



## **Time Capsule - The CAL FIRE California Forest Improvement Program in the 1980s**

**By Adam Eisenberg**

On a cool spring morning in April 1987, Captain James T. Kirk – or rather, actor William Shatner – beamed down to a small reservoir in the Hollywood Hills and saved the forests of the future.

At the time, the California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP) was less than ten-years-old, and the unique cost-share program designed to help private landowners manage their forests was, like many state programs, facing a challenging budgetary climate.

To promote forest preservation, Shatner volunteered his time to serve as narrator for an educational video and public service announcements (PSAs). The popular actor was riding high on the success of the film “Star Trek: The Voyage Home” – that’s the one where Kirk and the intrepid Enterprise crew time travel back to 1980s San Francisco to save humpback whales from extinction – and his timely boost of support sent awareness of CFIP up, well, toward the stratosphere!

I know this story because I wrote the script for the video and PSAs, and I co-produced them with M. Baba Cooper. Richard A. Colla, a CFIP participant and successful TV director (“Battlestar Galactica”), served as executive producer, and Golden Globe-nominated composer Bob Alcivar wrote the music score.

CFIP is a state-funded program that provides resources and guidance to private forest landowners. To qualify for financial assistance, landowners must own between 20 and 5,000 acres and agree to maintain their property as potentially harvestable forest land for 10 years. Accepted participants receive up 90 percent of the cost of approved forest maintenance.

Providing support to these landowners is critical to California because forests occupy more than one-third of the total land in the state, and over 50 percent of these forests are privately owned.

“Launched in 1980, CFIP has helped hundreds of landowners properly manage their forests to reduce fire danger, improve wildlife and fisheries habitat, and ensure an ongoing source of timber,” explains Stewart McMorrow, the CAL FIRE Wildfire Resilience Program Staff Chief who currently oversees CFIP.

“CFIP gives landowners access to registered professional foresters and other forestry professionals so they can do the work needed on their property to promote forest health,” McMorrow adds. “In the last five years, CFIP has awarded 303 grants to nonindustrial forest

landowners. These grants include nearly 50 thousand acres of forest management planning, and 13,722 acres of reforestation and forest health treatments.”

While CFIP is considered a success today, back in 1987 its future was far from certain. Eager to find ways to gain more attention to the program, the California Department of Forestry and Fire (as CAL FIRE was then known) enlisted Colla to produce the educational video and PSAs.

After months of research and preparation, we took a small crew and filmed at locations across the state: Henninger Flats in the San Gabriel Mountains near Los Angeles, the state capitol in Sacramento, the tree nursery at the University of California at Davis, Pacific Lumber Company in Scotia, Sequoia Park in Eureka, and the redwood groves at Humboldt State University in Arcata.

When it came time to find a narrator to appear on camera, Colla immediately thought of Shatner, a friend of his since the two worked together in the early Sixties. Fortunately, the actor readily agreed to participate.

For his part, Shatner arrived that overcast April morning with two well-behaved Dobermans in tow. Franklin County Reservoir provided the backdrop, a location used in countless movies and TV series including “The Creature From the Black Lagoon,” “Murder, She Wrote,” “The Andy Griffith Show” (it’s where young Opie tosses a rock into the lake at the start of every episode) and the original “Star Trek” starring William Shatner!

The actor filmed and recorded his narration on the reservoir’s edge as mist slowly rose from the water’s surface. It was a calm morning, and Shatner’s performance was interrupted only occasionally by the quacking of ducks hiding in the weeds nearby.

Once completed, “Reforestation” became an invaluable promotional tool. The video made the rounds at the state legislature and helped CFIP weather that year’s budget storm, and in subsequent years it was regularly shown to private landowners to encourage them to join. The Shatner-narrated PSAs also began playing on local television stations across the state. They continued to air over many years and were critical to getting the word out.

“Having William Shatner appear as a spokesperson for CFIP was a great boost,” McMorrow says. “As Mr. Shatner explains in the video and in the PSAs, ‘Reforestation means to rejuvenate the land, to rejuvenate the earth.’ His message set the stage for the next thirty years and helped us get CFIP to where it is today. We can’t thank him enough.”

View the full documentary [HERE](#).

Learn more about the CFIP program [HERE](#).

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