

# AS I SEE IT

ALC President – Mike Wiedeman  
**Applied Science vs. Politics**

One of the benefits of this job is that I see a lot of information about issues concerning forestry and logging from a lot of different sources. Some of what I receive is opinion but the majority of the information has basis in one or more of the applied sciences although political science plays a far bigger role than it should.

I would like to focus on a particular study that was completed in 2008 but hasn't received the recognition that it deserves. The study titled "*Greenhouse gas emissions from four California wildfires; opportunities to prevent and reverse environmental and climate impacts*" authored by Dr. Thomas Bonnicksen, Professor Emeritus of Forest Science at Texas A&M University.

The study looks at four separate wildfires in California: the Angora Fire (2007), the Fountain Fire (1992), the Star Fire (2001) and the Moonlight Fire (2007). The study looks at the carbon footprint of these fires as it is related to actions taken post-fire and then uses automobile emissions as the measurement to give a real world example of the effects of these fires. The fires covered 144,825 acres of diverse forest types and each had different types of mitigation. The initial combustion had a carbon footprint equal to 1,868,624 passenger cars for one year but the long term effect of decay had a carbon footprint equal to an additional 5,098,009 passenger cars for one year.

The unique element of this study is the development of a computer model, Forest Carbon and Emissions Model or FCEM. Dr Bonnicksen incorporated four elements in his model, carbon released in the initial fire, carbon released by decay over time, carbon sequestration in wood products and the effect on carbon of timely replanting.

If CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are the major contributing factor to the frenzy over perceived global climate change then the role of forestland and the net effect on CO<sub>2</sub> must be the driving force in the calculus of forest management. Harvest, reforestation, sequestration, risk, and benefit are primary considerations. If we are to honestly take an integrated look at forest management, then the role of carbon and the consequences of non management must be considered.

One of the most important elements of the report focuses on the value of reducing overstocking to mitigate risk as well as the value of uneven age management. Another element of the study measures the positive effects of harvest and replanting. The idea that after a wildfire the most effective way to reduce the long term release of CO<sub>2</sub> is to aggressively harvest and quickly replant also makes a lot of sense. The conclusions reached by the study are common sense practical approaches to managing our forest and dealing with the issue of carbon emissions.

I think Dr. Bonnicksen sums up the issue best when he states, " Our most important question is: Can we recover from our mistakes of letting forests become unnaturally overcrowded with trees vulnerable to catastrophic wildfires? The answer is yes if we care about restoring our forests and fighting global climate change." He goes on to say, "reducing the number and severity of wildfires may be the single most important action we can take in the short term to lower greenhouse gas emissions."

If the US Government and the world community are going to regulate carbon emissions then it is high time that the federal agencies and policymakers in charge of forest policy and regulations recognize their responsibility and quit screwing around and listening to the radical fringe. By thinning the forests, salvaging dead and dying trees immediately following a catastrophic fire or insect infestation, replanting the forest, and promoting the use of solid wood products for construction and remodeling, we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

A link to the Bonnicksen study is available at [www.calforesfoundation.org/FCEM-2.pdf](http://www.calforesfoundation.org/FCEM-2.pdf).

*Mike Weideman is the President of the American Loggers Council, which represents over 50,000 logging professionals in 28 states. Mike's operation, BTO Logging, is headquartered in Enterprise, Oregon. For more information please contact the American Loggers Council office at 409-625-0206 or e-mail at [americanlogger@aol.com](mailto:americanlogger@aol.com)*