



October 2, 2009

Timber Industry and Environment May Benefit From Green Push

By Brad Garbutt, Realtor

How do you put a smile on the face of a timberland owner and greenhouse gas generators at the same time? Carbon credits! The fact that trees trap carbon from the atmosphere provides forest property owners the opportunity to sell carbon credits to industrial emitters of greenhouse gases under a program implemented a couple years ago. Environmentalists don't think it's a move in the right direction unless clear-cutting is completely banned. However, if adopted by timberland owners, this program will encourage selective logging over clear-cutting in my opinion.

How might this work? Let's say P,G&E needs carbon credits to offset emissions from a gas-fired energy plant. They can make a deal with a timber land owner to pay them not to harvest a specific tree or tract of trees for at least 100 years in exchange for carbon credits equaling the trees ability to sequester carbon. The volume of tree growth is measurable so this trade can be quantified. The Pacific Forest Trust manages the van Eck redwood forest near Arcata totaling 2200 acres. The cost of preserving the forest is partially offset with money earned from carbon credits. This property owner is among the first to take advantage of this program.

Add this to a finding reported in this month's issue of National Geographic which points to a new study that focuses on growth rates of redwood trees which found older trees add more volume than younger, vigorously growing saplings in a clear cut. The prized rot-resistant heartwood of older redwoods is also superior to the soft sapwood of younger redwood trees. This would allow timberland owners to receive revenue for not cutting merchantable trees-extending crop rotations from the current 40-50 years to more than 100 years. This would be a win-win-win for timber owners, emission producers and the environment.

If this new management practice dubbed "ecological forestry" gains traction, it could lead to the end of clear-cutting and the beginning of a new era of selective logging tied to carbon sequestration contracts. The fact that demand has waned for wood products due to the ailing economy may make this the perfect time for timberland owners to consider this new forest management option. Obstacles include uneasiness among timberland owners required to relenquish management control of their trees if burdened with conservation easements and enviornmental groups unwavering demand that clear-cutting be removed from the forester's tool box. Time will tell if this changes California's forest landscape!