

Opinion: Timber reform plan needs tweaking

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the June 17, 2012, Sacramento Bee.*

Hampered by a lagging economy and imports of forest products from elsewhere, California's timber industry is looking for help. It is finding it in the administration of Gov. Jerry Brown, and not just because the governor has been a recipient of campaign funds from Sierra Pacific Industries, the state's largest single private landowner.

Brown recognizes, as we do, that sawmills and forest products are important to our rural economies, particularly in Northern California.

That doesn't mean timber companies should get a green light to return to an era of unsustainable logging practices. But last time we checked, California was a major consumer of forest products. If we want wood, we should attempt to grow a reasonable amount of it, under environmental laws that are far more protective than those in other states.

To help the state's timber industry, the governor has proposed a multi-part plan – much of which has generated little or no controversy. To help pay for timber harvest plan reviews (and possibly speed up the regulatory process) the governor has proposed a new fee on certain wood products sold in California. This fee, which has the support of the timber industry, could generate up to \$30 million yearly, relieving pressure on the general fund.

The proposal would also extend the duration of timber harvest plans approved by the state. Currently, these plans are effective for three years, with two one-year extensions. The governor would extend that to five years, with one two-year

extension. He'd also make administrative changes and attempt a pilot project to speed up permit processing times.

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