MOVING TO AN ANNUAL INVENTORY IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

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ABSTRACT.—The process of moving toward an annual inventory in the Pacific Coast states began with educating the individual states as to what might be involved in the annual system. The states and some industry groups voiced concerns about inventorying unproductive or reserved lands on an annual basis. The states in particular were concerned about the ability to estimate periodic change with an annual system. The discussion presents these concerns and other possible problems that the Pacific Northwest may face when moving to an annual inventory system.

INTRODUCTION

The process of implementing the 1998 Farm Bill in the Pacific Northwest started with exposing our states (Alaska, California, Oregon, and Washington) and cooperators to the possible changes in the inventory. We explained the five panel design that was put forth in the Farm Bill and the reasons that the South and North were moving to that design. In general, our states are more interested in the change between our periodic inventories than the actual point estimate. At that time all three states were happy with the present 10-year periodic cycle. In fact they would rather we used the additional funds for the annual inventories on other projects within their states. It was apparent from our original meetings that the states would not be interested in funding an annual inventory on a 5-year cycle.

With the exception of Washington in 1988, our states do not generally give us funds to measure plots. The cooperation with our states is usually for extra analysis or additional variables. The State of Washington was interested in an intensification of the number of plots in 1988, but has no interest in spending dollars to increase the number of plots in our upcoming inventory. The State of Oregon cites data from our 1994 inventory (McKay 1998) concerning the small amount of change being measured and doesn't see the reason to go to annual inventories. The states also do not see a need to be able to capture catastrophic events with an annual inventory, since there have only been two such events in the last 40 years in the Pacific Northwest (the Mt. St. Helens eruption, and the Columbus Day storm in the 1960s).

Concern that we need a more frequent evaluation of change is offset by our inventories showing little change. Bolsinger *et al.* (1997) estimated a less than 1 percent loss in softwood growing-stock volume between 1980 and 1991 in Washington. McKay *et al.* (1998) estimated a 3-percent increase in softwood growing-stock volume and less than a 1-percent increase in timberland area between 1986 and 1994 in western Oregon. Waddell and Bassett (1994 and 1997 a,b,c,d, five California reports) found a decrease of approximately 3 percent in primary forest area but an increase of about 7 percent in growing-stock volume between 1984 and 1994 in California (table 1).

There are also concerns from industry and state groups as to why we would inventory the National Parks on an annual cycle. The National Parks also have some reservations about us visiting their land on a yearly basis, and a similar concern was expressed by the Native American community. There are approximately 4.1 million acres of reserved forest lands in California, Oregon, and Washington and a combined Native American acreage of 1.6 million acres. There is also a general concern about an annual inventory of 6.2 million acres of juniper/pinyon lands in Oregon and California where little change occurs and growth is minimal. A similar concern exists in the interior of Alaska, where there are 62 million acres of black spruce. Coastal Alaska also has 4.6

Table 1.—*Changes in area and volume in California, western Oregon, and Washington in the latest inventories on non-Federal timberland*

State	Year[a]	Growing-stock volume	Timberland area
		Million cubic feet	*Thousand acres*
California	1984	24,390	8,247
	1994	26,135	7,971
Western Oregon	1986	19,456	6,729
	1994	19,824	6,758
Washington	1980	39,331	11,939
	1991	39,122	11,452

[a]The year value is the ending year of the inventory.

million acres of reserved land in parks and wilderness. The questionable lands in California, Oregon, and Washington (parks, Native American, and juniper) together represent approximately 12 million acres of possible problems within the annual panels.

In August 1999, we held a client meeting to discuss how we would move to annual inventories. We presented several possible ways of implementing an annual system, including panel, and annualized periodic. We did not get an overwhelming positive response: the State of Washington would like more data on its own lands; Oregon didn't see an advantage to moving to an annual system; and California didn't see a problem with going annual. The key was that no one was going to come forward with money to buy the cycle down from 10 to a smaller number of years. Most of the data users present either were not sure how it would affect their use of the data or thought it would not affect them.

We plan to complete the State of Washington on a periodic design in the next 3 years. This will give us an updated starting point to move into an annual inventory. We will start a 10-percent panel in Oregon in the summer of 2000 and move onto the 6,000 acre per plot hexagon grid in Oregon. If funding continues to progress, we will start an annual system in southeast Alaska in 2002, and in Washington and California in 2003.

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