

Stocking Standards

AB 2082, Dahle. Forest practices: resource conservation standards: stocking standards.

This bill authorized the board to adopt alternative stocking standards if those alternative standards reasonably address variables in forest characteristics and achieve suitable resource conservation, as provided.

Section 4561.2 is added to the Public Resources Code, to read:

4561.2.

Notwithstanding Section 4561.1 or the resource conservation standards in subdivision (a) of Section 4561, the board may adopt alternative stocking standards that meet the purposes of Section 4561 if those alternative standards reasonably address the variables in forest characteristics and achieve suitable resource conservation.

AB 417, Dahle. Forest practices: resource conservation standards.

This bill extended the authorization to adopt alternative stocking standards notwithstanding the stocking conditions relating to the average residual basal area, as provided.

Section 4561.2 of the Public Resources Code is amended to read:

4561.2.

Notwithstanding Section 4561.1 or the resource conservation standards relating to stocking pursuant to Section 4561, the board may adopt alternative stocking standards that meet the purposes of Section 4561 if those alternative standards reasonably address the variables in forest characteristics, achieve suitable resource conservation, and contribute to specific forest health and ecological goals as defined by the board.

AB 2082 was introduced to give additional consideration to site-specific forest health and ecological goals on California timberland. It allows the Board to adopt alternative point count stocking standards to address variables in forest characteristics to meet land management objectives while achieving suitable resource conservation.

Assembly Bill (AB) 417 proposed to change Section 4561.2 of the Public Resource Code, mandating the Board of Forestry to reevaluate the current basal area stocking standards (used for uneven-aged regeneration methods) and to adopt alternative standards when appropriate for different areas of the state. This will allow the Board to take into consideration the variability in forest characteristics throughout California's timberlands, as well as allowing it to account for new objectives in forest and ecosystem restoration projects that may not be achievable with the current standards in place.

Reasons for Stocking Standard Change

Fire suppression in California has significantly altered forest structures by increasing the regeneration of fire-sensitive species where they would normally be removed by frequent, low-intensity fires.

Initial stocking standards were set arbitrarily and did not necessarily reflect a healthy stocking level for all forest ecotypes. Stocking standards were set according to site class, which is determined based on

the growth rates of conifer trees and does not necessarily reflect other structural dynamics that would naturally be occurring in a particular region. Alternative stocking standards can help adjust management goals to more closely model a natural stand structure, particularly in terms of the density of trees. This is ecologically significant because the proper density of trees is essential in avoiding certain thresholds which can significantly increase the risk of disease transmission as well as risk of severe fire damage. The factors that affect these phenomena are not adequately assessed by site class alone.

Seedling regeneration rates have significantly improved and the previous stocking standards did not account for this increase in survival rates. Without an adjustment, management based on previous stocking levels will achieve a greater density of mature trees than was intended by the previous standards.

Registered Professional Foresters have the professional ability to assess on site conditions and make recommendations for appropriate stocking. Forest environments can be highly variable. Prescribed stocking standards appropriate for one site may not be for others due to this variability. Over stocking resulting from fire exclusion is arguably the largest ecological change to California forests over the past century. Increasing average temperatures and drought have precipitated large scale insect infestations and tree mortality of unprecedented scale. Healthy forests require forest densities and species composition appropriate for the site-specific conditions; elevation, aspect, slope, geomorphology, precipitation and available groundwater. These site conditions can change within relative close proximity in a watershed or forest region.

PROPOSAL

To best provide for alternatives for stocking, it is proposed that Registered Professional Foresters be given the opportunity to propose site specific alternative stocking criteria down to the existing minimum resource conservation standards not to fall below the standards for the lowest site class for the proposed regeneration method, intermediate treatment or special prescription. This will require explanation and justification that reasonably address 1) Variables in forest characteristics and 2) specific forest health and ecological goals as defined by the Board that may include:

- (1) Improved fire resilience
- (2) Increased drought tolerance
- (3) Improved forest pest and disease resistance
- (4) Increased carbon sequestration in above and below ground carbon pools

The proposed alternative would require explanation and justification by the RPF using substantial evidence and a detailed description of available stand maintenance and vegetative treatments that will be applied where necessary to assure achievement of suitable resource conservation. It would also require a sample mark where applicable and inspection by the local Forest Practice Inspector of on-site conditions and certification that the proposed alternative will achieve suitable resource conservation.