

# Future Management of Jackson Demonstration State Forest

by  
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Jackson Demonstration State Forest (JDSF) has for more than 70 years managed our local forest as an extractive industry, demonstrating the same destructive practices seen on industrial timberlands. All the while the values of local First People were ignored and the last of the salmon spawning habitat was destroyed. JDSF first extracts the trees and then the profits from the sale of timber have been extracted from our local economy. The land making up most of JDSF was purchased by the State of California from the Caspar Lumber Company in 1942; characterizing it as “cutover, burned over and other wise denuded...”. The reality is that large tracts along headwater streams were unentered old growth forest. Other areas that had been logged decades earlier were maturing into desirable second growth forest at the time of purchase. The state of California recognized an opportunity to harvest timber from fifty thousand acres; the profits to help fund state expenditures. Without halting the harvest of trees in JDSF to pay for state spending beyond this local forest, there is no chance of changing the management practices within the forest to better serve our local communities.

I am not advocating for an immediate and wholesale change in the management of JDSF. That would result in major hardships and only increase the divisions within our communities. But management should shift to harvesting individual trees and very small group selection rather than hundreds of acres within each timber harvest plan. Harvesting trees to restore both the forest and fish spawning habitat while incorporating the values of local First People would benefit all who live here. None of these changes in management can take place without the state of California reducing the level of harvest to only what is required to pay the cost of managing the forest. Stop managing the forest as a ‘cash cow’ for additional state revenue. The land of JDSF has payed for itself many time over since the state purchased it. It is time for the forest to be managed to serve the communities that surround it.

People used “thick” and “abundant” to tell me of fishing our coastal rivers in the 1950s. One said “it was like you could walk across their backs”. Pictures of early logging convey the “cutover, burned over” river bottoms that salmon swam through to spawn in intact headwater tributaries not yet destroyed by logging in JDSF. Only with the destruction of the last spawning beds did the salmon collapse. Having personally witnessed salmon returning by the hundreds of thousands to rivers in Alaska even through times of overfishing and mismanagement for almost almost six decades; I can only attribute the amount and type of logging conducted in JDSF with the lack of salmon and steelhead in

our local rivers and creeks. Logging practices of JDSF are likely the most significant reason salmon populations are not able to rebound. Commercial and sport fisher people have likely been the greatest losers with the past and present mismanagement of JDSF. I am inspired; envisioning a change in the management of JDSF. It would create timber jobs to restore both forest and stream habitats. Restorative logging would bring our community together rather than the present management of JDSF that has resulted in the pitting of one part of our community against another; those employed in forest related jobs and others who want to live near an intact forest with all the diversity it once had. As a state forest, JDSF belongs to all of us. JDSF could and should be a global leader; demonstrating the restoration of an intact forest landscape while lifting prosperity and fostering harmony for all of us living near the forest.

If profits from the harvest of trees within JDSF did not leave the area a new management mandate that served our local communities could follow. A more selective harvesting of trees would generate less profit per acre but harvesting trees could still pay for everything connected to the forest; road maintenance, habitat restoration for salmon, demonstrations of forest restoration and incorporating the values of local First People. This selective removal of trees could speed the forest toward a condition with as much diversity and productivity as it had as an old growth forest. Future logging would leave biologically based buffers of untouched forest along every stream. It would include using the best forestry practices to sequester carbon. If the profits from all timber harvest within JDSF stayed closer to home there could as much, not less, employment within the forest in perpetuity. Our new visitor centered economy could thrive beyond what is presently possible when some of our local forest look devastated and there are few if any salmon and steelhead. New and improved hiking and biking trails could be part of our local forest including the showcasing the few small groves of old growth forest left standing within JDSF. The future for our ocean and forest community is limited only by what we accept for the management of Jackson Demonstration State Forest. No one needs to loose. The future can be bright for our entire community.

Monroe Robinson earned a bachelors degree in Fisheries Biology from Colorado State University. He did field work for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service on salmon projects between 1965 - 1970. He worked as a salvage logger (taking one tree at a time) in Jackson Demonstration State Forest from 1992 through 1999 and served on a Citizens Advisory Committee for a new management plan for JDSF in 1998 and 1999.