

## **What is a Nonindustrial Timber Management Plan (NTMP)?**

In California, all timber harvesting on State and private lands is subject to the State's Forest Practice Act and Rules. Other environmental laws, such as the California Environmental Quality Act, State and Federal Endangered Species Acts, and the Clean Water Act, also apply to timber harvesting.

To address these rules pertaining to logging, a document called a Timber Harvest Plan (THP) is typically prepared for each harvesting project by a Registered Professional Forester (RPF). The THP not only provides a detailed plan of the logging operation, but also a detailed analysis of the potential environmental effects of the proposed operation. The THP review process also provides the public to opportunity to comment on any element of the THP, which is an important tenet in California environmental law. The "lead agency" in the review of THPs, and in all aspects of enforcement of the Forest Practice Rules, is the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire).

With an effective period of 5 years and the possibility of receiving two one-year extensions, the maximum life of a THP after being approved by CalFire is 7 years.

In 1991, the State Legislature amended the Forest Practices Act to create the Nonindustrial Timber Management Plan (NTMP). The purpose of the NTMP is to allow "nonindustrial" landowners; that is, those who own less than 2,500 acres and are not "primarily engaged" in the manufacture of forest products, to create a more long-term document than a 5 year THP.

The NTMP is similar to a THP in many ways. It is also prepared by an RPF, provides very detailed information about the environment found on the project area, including biological, watershed, and archaeological resources, and it goes through the same environmental review process as the THP. The difference is, that upon its approval by CalFire, it has no expiration date. If the landowner with an approved NTMP wishes to harvest trees, a less complicated document called a "Notice of Timber Operations" is submitted to CalFire. The Notice of Timber Operations provides the details of the harvest activities intended to be carried out. The landowner also must certify that no significant changes to the NTMP area have occurred since its approval. Such significant changes may include the discovery of a new archaeological site, or the newly discovered presence of a listed plant or animal species in the assessment area<sup>1</sup>, or other physical or environmental changes.

The important advantage to the NTMP is that once it is approved, and there are no substantial changes in the environment as described above, the "Notice of Timber Operations" is "ministerial". That is, if the Notice is accurate and complete, no further

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<sup>1</sup> The "assessment area" is a much larger area surrounding the NTMP that the RPF uses to evaluate the potential for cumulative adverse effects on forest resources, including wildlife species.

approval to conduct the harvest operation as described is necessary. The landowner may begin harvesting 3 days after mailing the Notice of Timber Operations. In contrast, after the 5 to 7-year life of a THP, a new THP must be submitted and is subject to a long process of environmental review before approval. In this way, the NTMP allows the small landowner a much simpler process to harvest trees over a long period of time.

There are other major differences between an NTMP and a THP. One is that under an NTMP, no type of “even-aged” silvicultural system may be applied. No regeneration methods are allowed that result in the creation of large areas (over 2 ½ acres) of trees that are the same age, including the clearcutting, shelterwood, and seed tree silvicultural methods. Under the NTMP, only certain types of harvesting are allowed. These include selection harvesting, intermediate treatments such as commercial thinning, and a treatment called the “transition” method. The purpose of the transition method is to convert the structure of the forest from an even-aged structure to one more manageable through selection harvesting.

Another major difference between an NTMP and a THP is that the NTMP must provide substantial information about the long-term management and productivity of the project area. The NTMP area is often divided into management units. For each unit, the proposed management objective must be stated, and the proposed activities to achieve the objective must be described, including how often harvests will take place, what silvicultural methods are to be applied, and the logging methods to be employed.

The NTMP also requires detailed information about the current and projected character of the timber stands in each management unit. This data includes the species composition, tree age classes, projected growth, present stocking and volume per acre, and other stand characteristics. Growth projections are typically generated by computer models that “grow” trees through time based on such stand data, taking into account the productivity of the unit (its “site class”). Finally, the NTMP must demonstrate that the harvesting of trees will be balanced by growth of the timber stand over the long run.

In summary, the NTMP provides a comprehensive management plan, prepared by an RPF, to assure that the landowner’s long-term objectives for the ownership will be met. After its initial approval, the NTMP also provides the small landowner more flexibility to conduct timber harvesting over an indefinite period of time, simply by submitting an accurate and complete Notice of Timber Operations. This is in contrast to the relatively short life and often-cumbersome THP approval process. The disadvantages are that the NTMP requires much more stand data collection and processing than the typical THP. Also, if there are substantial changes in the environment of the project area over time, such as having a listed species move into the area, such a change would require amending the NTMP, in turn initiating the process of review and approval by CalFire.