



State Forester: Record number of tree seedlings to be planted in Idaho forests

Opinion by State Forester David Groeschl
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(COEUR D'ALENE) - Arbor Day is April 26, a fitting time to talk about the State of Idaho's record-setting tree planting efforts this year.

The Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) will plant a record 2.2 million tree seedlings in state endowment forests this fiscal year, covering thousands of acres and many square miles of forests.

Forty percent of Idaho - about 22 million acres - is forested. That's an area larger than the states of Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut combined.

Much of those forests are owned by the federal government and private landowners, but about 1 million acres are state endowment forests actively managed by the IDL and the Land Board to provide **long-term financial returns to public schools and other important institutions** in Idaho.

For every dollar we spend actively managing state endowment forests, we provide three dollars to public schools and other financial beneficiaries of the lands. That contribution includes the IDL costs to fight wildfires on more than 6 million acres.

Growing forests are healthy forests. The timber harvested from state endowment forests doesn't just support thousands of Idahoans working in Idaho's forest products businesses, but the reforestation that happens after harvest keeps forests full of growing trees that store carbon, keeps our water clean, and promotes healthy habitat for wildlife. Additionally, many of the seedlings are grown to be resistant to certain types of tree diseases, a characteristic that encourages healthy forests on a landscape level.

Reforestation takes effort on the part of foresters, but **foresters also know how to take advantage of nature's own ability to regenerate trees.** Along with planting tree seedlings after harvest, forest managers also can leave seed trees in place during harvest to promote natural regeneration.

Idaho's own Forest Practices Act requires regeneration of a harvested area within five years, a condition not present in every state's forest protection laws and that reflects the importance of sustainable forests to our citizens and forest products industry.

The way in which trees are harvested and regenerated in state endowment forests is an exceptional process. An audit led by the Idaho Department of

Environmental Quality in 2012 showed that across State, federal, and private ownerships, **harvest operations on state endowment forests had the highest rate of compliance - nearly perfect at 99 percent - with the forest protection measures** set forth in the Idaho Forest Practices Act and rules.

In short, **responsible active management - including intensive tree replanting efforts and enabling natural regeneration - and Idaho's own forest protection laws promote long-term health and productivity of state endowment forests.** The lands, in turn, continue to financially support not only this generation of Idaho public school students but future generations as well.

The picture of the State's contribution to healthy trees wouldn't be complete without mentioning our role in **keeping "community forests" growing**, too. There are billions of trees living and growing in the cities and towns across the state. In the Treasure Valley alone there are more than \$3 billion worth of trees (what it would cost to replace all of them) that provide nearly \$10 million annually in storm water reduction benefits, energy savings, and public health benefits through cleaner air. The IDL works with communities across Idaho to maintain a framework that supports growing trees in urban areas as well.

American businessman Warren Buffet said, "Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago." This adage says a lot about life in general, but it is a good saying for the month of April as well. The days and weeks surrounding Arbor Day are a great time to act on the marvels of this renewable, sustainable natural resource that we all benefit from.

Whether you live in a neighborhood or a forestland, **plant a tree this Arbor Day and continue to support Idaho's forestry and fire professionals, along with the forest products industry, that keep Idaho forests growing.**

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David Groeschl has been the Idaho State Forester since 2011. He is the Deputy Director of the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) Division of Forestry and Fire. Based out of the IDL Coeur d'Alene Staff Office, he oversees the management of 1 million acres of forested state endowment trust lands and fire protection on more than 6 million acres of mostly state and private land. He has 27 years of experience in forestry and land management.

646 words



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