



Brief Communication: Perspectives on Increasing Timber Harvest on National Forest Lands in the Pacific Northwest

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Abstract

This brief communication presents selected findings from recent social and economic monitoring of national forest policies in the Pacific Northwest. Qualitative interviews with timber industry professionals, USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) employees, and rural community members provided local perspectives on increasing the pace and scale of timber harvests on national forests. Challenges noted by interviewees included spatial consolidation of the wood processing facilities, limitations of the timber supply from federal lands, misalignment between timber sales and industry needs, market volatility, labor shortages, and regulatory complexity. Interviewees expressed skepticism about the Forest Service's reliability in delivering consistent timber volume and highlighted barriers in the bidding process that disadvantage smaller operators. Workforce issues—both in wood processing facilities and logging operations—further constrain current and future production capacity. Our findings suggest that increasing timber harvests will require coordinated, long-term efforts to build trust, improve Forest Service capacity, and better align timber sale offerings with market needs. Rather than attributing production shortfalls solely to environmental regulation, the study emphasizes the need for federal policies that address structural and economic realities of the forest industry. These insights can inform durable strategies for forest restoration and timber production in the American West.

Keywords Northwest forest plan · Forest policy · Rural communities · Social and economic monitoring · Timber workforce

Introduction and Methodology

In March 2025, President Trump signed an executive order, “Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production” (EO 14225), which directed federal agencies to increase timber production by ramping up contracts and agreements and streamlining environmental review. In May 2025, the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) released a national

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strategy in response to the executive order that calls for increasing annual timber harvest sale volume from national forests by 25% over the fiscal year 2020–2024 average, with a goal of 4 billion board feet annually by fiscal year 2028 (Forest Service 2025). Here we present an analysis of local perspectives on timber supply, market conditions, mill infrastructure, workforce, and regulation in the Pacific Northwest (PNW). The PNW has long been a bellwether of federal forest management policy, and our findings can inform efforts to increase the pace and scale of federal timber sales.

We conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews in 2024 with individuals chosen for their localized knowledge and experience (Bernard 2006) as part of social and economic monitoring of the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) in eight rural communities in the PNW located adjacent to national forest lands (Table 1, Fig. 1). We selected community case studies (defined as US Census county subdivisions) that were relatively evenly dispersed across the NWFP area with fewer than 15,000 residents, where federal forests comprise greater than 30 percent of the land base, and that were not previously selected for the NWFP 25-year social and economic monitoring (Grinspoon 2025). Our sampled communities represent a diverse geography centered on the NWFP footprint and adjacent National Priority Landscapes¹ (cf. Coughlan et al. 2026a). See Coughlan et al. (2026b) for more information on the community sampling strategy.

A subset of our interview questions asked about the state of the timber industry following adoption of the NWFP in 1994. Although interviews were conducted prior to EO 14225, we specifically asked about the potential for increasing timber supply from federal lands as well as industry capacities for absorbing increased timber supply. While our questions were hypothetical, we believe these perspectives hold relevance to recently announced policy changes.

We selected interviewees for their knowledge and experience with local community issues, natural resource management, or the timber industry using a combination of snowball sampling (where interviewees suggest others from their networks) and purposive sampling strategies that targeted specific roles or positions (i.e., local elected official, business owner, district ranger). Interviewees all resided or worked in one of the eight sample communities and included individuals actively employed by the timber industry ($n=12$) and the Forest Service ($n=40$), as well as local residents (business owners, retired Forest Service and forest industry workers, elected officials) with knowledge of local federal forest management and/or its impacts on the local community ($n=118$). Each of our sample communities included at least one interviewee from the timber industry: eight timber industry interviewees were involved in forest management or procurement of timber, two were foresters, and one was a mill manager. Timber industry interviewees' professional experience varied from four years to 55 years (median=20 years). Position types varied among Forest Service interviewees with the median time in the same position of 4 years,

¹ National Priority Landscapes are landscaped designated under the Biden Administration's Wildfire Crisis Strategy. These landscapes represent national priority areas for wildfire risk reduction, including commercial fuels reduction.

Table 1 Sample communities, associated national forest landscape, and interviewee information

Sample Community	Area	District Name	National Forest	National Priority Landscape	Total interviewees	Timber Industry & Forest Service Interviewees
1. Packwood-Randle	South-Central Washington (West side of Cascades)	Cowlitz Valley	Gifford Pinchot	No	19	5
2. Naches	South-Central Washington (East side of Cascades)	Naches	Okanogan-Wenatchee	Yes	26	7
3. Upper Hood River Valley	North-Central Oregon	Hood River/Barlow ^a	Mt. Hood	Yes	23	6
4. Southern Tillamook County	Central Coastal Oregon	Hebo	Siuslaw	No	21	7
5. Butte Falls-Prospect	South-Central Oregon	High Cascades	Rogue River-Siskiyou	Adjacent	23	7
6. Gold Beach	Southwestern Oregon	Gold Beach	Rogue River-Siskiyou	No	16	5
7. Mt. Shasta-Weed	North-Central California	Shasta-McCloud Management Unit ^b	Shasta-Trinity	Yes	22	8
8. Smith River	Northwestern California	Gasquet	Six Rivers	Adjacent	20	7
Total					170	52

^aThese two ranger districts are functionally managed together as both Hood River and Barlow. In this report, we refer to them collectively as “Hood River.”

^bThe Shasta District is part of the Shasta-McCloud management unit (SMMU), which comprises two ranger districts—Shasta and McCloud—with a shared district ranger. We include both districts in our analysis

^cFederal forest represents National Forest Lands and Oregon and California Railroad Revested Lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management

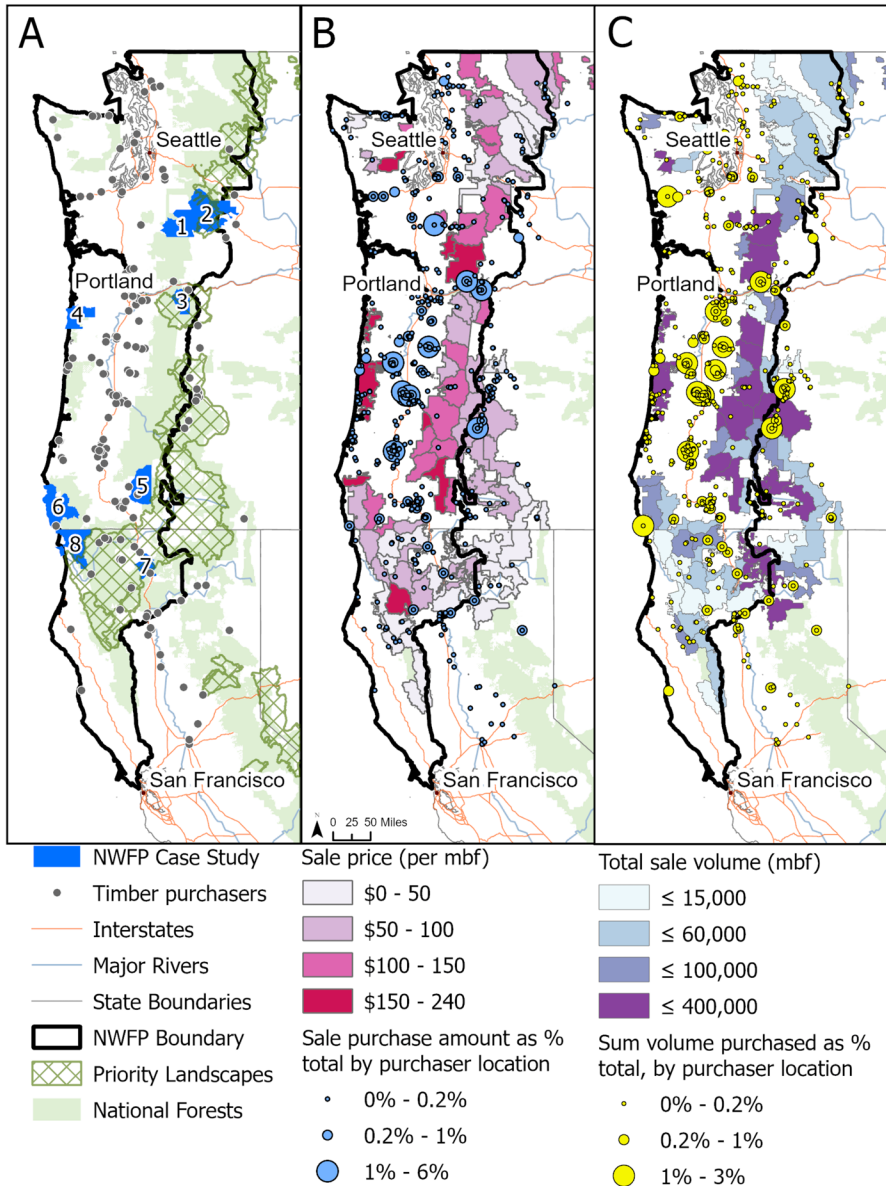


Fig. 1 Social and economic monitoring and recent national forest timber harvest contexts. **A** Map showing sampled communities (“NWFP Case Study”, see Table 1 for names and details), National Priority Landscapes for wildfire risk reduction (“Priority Landscapes”), and purchasers of national forest timber sales with total purchased volume above 1 million board feet for the period federal fiscal years 2014–2023 (“Timber purchasers”); **B** Map showing Forest Service timber sale price per thousand board feet (mbf) by national forest ranger district and timber sale purchase amount as percent region total by purchaser location; **C** Map showing Forest Service timber sale volume sold by national forest ranger district and the volume purchased as percent region total by purchaser location. Timber sale data used in these maps, including purchaser locations, sourced from Forest Service Timber Information Manager data for the years 2014–2023 (federal fiscal years) (Forest Service 2023)

a minimum of 0.5 and a maximum of 37. We did not formally record information pertaining to individuals' ages or ethnic and gender identities as this was not part of our research protocol.

Interviews, were conducted in person or virtually, and lasted approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. We followed a standard verbal informed consent script and took appropriate precautions with data storage and management to protect the confidentiality of our interviewees as outlined in our University of Oregon Institutional Review Board approved protocol (Study 00000998). We digitally audio recorded interviews and transcribed them using AI transcription software (Otter.ai). Transcripts were thoroughly reviewed and cleaned by research technicians who referenced the audio recordings. We uploaded interviews into Dedoose collaborative qualitative coding software for analysis. We systematically coded interviews by topical area and emergent themes following a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Each interview was coded by at least two researchers and coding was compared to ensure inter-coder reliability. For this analysis, we identified emergent themes across (rather than within) sample communities to ensure themes were valid regionally. We selected quotes for this manuscript to exemplify emergent themes that were common across interviews (Yeo and Han 2025) and present the exact number of interviewees who expressed these perspectives in the text below. Readers should interpret the quotes as perspectives rather than assertions of empirical facts about the topic being discussed. To ensure inclusiveness in our quotes (Yeo and Han 2025), we present quotes from 10 out of 12 actively employed timber industry interviewees.

Research Positionality

Our analysis is informed by concurrent social and economic monitoring of national forest management as well as past research (e.g., Coughlan et al. 2025a, Coughlan et al. 2025b, Schneider and Coughlan 2025, Coughlan et al. 2026a, Serio et al. 2023, Sullivan-Astor et al. 2025) that includes regional level quantitative and spatial analyses (Fig. 1). Five of the co-authors are applied environmental social science researchers and one co-author is a forest ecologist and an expert in forest policy. Our group has over 50 years of combined experience with forest-related topics and maintains active working relationships with the timber industry, forest managers and practitioners, and engaged rural community groups (i.e. forest collaboratives). The results presented here were collected within the context of social and economic monitoring of a politically polarizing topic. We specifically designed interview protocols to be politically neutral, and interviewers were trained to avoid leading questions or engaging interviewees in political debates.

Our motives in writing this brief communication were to represent interviewee perspectives on the challenges of increasing federal timber production within the NWFP area. These perspectives are derived from interviewee experiences with commercial timber harvesting on federal lands within the NWFP area. In some instances, we included points made by only one interviewee because we believe that the points had merit. We do not consider this study to provide a definitive treatment of this topic. Further research may be needed to better evaluate the significance and validity of points discussed below.

Results

Industry Consolidation

The timber industry in the PNW has experienced multidimensional and complex changes tied to significant reductions in timber harvest from federal forests under the NWFP (Charnley et al. 2006; Coughlan et al. 2021; Donoghue and Sturtevant 2008). Consolidation of wood processing facilities (in terms of ownership and spatial location) both before and after the adoption of NWFP significantly reshaped the industry and its workforce (Prudham 2005).

Our analysis of federal timber sales for fiscal years 2014–2023 is consistent with previous work indicating that wood processing facilities in the PNW have become larger and located closer to urban centers and major transportation corridors over the last 30 years (Crandall et al. 2025). Specifically, most current federal timber purchasers are concentrated in central western Oregon along the Interstate 5 corridor (Fig. 1). This spatial pattern was even more pronounced among high volume purchasers. Despite a relatively consistent supply of timber from PNW national forests, counts of unique businesses purchasing national forest timber fell from a high of 674 in FY2014 to a low of 513 in FY2023. At the same time, median distances traveled by purchasers to place of sale increased from 65 to 93 miles (Table 2), suggesting that businesses remaining in FY2023 have concentrated operations farther away from national forests. We tested this apparent trend of increasing median distance using a Mann–Kendall non-parametric statistical method (Kendall 1975). Results show a statistically significant (p-value of 0.02) positive trend of increasing haul distance. Conversely, this test did not yield statistically significant results for changes in either median bid prices or volume sold.

Table 2 Summary of timber sold from national forests within the Northwest Forest Plan and PNW National Priority Landscapes. Note total volume is reported in million board feet (mmbf) while median sale volume is reported in thousand board feet (mbf). Median distance represents distance between sale purchaser place of business and center of ranger district where sale occurred. Timber sale data from Forest Service Timber Information Manager (TIM) (Forest Service 2023)

Fiscal Year	Total volume (mmbf)	Median sale volume (mbf)	Total bid amount (million)	Median sale bid amount (thousand)	Median distance (miles)
2014	406.6	322.9	\$34.9	\$27.8	65
2015	461.4	320.0	\$46.4	\$19.0	62
2016	455.5	168.2	\$46.5	\$11.9	66
2017	381.8	855.0	\$50.8	\$33.7	75
2018	474.3	911.4	\$58.5	\$42.9	71
2019	396.0	718.0	\$32.8	\$29.4	75
2020	552.2	2563.4	\$52.7	\$16.8	84
2021	368.9	640.5	\$51.1	\$34.3	73
2022	365.2	680.2	\$32.7	\$19.0	72
2023	482.9	1536.0	\$40.6	\$18.8	93

Interviewees described how changes in the location of timber industry infrastructure impacted their communities. In some communities, significant changes took place as early as the 1960s, decades prior to the NWFP. For example, wood processing activities in one of our sample communities northeast of Medford relocated to the Rogue River Valley in the 1960s. In previous social and economic monitoring of NWFP communities, Coughlan et al. (2021) observed that, at least for the PNW, factors such as transportation connectivity and area housing costs were more important for sustainable timber mill operations than the stability of local timber supply from federal forestlands.

Timber Supply

Total timber harvests in Washington, Oregon, and California fell from an annual average of 19 billion board feet between 1958 and 1989 to just under 8 billion board feet from 2014–2023 (cf., Crandall et al. 2025, Maher 2024). The share of that harvest from national forests fell from 32 percent (1958 to 1989) to 9.4 percent (2014–2023) for those two periods respectively. During the 2014–2023 period, private lands supplied over 75 percent of processed timber for the area. Nevertheless, Forest Service timber sale offerings in the NWFP area have been relatively stable over the last decade. For example, timber volume sold for the NWFP and PNW National Priority Landscapes averaged 431 million board feet (mmbf) and ranged between 381 and 552 mmbf, with a peak in 2020 and slump in 2021–2022 during the height of the global COVID 19 pandemic (Table 2).

In 2024, ten of twelve timber industry interviewees stated that they would like to see greater supply from federal lands. Eight of these interviewees stated that they were skeptical or not optimistic that an increase in supply would be forthcoming. A common sentiment ($n=5$, 42 percent of timber industry interviewees) was that the Forest Service would frequently discuss increasing timber volume without following through: “we hear a lot of talk, but not much action.” As noted in Table 2, however, Forest Service timber sale volumes vary greatly from year to year. Many interviewees ($n=7$, 58 percent of timber industry interviewees) felt that there was a lack of trust between industry and the Forest Service. Despite relative stability of timber supply at the regional level, one interviewee suggested that they would not include Forest Service timber sales in their financial projections because the agency was not reliable.

Spatial analysis of Forest Service timber sale volume and bid value within the PNW for federal fiscal years 2014 to 2023 (Fig. 1) shows considerable variability between ranger districts. Some of this variability reflects geographic impediments to increasing federal timber harvest that relate to national forest terrain, amount of reserved land allocations, or forest type (and species composition available for harvest). For example, some ranger districts can only offer lower value timber (priced by volume), while others may offer higher value timber but at lower volume.

Purchaser and Market Demand

Seven interviewees discussed how some Forest Service timber sales fail to attract bidders on first offer. Four interviewees attributed these “no-bid” sales to either mismatches between the sale and mill processing capacity (log diameter, scaling, or species mismatches) or a low (to negative) profit margin due to poor access (e.g., requiring a more expensive logging method like helicopter logging) or lower quality timber (e.g., salvage sales, a less desirable species mix, or other quality issues). As other research has pointed out, the causes of no-bid sales are complex, and whether or not an interviewee defines a sale as “no-bid” depends on their primary interest in terms of meeting timber targets, reducing management costs, or achieving ecological benefits (Frey et al. 2024). While most of these no-bid timber sales do eventually receive bids on consecutive offers, the perspectives that interviewees expressed about this problem highlight how and why federal timber sales may be viewed as less attractive to potential purchasers. Further, the no-bid problem, even if relatively minor, detracts from the overall efficiency of the Forest Service timber sale process.

While some timber industry interviewees noted that Forest Service scaled log lengths didn’t match their preferred dimensions ($n=4$, 33 percent of timber industry interviewees), another issue was a mismatch between species availability and mill product line ($n=3$, 25 percent of timber industry interviewees) (Fig. 2): “The mills don’t have a huge appetite for that small pine. So, a lot of times we pass on those pine sales.” Two Forest Service interviewees also mentioned that it is difficult to sell small-diameter pine due to inherent limitations that diameter places on end products. In some areas, like Humboldt County, CA, there is no capacity for sawmills to process spruce, so it is difficult to sell this species.

Some interviewees ($n=7$, 58 percent of timber industry interviewees) discussed problems associated with timber supply. Seven interviewees (industry and Forest Service) also cited challenges they attributed to broader market forces that shaped the demand for wood products. As one Forest Service interviewee stated, “If the price of logs are down (especially in the case of pine right now), we may not get bids because they’re not going to make their money back.” A timber industry interviewee noted, “we do have the wood supply, but the market has to be there too... Who’s gonna build a house right now on a 9.2 [percent] interest rate? ...the lumber market right now... is in the toilet.” Although this interviewee exaggerated the interest rate to make their point, high interest rates can nevertheless dampen demand for residential construction which then has additional downstream effects on the timber industry.

Another issue concerns the recent collapse of the pulp market (Brandeis and Zhimei 2016). This pricing collapse on pulp has impacted the industry’s ability to sell wood chips and other byproducts from dimensional lumber production, especially on the eastern side of the Cascades. As one interviewee in Washington state said, “That market’s disappeared. Just trying to get rid of residue mill chips has become a real problem. They’re stacked up at every mill site across the state.”

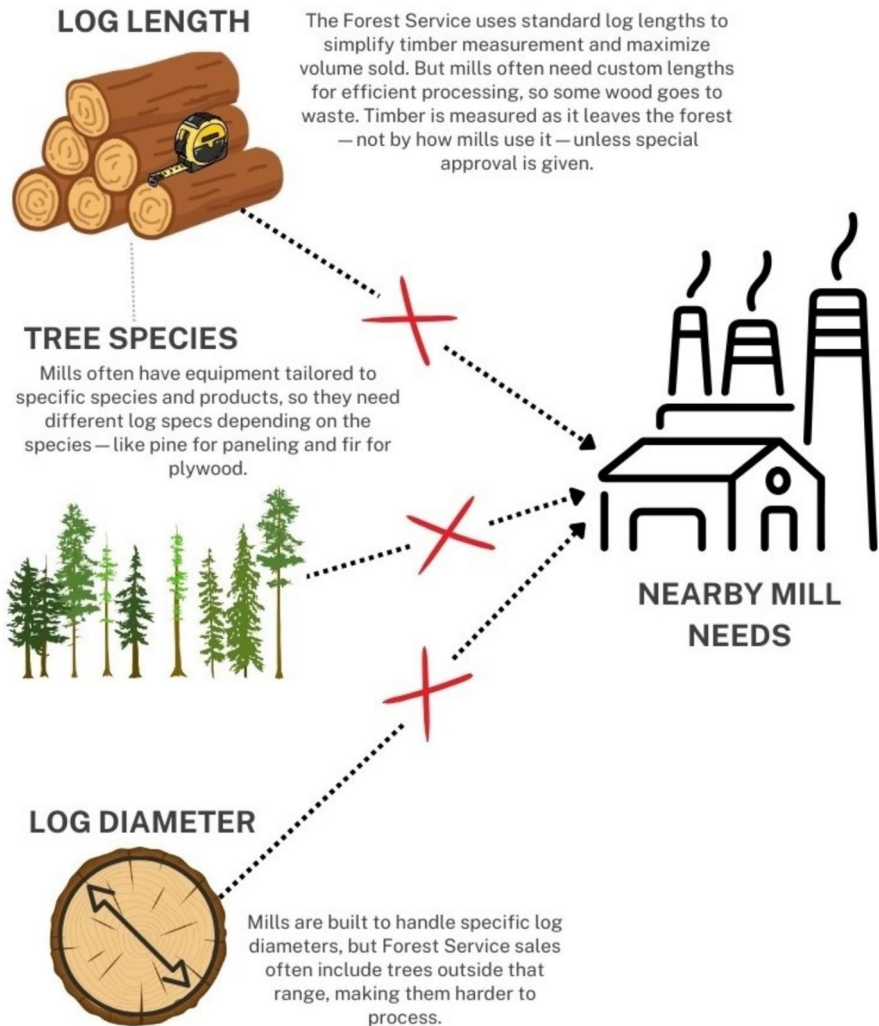


Fig. 2 Infographic showing Forest Service timber sale packaging mismatch with timber industry needs

Mill Workforce

Six industry interviewees commented that they had problems recruiting and retaining new mill workers. Some ($n=9$, 75 percent of timber industry interviewees) compared their situation to the general labor market, compounded by the demanding nature of mill and forestry work: “It’s always difficult to find and retain people, and we can’t—I don’t know if anyone really knows why.” Interviewees ($n=5$, 42 percent of timber industry interviewees) also commented that these challenges would be exacerbated if they added an additional shift: “So difficult to find people...that will

work in the mill, and especially those [swing and graveyard] shifts that ...we would have to be filling... to run three full shifts”. Because of the difficulties in recruiting additional workers for later shifts, other mill operators noted that they have chosen to retain their late shift workers through economic downturns: “It’s hard to get people to come to work in this industry... There’s a lot of turnover. If we lay off a shift, and ... if the market comes back, we’re going to have a hell of a time getting folks to come back to work.”

Four industry interviewees also noted that the workforce had a “missing middle” and few experienced workers: mill workers had either worked for the mill for a long time (25+ years) or were relatively new to the industry (1–6 years). The ethnic composition of the workforce has been changing as well: one mill reported that they have more Latine/Hispanic workers than before, and that they have been actively recruiting from this population on Spanish-language radio. As of this writing, it is unknown to what degree the Trump administration’s immigration policies may influence mill staffing.

Logging Operations and Workforce

Six industry interviewees specifically mentioned difficulties with contracting loggers. These interviewees agreed that the logging profession no longer attracts the number of workers that it did in the past, with one saying: “kids don’t grow up here to be loggers, but they used to.” Interviewees ($n=4$, 33 percent of timber industry interviewees) reported that the demographic of loggers that contract with mills “is definitely getting older.” Interviewees foresaw a future with fewer loggers as the current generation retires.

Interviewees also noted that spatial consolidation of mills meant that hauls between timber sale sites and mill yards were getting longer. Haul-distance is even greater in northern California and on the east sides of the Cascades in Oregon and Washington. At the same time, the cost of diesel fuel has increased, impacting logging contractors’ ability to transport their harvest to mills economically. One interviewee near the California-Oregon border noted that higher fuel costs and regulatory restrictions on truck weights in California increased costs and decreased the competitiveness of timber from California national forests.

Because of the relative shortage of loggers, one interviewee noted that smaller mills have more difficulty attracting loggers to contract with them: “most of the loggers of any size are tied to one of the [larger] companies because they get assurance of a larger volume of the harvest, which ... [is more] efficient because of cost.”

Government Regulation and Enforcement

One interviewee mentioned they thought federal regulations were unevenly enforced across national forest ranger districts. For example, in discussing stream protection regulations, this interviewee noted that: “You can go district by district, and it depends on who the soil person is. That’s the real driver, because it changes.

Because there is variation as you go across the forest and by area [in staff], when, in reality, the environmental impacts are no different.”

Two timber industry interviewees also thought that operating seasons were limited by regulations, including restrictions to reduce wildfire risk, which vary from district to district in different years, but often significantly restrict timber harvest in July through September. As noted by one interviewee: “All the Forest Service sales that I’ve ever operated on... they’re all operating during the winter months, because during fire season, it’s stop, go, stop, go.” As these restrictions increase in duration, interviewees saw fewer windows of opportunity to log. Enforcement of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) also involves seasonal restrictions on harvest activities near northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) nesting areas and habitat. These restrictions are typically in place during spring months that would otherwise be well suited for logging as they fall outside fire season. However, not all interviewees agreed that these restrictions on harvest timing reduced or otherwise impacted total harvest volume.

Timber Sale Processes and Procedures

Four timber industry interviewees reported that the timelines and administrative hurdles inherent in Forest Service bidding processes made them less attractive than sales from other timber producers. Interviewees suggested that lengthy bidding timelines introduced too much risk for timber purchasers, since market prices for timber could decrease in the time between when a sale was appraised, put up for bid, and then awarded.

Two industry interviewees suggested the threat of litigation as an impediment to increasing pace and scale of timber harvest on federal lands. For example, one interviewee noted, “you could put up a timber sale, but if there’s a lawsuit that comes through and you can’t do it all of a sudden, I mean, what do you replace that volume with?”

Three industry interviewees thought that state agencies and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had easier timber sale processes than the Forest Service: “ODF [Oregon Department of Forestry] and BLM are way better to work with.” One of the reasons cited by this interviewee that ODF and BLM were easier to work with related to the prevalence of position turnover within the Forest Service: “BLM ... they’ve had people in here, in place. The problem that we have with the Forest Service is that you get change so much ... People move in and out....there’s just so much change within the Forest Service, and no one’s willing to make a decision.”

One interviewee mentioned that they purchased Forest Service sales only out of necessity: “We need the federal supply. I mean, we, we don’t buy them because we *want to*. We buy them because we *need to*.”

In many cases, wood processing facilities were not purchasing directly from the Forest Service or BLM, but instead through loggers or licensed timber operators who purchased sales from the agency. One small independent mill owner mentioned that they would like more assistance in navigating the process of bidding on timber sales.

Discussion and Conclusion

The executive order “Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production” (EO 14225) suggests that the Forest Service has failed to fully utilize American timber resources, resulting in a dependence on imported lumber that threatens our national and economic security. EO 14225 further suggests that “heavy-handed” and “onerous” federal policies are the main cause of this failure. Our findings do not strongly implicate such policies as the only or even the most important impediment to rapidly increasing timber production from national forest lands within the PNW. Instead, our interviews suggest that interacting and compounding regulatory, social, and economic factors contribute to difficulty in increasing harvest.

Although our monitoring efforts resulted in a relatively large interviewee sample size, our sample of individuals actively employed by the timber industry was comparatively limited (seven percent of all interviewees). Further, our questions were hypothetical and pre-dated the executive order. For reasons we discuss below, we suggest that our interviewee perspectives are highly relevant to the current policy environment and we believe our results can contribute to framing future research efforts related to timber harvesting in the NWFP area.

For decades following an initial decline in federal timber harvest, the timber industry and the Forest Service have been caught in a vicious business cycle in which a shift in the type of trees harvested, a decline in trust between key actors (as suggested by our interviews), and ongoing structural changes in the timber industry and timber markets have created an unstable and uncertain environment for labor and investment. These changes and the uncertainty they create have resulted in retrenchment in mill infrastructure and agency capacity. Recent reductions in Forest Service staffing have only exacerbated issues with agency capacity.

These structural problems have been decades in the making and are unlikely to be reversed over the course of one Presidential term. Achieving the administration’s goal of increasing timber production from federal lands will require creation of a virtuous business cycle through action on multiple fronts by diverse actors over many years. While federal forest policies cannot directly influence trends in industry location or financial structure, timber markets, or the size and quality of the mill and logging workforce, our research suggests several concrete initiatives could be implemented by the Forest Service to help build certainty, augment agency capacity, and spur timber industry investments.

First, results presented here and elsewhere (Coughlan et al. 2023) suggest that Forest Service timber sale bidding processes present a significant barrier for smaller businesses and others trying to minimize investment and risk. If the Forest Service took action to improve the competitiveness of timber sales through closer cooperation with prospective purchasers to match sale specifications with facility appropriate wood products, and to simplify and streamline bidding and contracting procedures, this barrier might be overcome. Critical comparison with state and BLM processes may yield immediate efficiencies.

Second, the issue of uneven enforcement of regulations might improve if the Forest Service incentivized employee retention at the duty-station level and made

stronger efforts to fill and retain critical positions, including lifting the current federal hiring freeze. Since the mid-1990s, staff turnover and reductions in staffing have resulted in lengthy position vacancies and under-staffed planning and sale administration teams (Westphal et al. 2022; Santo et al. 2021). When positions are filled, new staff members often have little experience with the local management context and may move on before gaining those capacities. Current staffing conditions offer an opportunity to recruit new expertise and build a durable and sustainable workforce.

Third, there is a strong scientific basis for using a variety of forest restoration practices in the American West that can produce significant timber volume, enhance forest resilience, and avoid major legal challenges (Hessburg et al. 2021; Franklin et al. 2018). Administration initiatives to roll back environmental protections have proven to be highly vulnerable to legal challenge and are likely to be overturned by the next administration, exacerbating uncertainty and a dysfunctional land management business cycle. Increasing timber production from federal forests will instead depend on policy rooted in empirical conditions rather than ideology and will likely be most durable when it has bipartisan political support.

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Authors' Contributions Sizek – Conceptualization, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review and Editing, qualitative data collection and analysis. Coughlan—Conceptualization, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review and Editing, Visualization, Funding Acquisition, Project Administration, Supervision, quantitative data curation and analysis. Huber-Stearns—Conceptualization, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review and Editing, Visualization, Funding Acquisition. Johnston – Writing – Review and Editing, Visualization. Charnley – Writing – Review and Editing. Martin—Writing – Review and Editing. Downey – Review and Editing, qualitative data analysis.

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Data Availability Quantitative data available upon request. Please refer to Ecosystem Workforce Program, Working Paper 122 (Coughlan, et al. 2025a) for detailed descriptions of the data sources and data cleaning procedures used for producing Fig. 1. Qualitative data presented in this paper are confidential and protected by human subjects research protocols (UO IRB STUDY00000998).

Declarations

Competing interests We declare no competing interests in this research.

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