

Box 4. Sustainable Community-based Redwood Forests: the RFFI Model.

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The Redwood Forest Foundation, Inc. (RFFI, <www.rffi.org>) promotes ecologically, economically, and socially responsible forestry as a means of sustaining the integrity of forest ecosystems and the human communities dependent upon them. In 2007 RFFI purchased the 50,000-acre Usal Redwood Forest. (Fig. 4-1)

RFFI's long-term stewardship goals for the Usal include rethinking forest management strategies to bring harvest and restoration practices into alignment with optimal biological productivity, ecosystem values, and community priorities.

The RFFI model recently achieved national recognition through Michael Fay, National Geographic Explorer in residence, who visited the property during his recent Redwood Transect. Mike's transect resulted in a cover story in National Geographic on the Redwood Region as a model, with global implications, for developing effective stewardship of forest resources.

There will always be more to learn about the interface between forest management and ecosystem functions, particularly in a world facing the potential of substantial climate change. Yet there are steps we can take today that we can be confident will improve ecosystem function and resilience, increase the long-term production of wood products for human use, and increase the economic sustainability of working forests. The key to implementing these practices is achieving an objective understanding of the true value, and the true cost, of providing various ecosystem services to society.

One important concept driving traditional forest management practices is the concept of "economic maturity" for forest stands, i.e., a rotation or harvest age that maximizes the present value of future harvests. These calculations typically do not include increases or decreases in viable habitat, carbon storage, water quality, or other ecosystem functions. Developing the resources necessary to steward working forests for multiple objectives, including nonmarket ecosystem services and community values, is a challenge. For example, how will we value the recovery and protection of salmon populations and Native American cultural heritage?

Effectively addressing these issues requires cooperation and understanding across a variety of disciplines, from ecologists and biologists to foresters and practitioners, from outside investors and policy-makers to local community members and leaders. RFFI's Usal forest provides an example of how rural communities can host these multidisciplinary conversations. Usal Redwood Forest offers an opportunity to test, evaluate, and implement an effective sustainable model of ecosystem stewardship.

