

Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition

Forest Priorities for the 2012 Farm Bill | January 2011

Congress and the administration must work to ensure that the Farm Bill provides the necessary resources to support the healthy management and conservation of America's private and family-owned forests that provide a multitude of public benefits.

Forests in the 2008 Farm Bill: A Strong Beginning

The 2008 Farm Bill added new opportunities to increase conservation and improve management of private forests. Congress affirmed forests' importance to America's economic vitality and quality of life and put forest conservation on par with agriculture land conservation. These investments in private forests for the public good were a strong beginning.

Since enactment of the 2008 bill, funding has supported projects such as wildlife habitat improvement, water quality improvement, carbon sequestration, wetlands restoration, insect and disease mitigation, controlled burning, reforestation, windbreak plantings, and firebreaks that improved the health of America's private forests.

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding for forests increased by nearly 134 percent from 2007 to 2009.
- Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) funding for forests nearly quadrupled to almost \$8 million in the same time.
- In 2009, the U.S. Forest Service Forest Stewardship Program helped nearly 16,000 forest owners develop forest stewardship plans covering over 2 million acres, bringing the total acreage covered by forest stewardship plans to 34 million. Monitoring shows that 86 percent of acres enrolled in the program are managed consistent with these plans.
- More than one million forested acres are enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program, nearly meeting the program's limit on forested acreage that can be enrolled annually.

While this is a good start, improvements are needed to ensure that more landowners have access to assistance, to streamline programs across agencies, and to expand conservation.

Why Forests in the Farm Bill?

While the amount of forest land and agricultural land are similar, there are 11 million private forest owners in America as compared with two million farmers. Despite these numbers, the investment in private forests in the Farm Bill lags significantly behind funding levels for farmers. Investments in forestry programs have a multiplying positive impact on jobs, rural economies, the environment and Americans' quality of life.

Jobs/Rural Economies

- Forestry and related industries support more than 2.8 million family-wage jobs.
- Investments in forestry equates to a strong return on investment—every 1,000 acres of private forests supports an average of 8 jobs.
- Forests are part of the rural landscape. Almost half of family forestland is associated with a farm.
- 92 percent of trees harvested for the wood products we use every day come from private forests.¹
- Forests can supply renewable biomass for electricity and fuels to help meet the nation's renewable energy goals.
- Forest protection can save billions of dollars. In the Catskill/Delaware watershed, paying upstream landowners to keep land in forests and practice good management helped avoid \$8-9 billion in costs for a filtration system. Watershed preservation costs \$1.5 billion and supported rural communities upstream.²

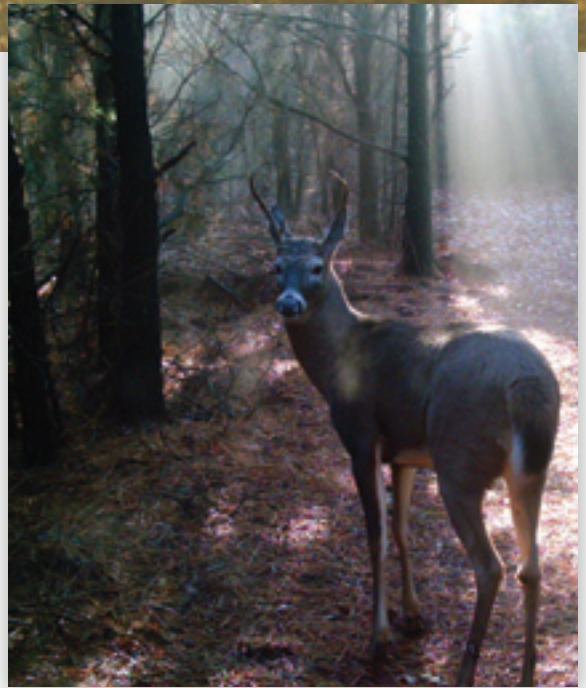


Photo: Tony Jewell, Seaford, Delaware



Holding the fire line during wildlife habitat burns in Tallahassee, Florida. Photo by Emilie Cooper.

Environment

- 53 percent of the water supply of the lower 48 states originates in forests with one quarter of the supply originating in private forests. Keeping forests healthy reduces infrastructure costs to cities and towns.³
- Forests provide the most immediate, efficient and cost-effective solution to reducing carbon in the atmosphere. Currently forests annually absorb 12 percent of America's carbon emissions and with improved management this could rise to 20 percent.
- 60 percent of at-risk plants and animals rely on private forests.

Quality of Life

- Family forests are fundamental to maintaining America's conservation ethic and connecting people to nature.
- The 15 million Americans who hunt and the 55 million who fish depend on private forests for most of the habitat for fish and wildlife.

Threats To Private Forests

Even as Americans rely on private forests to provide multiple benefits, these forests are under pressure from a variety of societal, economic, and environmental threats—making the need for conservation and management assistance for family forest owners even greater. In June 2010, state forestry agencies in all the states, territories and the District of Columbia completed Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies—an important outcome of the 2008 Farm Bill. A number of threats to private forests were identified in the assessments and strategies including:



Loss of Forest Land to Commercial and Residential Development

- 57 million acres of private forests, an area larger than the entire state of Idaho, will be threatened by development in the next two decades.⁴ Forest fragmentation, urbanization and forest conversion to other uses, all compound the threats to forest health.⁵

Impairments to Forested Watersheds

- A recent USDA study highlighted that over 100 watersheds, which supply water to millions of Americans, will face significant impacts on water quality and availability as development pressures increase. Additionally, as climate change and drought persist, water availability across the country is gravely threatened, an issue which forest cover and sustainable forest management can help rectify.

Infestations of Invasive Species and other Insects and Diseases

- According to the US Forest Service, roughly 58 million acres of forests are at risk of increased mortality due to insects and disease. Many of these infestations will require management on the part of private forest owners to minimize damages to their woodlands. In fact, invasive species result in over \$138 billion in damages each year, part of which is damage to private forests.

Increasing Impacts of Climate Change

- Changes in precipitation, temperature, fire intensity and severity, increased CO₂ concentrations, pest outbreaks and other factors often associated with climate change threaten to transform forest ecosystems and wildlife habitat by altering their composition and shifting their distribution. Forest management activities can help forests adapt and continue to provide wildlife habitat and other essential ecosystems services.⁶

Increasing Wildfires and Growth in the Interface between Homes and Forests

- The U.S. Forest Service projects that roughly 400 million acres of private forests are at risk of wildfires. In many cases, the greatest fire risk is in areas where forests connect with urban areas.⁷ Since 1970, there has been a 50 percent increase in the interface between homes and forests, making wildfires an increasing threat to human life and property. Both of these issues mean higher management costs and increasing management needs on the part of private forest owners.

Changing ownerships of private lands

- An intergenerational transfer affecting more than half of America's family forests is beginning: 170 million acres of forests are owned by landowners 55 years or older. These forests are at risk of being split into smaller parcels and developed, as they change hands and are sold or passed down.

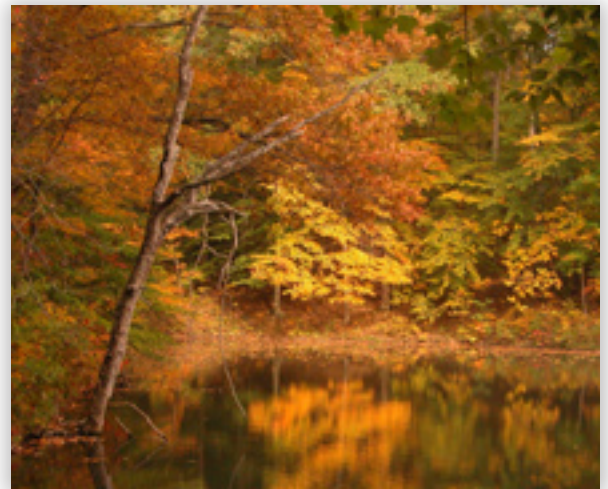
Limited stewardship

- Only four percent of the 11 million family forest owners in America have a forest management plan. This leaves 216 million acres without a sustainable management plan.

What More Needs to be Done

To ensure that America's private forests continue to provide nature's benefits that every American benefits from and to alleviate the threats to America's private forests, Congress should:

- 1 Provide sufficient funding for USDA conservation and forestry programs** (including agroforestry) through the 2012 Farm Bill to help satisfy the unmet need for more conservation practices.
- 2 Streamline program requirements for forest landowners** to improve delivery of conservation and forestry programs, maximizing resources available for more conservation practices.
- 3 Boost capacity to provide technical assistance and outreach for family and other private forest owners**, especially landowners who are currently not engaged in conservation or management of their lands. State forestry agencies, non-governmental organizations and other private sector technical service providers should be utilized to reach landowners whose forests provide vital services and benefits to the American public.
- 4 Focus conservation and forestry programs to accomplish landscape level conservation goals.** Maximize ability of programs to address important forest issues and threats, especially those identified by the state forest resource assessments and strategies and state wildlife action plans. This should include continued support for regular updates to these state level efforts.
- 5 Promote policies for sustainably producing forest biomass for renewable energy and other forest products** from well-managed forests.
- 6 Encourage and facilitate the development of markets and incentives for ecosystem services** from private forests, building on the 2008 Farm Bill's directive.
- 7 Strengthen forest research, education, extension offices, and forest inventory capacity** to address current and future forestry and conservation needs.
- 8 Implement education strategies** to ensure a future pool of forestry professionals.



Endnotes

- 1 Stein, Susan M., et al., "Private Forests, Public Benefits: Increased Housing Density and Other Pressures on Private Forest Contributions," USDA Forest Service General Technical Report PNW-GTR-795, December 2009.
- 2 Kenny, Alice, "Ecosystem Services in the New York City Watershed," Ecosystems Marketplace, February 2006.
- 3 Stein, Susan M., et al., "Private Forests, Public Benefits: Increased Housing Density and Other Pressures on Private Forest Contributions," USDA Forest Service General Technical Report PNW-GTR-795, December 2009.
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Summary and Analysis of Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies 2010, USDA Forest Service, 2010.
- 6 Pimentel, D.; R. Zuniga and D., Morrison (2005). "Update on the environmental and economic costs associated with alien-invasive species in the United States." Ecological Economics 52: 273-288
- 7 Fire and Fuels Buildup, USDA Forest Service, 2003.

The Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition

American Bird Conservancy
American Forests
American Forest & Paper Association
American Forest Foundation
American Forest Resource Council
American Loggers Council
American Rivers
Appalachian Mountain Club
Association of Consulting Foresters
Association for Temperate Agroforestry
Biomass Thermal Energy Council
CarbonVerde
Conservation Forestry
Defenders of Wildlife
Forest Guild
Forest Resources Association
Fountains America
Hardwood Federation
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Association of State Foresters
National Association of University Forest Resource Programs
National Network of Forest Practitioners
National Wildlife Federation
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Woodland Owners Association
Northern Forest Center
Pinchot Institute for Conservation
Quail Unlimited
Ruffed Grouse Society
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
Sustainable Northwest
Society of American Foresters
The Conservation Fund
The Nature Conservancy
The Pacific Forest Trust
Trust for Public Land
Wildlife Mississippi