

NorCal SAF Sponsors Legislative Tour at Blodgett Forest

Getting legislators to see forest and forest practices up close and personal can help them look at forestry bills and policies in a new light. With that in mind, the Northern California SAF invited a handful of state legislators and their staffs to Blodgett Forest Research Station in the central Sierra Nevada in California in August. This was the most recent of several tours for legislators and the news media held at Blodgett since 2011, an effort spearheaded by NorCal SAF members and Bill Keyé and Mike DeLasaux.

Blodgett is a 4,400-acre property owned by the University of California and managed by the Center for Forestry at UC Berkeley's College of Natural Resources. The main mission at Blodgett is to evaluate the response, cost, and impacts of various forest-management activities, including commercial harvests.

SAF member Rob York, the center's research station manager and an adjunct assistant professor of forestry at the college, says he has heard nothing but positive feedback from tour attendees.



California State Assemblyman Ken Cooley at a tour of the Blodgett Forest Research Station in August.

"We tend to focus on different forest-management alternatives, and people [on the tours] are interested in the long-term effects

of the alternatives—for example, comparing even-aged and uneven-aged management methods and understanding the effects those have on water quality, soil, or wildlife resources. They also often seem to be interested in the social impacts of the different alternatives, the aesthetic differences in the forest structures we show them. And the role of fire seems to be a key interest, including the degree to which we can mimic the processes of fire with other treatments," said York, who leads the tours.

In addition to a variety of forest practices, tour attendees also see portions of the Blodgett Forest that have not been managed. About 20 percent of the forest is set aside in reserves, where no management action is taken except for fire suppression.

"That's where the light bulb seems to come on in people's minds about the role of fire," York said. "We focus on the fire regime as it used to be, before fire suppression policies took effect, when the average fire-return interval was about 12 years and the maximum interval about 30 years, and then we describe the current situation in the reserves as being something like a 100-year fire-return interval—or a fire-free interval. That's when they start to think, oh, maybe fire does have a pretty important role, and that maybe disturbance in general plays an important role in forests. And if we take that role out, then even though it's still a forest, that forest has a structure that is created by the policy and management decisions to suppress fire but to do nothing else."

The reserves are typically the first stop on York's tours, followed by stands treated with a range of management practices.

"That lets them think about how those treated stands would look had we not started intervening with different management approaches," he said. "We talk about all of the basic alternatives to altering future fire behavior. We talk about the inevitability of fire, that there will be a fire at some point. And we discuss the factors that will combine to influence that fire's behavior. We show them the effects of prescribed fire and then the different mechanical methods, as well as combinations of prescribed fire and mechanical methods."

York, citing rapid response times from fire suppression resources in the area as well as a certain amount of luck, said no wildland fires have struck the Blodgett recently.

Not surprisingly, many visitors to the Blodgett Forest want to know about com-



Rob York (far left), manager of UC Berkeley's Blodgett Forest Research Station, leads several tours each year for legislators and the news media.

mercial timber sales on the forest.

"Blodgett is fairly self-sustaining," said York. "Most of the costs of operating the forest are covered by the revenue from annual harvests. We've done a timber sale every year for the past 52 years. People are pretty impressed by that. It gets them thinking about how we sustainably manage timber over a long period of time. We talk about how the revenue from timber sales goes back into the forest for restoration projects and to support the maintenance of roads and buildings and so on."

A Whole New Perspective

Legislative consultant Melanie Reagan said she was thrilled to visit Blodgett in August.

"The tour gave me a whole new perspective," she said. "They've tried every forestry technique you can imagine at Blodgett, and there are a lot of tests and studies going on up there. It really gives you a lot of confidence that they know what they're doing. Timber is the one truly renewable resource. What I learned is there is a way to have a symbiotic relationship between the timber industry in the forest, with Mother Nature itself. There truly is."

According to Keyé, 16 people had signed up for the tour, but only nine attended, including one legislator and eight legislative staff members and consultants.

"It's quality, not quantity," Keyé said.

"When you're trying to influence policy in the largest state in the country [in terms of population and economic output], just making the rounds in putting out the invitation, letting folks know that there is such a thing as forestry and that they are welcome to come out to the forest, and following that up with a phone call and hopefully a friendly face, has a huge value, even if they don't end up going on a tour. I believe that there is tremendous value in simply telling people that you want to show them good forestry. I think that helps build trust."

The same is true with members of the news media. Stuart Leavenworth, the *Sacramento Bee's* editorial page editor, attended a media tour at Blodgett earlier this year.

"Leavenworth is one of the key editors of the main newspaper in the state capitol, so having him there was extremely important," Keyé said.

The media tour was cosponsored by NorCal SAF as well as the UC Berkeley College of Natural Resources. In addition to tours for legislators and the news media, York said that the Blodgett hosts numerous school groups, professional and nonprofit organizations, and others with an interest in forest management, including recent visits by agencies and groups with interests in the harvesting and utilization of forest biomass to produce energy. **ES**