

Past Timber Production and Harvest

Even before the Beaverhead and Deerlodge National Forests existed, timber was harvested in southwest Montana to meet the needs of people living in the area. In the Butte and Anaconda areas, harvest related to mining, mills, and settlements was very extensive. Like many other National Forests, timber harvest on the two forests greatly increased from the 1960s through the mid 1980s. Today's timber program differs dramatically from the program that existed 20 years ago when Forest Plans were developed. The changes can be attributed to several factors; including: evolving administrative and judicial interpretations of agency legal requirements, advances in scientific understanding of how ecosystems work, and shifting public attitudes concerning management priorities for National Forest lands. Whether measured in terms of volume offered, sold, or harvested, the size of the timber sale program on this Forest and nationwide has fallen markedly in recent years.

The Beaverhead and Deerlodge Forest Plans combined project an ASQ of 40.3 mmbf on 6,000 acres a year. That harvest level was met in 1988 and 1990 but never again, (BDNF Timber Sale Cut and Sold Reports 2004). Harvest dropped to 14.7 mmbf in 1991 and volume stayed around 11 mmbf ever since.

Timber offered for harvest over the past 10 years averaged 12 million board feet. This is an increase over the numbers reported in the DEIS because of the jump from 3.5 mmbf in 2003 to a decadal high of 21.5 mmbf in 2005. This increase is attributed to initiatives related to the National Fire Plan and other national programs. Timber offered for harvest from 2003 to 2005 averaged 14 mmbf. Along with that, a higher percent of the forest budget went to timber harvest and fuel reduction. We assume the capacity for producing timber on the BDNF will remain near 14 mmbf with the trend toward stable or decreasing budgets.

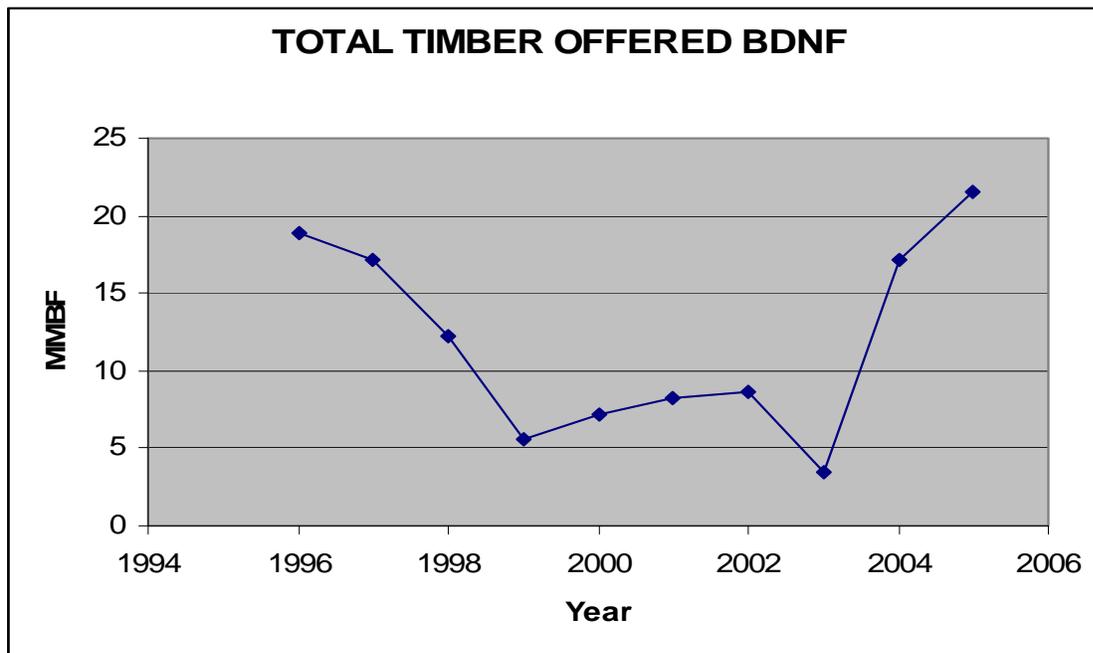


Figure 1. Timber Offered 1996 to 2005 (Source: BDNF Timber Sale Cut and Sold Reports)

Timber Management Practices and Prescriptions

The 1986 and 1987 Beaverhead and Deerlodge Forest Plans established a goal of developing healthier age and size class distributions of the timber resource through regulated non-declining flow of timber products from suitable lands. This was accomplished primarily through 40-acre clear-cuts in lodgepole pine stands to reduce mountain pine beetle infestations. Substantial volumes of timber were harvested this way in the 60s, 70s and 80s.

Clear-cutting has become increasingly controversial since the Plans were written. A 1992 policy decision was made to reduce use of this practice and clear-cut acres have steadily fallen. The 1991 Monitoring and Evaluation Report indicated 45% of harvested acres were clear-cut and 32% received selective or uneven-aged harvest. That trend has continued toward uneven-aged management and intermediate stand treatments, among others. These treatments produce lower volumes per acre than clear-cuts.

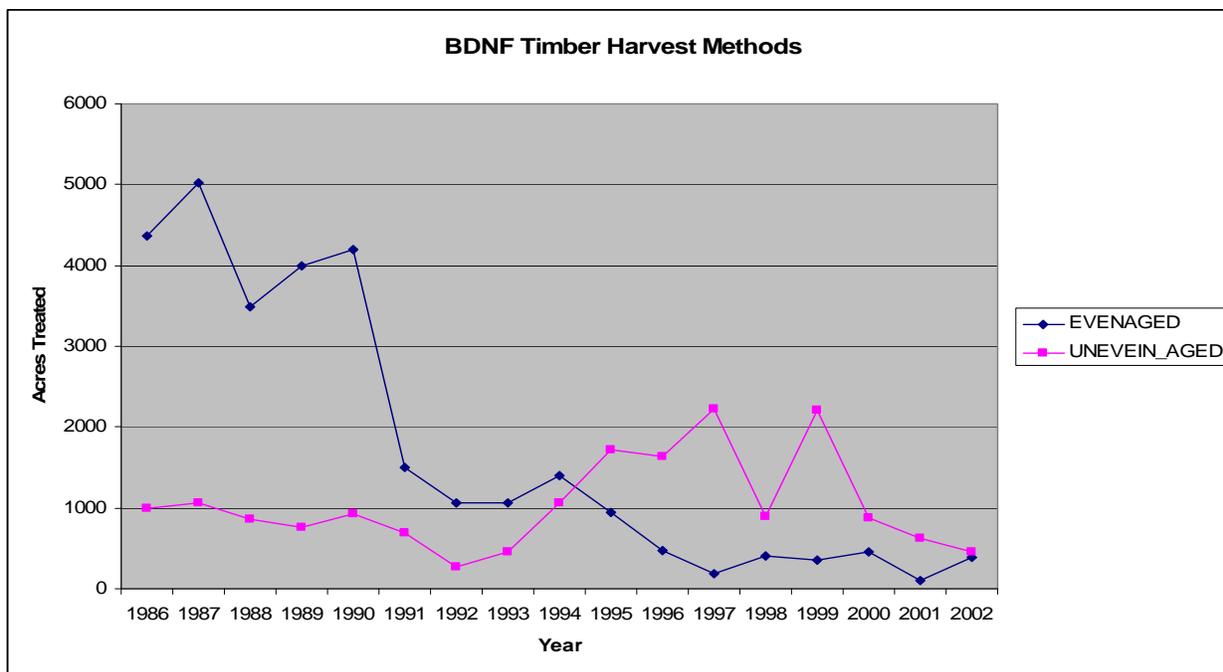


Figure 2. Timber Harvest Methods Chart (B. Schuelke query 9/04/03)

Natural and artificial regeneration methods are used. Natural regeneration methods are emphasized because they are cost-effective. Timber stand improvement (TSI) activities have been concentrated in timber sale areas to manage stand density and species composition in the sub-merchantable size classes.

Vegetation Management Practices

Landscape analyses since the last plans were written found most immediate forest health concerns result from lack of fire in aspen and Douglas-fir stands. Fire in conjunction with selective harvests is suggested as the primary tool to address these forest health concerns. Lack of disturbance in other vegetation cover types is also a concern. In 1994, the North Flints Landscape Ecology Project set the stage for the first ecosystem management based vegetation project on the forest. Since then, numerous small vegetation management projects were