

SPI Plantations and Wildlife

SPI plantations cannot legitimately be called early seral (or early successional) forest. SPI tree plantations are **farms** and do not contain the rich assemblages of species and ecological processes that early seral natural forests contain. SPI has revealed its plans to clearcut 70% of its ownership in the Sierra Nevada--on 1 million acres. The company also has acknowledged that the trees that are planted now will be harvested at the age of 80 years. At 80 years, trees are just beginning to become useful for wildlife again (see Figure 1). The adverse impacts of this scale and intensity of SPIs clearcutting program are not likely to be sustainable for viable populations of plants and animals.

After repeated herbicide applications, the even-aged commercial conifer crop trees in the typical SPI plantation, coupled with bare mineral soil depleted of life, does not resemble a natural forest. A plantation **does not** support the early seral plant community which is necessary for diverse wildlife populations. Plant species that only occur in early and late successional forests are being depleted on thousands of acres of California's forests, and may well be permanently eliminated. Without the continual replenishment of seeds falling to the forest floor, multiple species will simply disappear from the forests. SPI's clearcutting and tree farming regime is designed to do this very thing, so as to manage the tree crop more effectively with less cost per acre. Hundreds of species of animals, from butterfly pollinators to black bears, are dependent upon a rich assemblage of multiple plant species in order to survive. And under state law, the water, fish, and wildlife of the state are the public's resources and belong to the people. California's state Resources Agency today is completely failing in its responsibilities to protect these trust resources.

SPI claims that it is creating early successional habitat that is important for wildlife, after clearcutting. But these natural hardwood and shrub communities are systematically eliminated through repeated applications of toxic herbicides. The occasional shrub that survives these management regimes is merely an accidental result of the missed spraying, and they are likely to be deformed specimens with poor reproduction and low value for wildlife. Oaks are routinely eliminated from SPI's harvest areas, yet the acorn is the foundation of the forest food web--over 100 species of birds and mammals are dependent upon oaks to survive in the forest. Oak trees do not produce a mast acorn crop until they are 50 years old. Deer in the Eastern Tehama county herd, the largest herd in the state (and one that is continually declining each year) eat up to 70% acorns in their diet in the months of November and December, as they prepare for the winter. SPI's most intensive clearcutting is occurring within this deer herd's territory.

SPI repeats these policies on thousands upon thousands of acres of California's native forests and is slowly but surely turning them all into uniform, biological deserts filled with a sea of ponderosa pine. Besides being relatively useless for wildlife, densely packed tree farms are contributing to extremely hazardous fire conditions, due to their lack of biological and structural diversity and total lack of fire resilience in trees less than 100 years old.

According to Eric Loft, California Department of Fish and Games senior wildlife biologist and one of the state's foremost experts on deer, when looking at ecosystem function and processes--particularly focusing on succession---**diversity is higher at either end of the range of forest succession**. In other words, the two stages of forest development where wildlife thrive are in the early successional forest, and in the late successional forest. These are the two stages of forest development that are today being eliminated by SPI's management practices. See Figure 1 below. The end result of this systematic regime of converting natural forest to tree farms will be cascading losses of plant and animals species throughout the range of SPIs ownership in the Sierra Nevada, ultimately leading to the threat of extinction for multiple species. The California spotted owl and the Pacific fisher have already been virtually eliminated from SPI lands in the state. Other lesser known species are also at risk—the goshawk, marten, flying squirrel, pileated woodpecker and dozens of other species that are dependent upon diverse forests for their survival.

Figure 1. Diversity and Forest Succession

