



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Benefits of Conservation Planning

Landowner Profile

“Potential losses from a wildfire was once a major concern. But now that we have gotten our fuels under control, maintenance is easier and we can sleep easier at night.”

— Dennis Bebensee

Conservation Goals

- Fuels Reduction
- Brush Control
- Forest Health
- Wildlife Habitat

Conservation Practices

- Forest Stand Improvement
- Brush Management
- Tree & Shrub Pruning
- Tree Planting
- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management

Benefits

- Reduced Wildfire Threat
- Improved Forest Health
- Wildlife Habitat Enhancement
- Enhanced Water Quality
- Enhanced Carbon Sequestration
- Enhanced Aesthetics
- Enhanced Forest Visibility

Forest Maintenance is Key to Forestland Health

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its partners provide assistance to forest landowners to plan and implement conservation practices to address resource concerns and help to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire. NRCS programs, such as EQIP, can be an important component of an overall forest management plan.

Dennis and June Bebensee and Richard and Cathleen Schoenheide became forestland owners in 1975 with the purchase of 380 acres of forestland in northern California, known as the “Plateau tract.” They have been harvesting timber from the Plateau property for over 30 years.

As Registered Professional Foresters for the California Department of Forestry (CDF), now CALFIRE, Dennis and Richard had the knowledge and passion to not only manage but also to invest in their forested property. Their goal was to grow the healthiest and most productive forest that they could to leave a legacy to their descendants, while also enhancing wildlife and maintaining water quality.

The “Plateau tract,” located east of rural Shingletown, sits between 3,300-3,600 ft. in elevation immediately above the brushy foothills at the lower edge of the timberline. It is within CALFIRE’s Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. When purchased, this property was in a severe fire hazard condition, and catastrophic wildfire has continued to be a major concern.

Most of the 380 acres of forestland was very dense and contained trees with heavy limbs that reached to the ground, as well as scattered brush fields. The mixed conifer stand, about 45 years of age, consisted primarily of ponderosa pine and incense cedar with Douglas-fir, sugar pine, and black oak as minor stand components.



Landowners Richard and Cathleen Schenheide and June and Dennis Bebensee

In 1994, The Bebensee-Schoenheide partners developed a Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan (NTMP) to guide sustainable forest management and harvest activities. Since then, their forest management activities, both precommercial and commercial, have created a much more fire-safe forest.

except on steep slopes. Initially, only thinning was completed to remove poor quality and overstocked trees, but pruning eventually became a follow-up practice. Now, the landowners are using a masticator for forest stand improvement practices and to chip slash from pruned limbs.



Forest conditions before thinning



Mastication and pruning in progress



Plantation after thinning and pruning

In 2010, the landowners signed up for NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Through EQIP, NRCS helped the landowners develop a conservation plan and reduce fuel loads across this

property through thinning, pruning, and follow up maintenance treatment efforts on over 300 acres. This reduced fuels condition provides a fuel break not only along access roads but also between this property and the brush lands below. CALFIRES' California Forest Improvement Program has also been utilized for fuels reduction activities when available.



Tree mortality from insect infestations. Over the last 10 years, salvage operations have occurred almost annually due to recent drought conditions and subsequent bark beetle attack.

Having narrowly escaped the Ponderosa Fire in 2012 as well as three other wildfires around the Manton and Shingletown communities over the last 10 years, the landowners continue to carry out numerous fuels reduction activities to keep their forest healthy, productive, and fire safe.

Precommercial thinning has been completed three times across most of the property,

“Maintenance of fuel breaks and a fire safe forest is an ongoing job and needs to be done annually to keep ahead of the regrowth,” says Dennis Bebensee. NRCS Soil Conservationist Melinda Graves agrees, “Understanding the maintenance needs of these treatments has been what has made these landowners' efforts so successful. As a retired forester and fire prevention officer, Dennis has a good working knowledge of the realities of forest management and wildfire.”

The owners' children and grand-children have actively participated in the care of this forest. Both families are strong supporters and actively involved with the Forest Landowners of California and the American Tree Farm System, having hosted many tours to help educate other forestland owners about forest management and fuels reduction alternatives.



The Bebensee and Schoenheide families