

Idaho speeds clear cut salvage logging after wildfires

By KEITH RIDLER, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — So much Idaho endowment timber land has burned this wildfire season that state officials have altered the salvage sale process to allow faster approval for clear cuts of 100 acres or more.

The Idaho Land Board voted 5-0 Tuesday to speed salvage logging on an estimated 60 million to 80 million board feet of timber that burned this year.

The change allows Idaho Department of Lands workers to approve the salvage sales with clear cuts of 100 acres or more without first getting permission from the Land Board.

David Groeschl, state forester for the Idaho Department of Lands, told Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter and the four other Land Board members that the 100-acre limit works for regular timber sales with live trees.

But "on salvage sales like this where the trees are burned or dead, it doesn't make sense," he said, noting the burned timber is susceptible to insect attack and can quickly lose value if not harvested.

Officials say Idaho is on the hook for about \$50 million in firefighting costs this year that won't be reimbursed by federal agencies. The total cost is closer to \$70 million.

"It's going to cost us a lot of money," Otter said after the meeting. "In fact, more money than I can remember, by double."

On the positive side, officials said the wildfire season in Idaho is winding down and could be over within a few weeks with sustained rain or snow.

"I'm thankful we're getting the moisture we're getting not only today but for several days in the future," the governor said.

The plan approved by the Land Board still requires Groeschl or Tom Schultz, the director of the Idaho Department of Lands, to approve salvage sales with clear cuts exceeding 100 acres. In addition, those decisions will be reviewed by the Land Board monthly.

"We're talking 70 to 80 million board feet, so you could have a fairly large number of administrative packages that would have to come to the Land Board and be scheduled," Schultz said. "Even that 30-day delay to get it to the board can cause us to lose time on the ground."

His agency is already working on salvage sales, and one is projected to sell in October. He said there could be some harvest this winter and more next summer. Salvage contracts are typically a year long, he said.

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