of national forests are available for timber harvests, while 65% is designated for non-timber uses, such as wilderness and other areas set aside for protection,” the group said.

Environmental and conservation groups decried the new requirements, saying they will do little to protect the nation from wildfires but will devastate forest ecosystems.

The Sierra Club called the order “a logging giveaway.”

“While the order cites wildfire risks as a rationale for the declaration of an emergency, in reality, the order seeks to

drastically increase timber production in national forests and removes environmental review of logging projects,” the group said in a statement.

Tariffs could impact need for lumber

Trump’s proposed tariffs on Canada could significantly affect lumber availability. Canada accounts for about 85% of all U.S. softwood lumber imports, according to the National Association of Home Builders.

That is likely to change with a more than doubling of timber tariffs. The U.S. Department of Commerce’s proposed tariff rate will be 34% for Canadian lumber.

Canadian timber imports had already been subject to a 14.54% tariff, raised from 8.05% by the Biden administration in August 2024 as part of an annual review of existing tariffs.

It’s possible that higher tariffs on imported lumber and new policies to encourage more logging in national forests could increase logging in Western forests, said Jeff Reimer, a professor of applied economics at Oregon State University.

Is there demand for more lumber?

A big question for forestry economists is whether the United States is in need of significantly larger lumber production.

The forest products industry will begin quickly cutting and milling more U.S. timber only if there is demand, Reimer said.

Much of the lumber needs in the eastern part of the United States are met by private forests in the southeastern U.S., he said. That timber is mostly grown on private land that won’t be impacted by the new Forest Service requirements. But lumber in the West is almost all from Canada.

The demand for lumber is tightly tied to new U.S. housing starts, Reimer’s research has shown.

The U.S. housing industry has generally opposed timber tariffs because of their detrimental effect on housing affordability.

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