



Commitment to Landscape-Scale Conservation

Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell
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Good morning! It's a pleasure to be here on this panel. I want to start by assuring you that the Forest Service is absolutely committed to the Joint Forestry Team. The nation's forests are a strategic national resource, and sustaining them for future generations is vital to our nation.

All-Lands Approach

Sustainable forest management means bringing people together, pooling resources, and working across boundaries for the future of America's forests. Working with partners, the Forest Service is taking an all-lands approach that goes beyond the National Forest System. Under my leadership, we will focus on landscape-scale conservation.

I will be the first to admit that in times of tight budgets and difficult fire seasons, our agency has focused attention on fire suppression. We found ourselves trapped by circumstances.

But times have changed, and we have a new opportunity. We have a Secretary of Agriculture who takes a strong interest in forestry issues, who appreciates the value of forests, and who understands our mission. He understands our obligation to sustain the *nation's* forests.

Secretary Vilsack recently offered a broad vision to guide the Forest Service in setting a new course for America's forests. At the heart of his vision is an all-lands approach to sustaining and restoring the nation's forests. That means using all USDA resources and authorities, in collaboration with NRCS, to sustain the entire matrix of federal, state, tribal, county, municipal, and private forests.

Examples of our collaborative authorities for landscape-scale conservation include the Environmental Quality Improvement Program, which extends to nonindustrial private forest landowners; the Biomass Crop Assistance Program, which extends to woody biomass producers on nonfederal land; and the Wyden Amendment, which authorizes watershed restoration and enhancement agreements with state, private, and other partners. There are many more.

The point is this: We cannot sustain the nation's forests by focusing just on the national forests. Fifty-seven percent of America's forests are in private landownership, and another 23 percent are in state, tribal, county, municipal, and other federal ownerships. Forest ecosystems typically form mosaics—mosaics of plant and animal communities *and* mosaics of landownerships. This is true not only in the East, but also here in the West, where the critical issues are the same—healthy forests and grasslands, water, fire, wildlife habitat connectivity. These issues have never stopped at national forest boundaries. Even in the West, where national forest lands make up a

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large part of the landscape, we still need an all-lands approach, a landscape-scale approach, using collaboration to engage our partners and our communities.

More Than Partners

The State Foresters have always been more than just partners for the Forest Service. We depend on you to deliver our assistance to private forest landowners. Together, we decide how to address forest management needs so that the nation's forests will stay forested and be sustainably managed. Together with the State Foresters, the conservation districts, and the NRCS, we can probably reach every private landowner in the country.

Landscape-scale conservation is an outgrowth of State and Private Forestry Redesign. The State Foresters have a central role to play in identifying priorities, focusing on key landscapes, and achieving desired outcomes on a landscape scale—outcomes that make a difference—outcomes that go beyond the scattered landowner assistance we have traditionally provided. Where we want to go and how we want to get there will depend on the piece of geography we choose. We will figure it out by working together.

We owe a debt of gratitude to you, the State Foresters. You have played a leading role in the policy discussions surrounding landscape-scale conservation, and we are grateful for your leadership and support. You have applied Redesign and the concept of high-priority landscapes. You have helped bring our joint policy agenda to the national forefront, advancing policies that affect the nation's forests, such as the FLAME Act, the forestry-related provisions in the Farm Bill, and the Forest Landscape Restoration Act. These efforts germinated the dialogue that has made landscape-scale conservation a priority for the Forest Service.

I will briefly turn to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. As you might know, we are spending \$1.15 billion on projects under the act, and we expect to create about 20,000 jobs over the 2-year life of the program. Funding is limited; we received many more proposals than we could fund, and many deserving projects could not be funded. However, we are proud of our accomplishments. As of early this month, we had announced more than 500 projects in 47 states, 2 territories, and the District of Columbia. Many of the projects address high-priority forestry needs, such as fuels and forest health treatments and biomass utilization. Our involvement has helped to stimulate collaborative efforts related to restoration, climate change, fire and fuels, and landscape-scale conservation.

Forest Service Priorities

I readily acknowledge that we have not done a great job of explaining and sharing the importance of the nation's forests—their value and all the benefits that most just take for granted. Our job is to help the public understand the importance of forests for clean air and water, for climate regulation, for wildlife habitat, for outdoor recreation—for all the ecosystem services that Americans want and need.

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The bottom line is this: We are committed to sustaining the *nation's* forests, especially in an era of climate change. We need to restore the resilience of America's forests to disturbances of all kinds. The treatments needed will improve watershed health, increase water quantity, improve water quality, generate rural prosperity, and meet our shared vision of healthy, resilient forests. Those are our priorities.

But none of this can happen on a piecemeal scale. It has to be on a scale that supersedes ownership. Landscape-scale conservation brings landowners and stakeholders together across boundaries to decide on common goals for the landscapes they share. It brings them together to achieve long-term outcomes. Our collective responsibility is to work through landscape-scale conservation to meet public expectations for all the services people get from forested landscapes.

Leadership Challenge

Landscape-scale conservation could be a turning point in how our nation approaches forestry. It depends, in large part, on you. I want you to know that we stand ready to work together—to increase our efforts and to increase the results we can achieve together.

In closing, I ask for your help in understanding specifically what a collaborative all-lands approach will mean. I challenge you to consider three questions:

- What will landscape-scale conservation take?
- What will you need from the Forest Service to make landscape-scale conservation work?
- What will you deliver on behalf of landscape-scale conservation?

These are intended as specific questions for a dialogue within a timeframe of, say, 30 to 60 days.

In closing, we have a great opportunity to build on the progress we have made through State and Private Forestry Redesign. The Secretary has expressed specific support for an all-lands approach, but it will entail a new kind of leadership.

The challenge before us, in a nutshell, is this: to break old parochial habits of thinking and acting and to work instead across boundaries to sustain the forests we all share.

Thank you.