NorCal SAF Sponsors Legislative Tour at Blodgett Forest

Getting legislators to see forest and forest practices up close and personal can help them look at forestry bills and policies in a new light. With that in mind, the Northern California SAF invited a handful of state legislators and their staffs to Blodgett Forest Research Station in the central Sierra Nevada in California in August. This was the most recent of several tours for legislators and the news media held at Blodgett since 2011, an effort spearheaded by NorCal SAF members and Bill Keye and Mike DeLauro.

Blodgett is a 4,400-acre property owned by the University of California and managed by the Center for Forestry at UC Berkeley's College of Natural Resources. The main mission at Blodgett is to evaluate the response, cost, and impacts of various forest-management activities, including commercial harvests.

SAF member Rob York, the center's research station manager and an adjunct assistant professor of forestry at the college, says he has heard nothing but positive feedback from tour attendees.

Rob York (far left), manager of UC Berkeley's Blodgett Forest Research Station, leads several tours each year for legislators and the news media.

"When you're trying to influence policy in the largest state in the country [in terms of population and economic output], just making the rounds in putting out the invitation, letting folks know that there is such a thing as forestry and that they are welcome to come out to the forest, and following that up with a phone call and hopefully a friendly face, has a huge value, even if they don't end up going on a tour. I believe that there is tremendous value in simply telling people that you want to show them good forestry. I think that helps build trust."

The same is true with members of the news media. Stuart Leavensworth, the Sacramento Bee's editorial page editor, attended a media tour at Blodgett earlier this year.

"Leavensworth is one of the key editors of the main newspaper in the state capital, so having him there was extremely important," Keye said.

The media tour was cosponsored by NorCal SAF as well as the UC Berkeley College of Natural Resources. In addition to tours for legislators and the news media, York said that the Blodgett hosts numerous school groups, professional and nonprofit organizations, and others with an interest in forest management, including recent visits by agencies and groups with interests in the harvesting and utilization of forest biomass to produce energy.

A Whole New Perspective

Legislative consultant Melanie Reagan said she was thrilled to visit Blodgett in August.

"The tour gave me a whole new perspective," she said. "They've tried every forestry technique you can imagine at Blodgett, and there are a lot of tests and studies going on up there. It really gives you a lot of confidence that they know what they're doing. Timber is the one truly renewable resource. What I learned is there is a way to have a symbiotic relationship between the timber industry in the forest, with Mother Nature itself. There truly is."

According to Keye, 10 people had signed up for the tour, but only nine attended, including one legislator and eight legislative staff members and consultants.

"It's quality, not quantity," Keye said.