

A HEALTHY FOREST does not happen *by accident.*

June 2011

HEALTHY FORESTS IN AMERICA are critical to public health and well-being and are part of our national infrastructure just like roads and bridges. They filter our air and water, provide jobs and a wealth of paper and wood products, and are places where our children and grandchildren enjoy wildlife and nature. These benefits we enjoy from our forests don't happen by chance. Forest Action Plans in every state and territory are guiding the work of forestry professionals and supporting the goals of family forest owners to manage and conserve forests with future generations in mind.

Forests are under threat and need protection.

Forest Action Plans represent the first-ever comprehensive assessment of America's forest resources across all lands--public, private, rural and urban--and offer proactive strategies that state forestry

these tough economic times. They feature state-specific strategies based on local expertise and extensive public input. By linking the Forest Action Plans with our national conservation and economic goals, they should help facilitate long-term decisions for investing state, federal, and other resources where there is the greatest need.

We can't do it alone.

Forest Action Plans reflect the best scientific information available and extensive public input, and are an incredible insight into the state of America's forests.



FOREST ACTION PLANS

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) is proud to represent the 59 state and territorial forestry agencies responsible for helping America's family forest owners accomplish sound forestry practices for present and future generations. State foresters work closely with other state and federal land management agencies as well as myriad local and non-profit partners in accomplishing their work. One of their core roles is delivering the State & Private Forestry (S&PF) programs of the USDA Forest Service. NASF is working closely with the Forest Service to connect the priorities identified in the Forest Action Plans with national conservation goals.

For more information

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Sixty-two percent of voters believe the government owns the most forest land in this country. In reality, most of America's forests are owned by individuals and families.

Source: NASF Voter Attitudes Poll, April 2011

agencies are using to conserve, protect and enhance the trees and forests we depend on. They are invaluable at a time when tree mortality is on the rise due to disease and invasive pests; wildfires continue to increase in size and intensity; ecosystems struggle to adapt to climate change disturbances; and forests are being permanently converted to non-forest uses at a rate of 1 million acres per year.

Forest Action Plans are the right kind of solution.

Today there are increasing pressures to do more with less, as budgets shrink and priorities change. Forest Action Plans target resources efficiently in

According to the plans, the primary trends and threats facing the nation's forests include changing ownerships of private lands, increased urbanization and conversion of forestlands to other uses, and the effects of climate change, wildfire, and invasive species. Each of these issues is intertwined with the others. Success depends on healthy partnerships between local landowners, state agencies, federal and tribal landowners and private organizations. The State and Private Forestry programs of the USDA Forest Service maximize our collective efforts by leveraging these partnerships in communities and rural areas across the country.

www.forestationplans.org



CONNECTING THE DOTS: NATIONAL FOREST TRENDS

Every Forest Action Plan was read and analyzed by forestry experts to stitch together a national picture of America's forests based on the major issues identified in each state and territory's action plan. What emerged were a number of trends affecting forests across the U.S., with state- and region-specific strategies for addressing them.

Keeping Forests Forested

Forest fragmentation and conversion to other uses are significant impediments to managing forests for their sustainability and health. Several states note that the value of the land for real estate often is significantly higher than its value as a natural resource. Many state Forest Action Plans include strategies for enhancing the financial viability of private forest ownership

will be better able to adapt to the effects of climate change. A number of strategic approaches by state forestry agencies and the Forest Health Program of the USDA Forest Service are helping to slow the spread of invasives, restore damaged habitats, and educate the public.

Working with Landowners

According to the National Woodland Owners Survey, only four percent of family forest owners have a written management plan. As a result, most Forest Action Plans have strategies focused on outreach and support to private forest landowners. State agencies

will spread more rapidly and cause more devastating effects; and that wildfires will increase in frequency and severity. The islands are concerned with rising sea-level and increasing devastation from tropical storms. In response, Forest Action Plans identify strategies to manage forests for resilience, such as increasing the diversity in forest



structure and composition. Many states also see value in creating a market for the carbon sequestration benefits forests provide. Such a system could help combat forest fragmentation by creating an incentive (carbon credits) for retaining contiguous forests and would provide incentives for better and more active management of sustainable forests.

Forest Markets

Opportunities to maintain and establish forest markets are being addressed by many states in their Forest Action Plans. Markets provide

“ Our forests face significant threats and we must work together to address those threats... As budgets tighten, [Forest Action Plans] may prove invaluable in helping us focus our dollars for maximum effect.”

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, August 9, 2010



and for providing increased levels of customer service and technical assistance to private landowners.

Invasive Pests

As the movement of people and goods expands globally, damaging invasive species are arriving at an increasing rate. More and more often, foresters are dealing with dead and dying trees that have fallen victim to an invasive species. The results are destroyed habitat, economic loss of forest products and the void in cities, towns and natural areas once populated by thriving trees and forests. Healthier forests are better able to withstand the assault from invasive insects and pathogens and

deliver expertise and planning assistance through the Forest Stewardship Program as well as conservation and ownership transition assistance provided through the Forest Legacy Program.

Climate, Carbon, and Biomass Energy

Climate change is of concern to all regions of the nation, although the specifics vary. On the mainland, states' are concerned that ranges of important commercial trees will migrate north; that droughts, flood, and other severe weather will increase in frequency and severity and increase damage to forests; that invasive plants, insects, and

economic incentive for private landowners to increase the health of their forests. Without viable markets, however, the expense for many private landowners is too great. Some states point out that development of markets for biomass energy for example does not come without risks. Unless managed well, non-sustainable or improper biomass extraction could occur as energy demands increase, which could threaten water quality and quantity in some regions. States suggest that riparian areas in particular should be protected through best management practices and regulatory oversight.

Wildfire, Fuels, and Urbanization

Fire is a threat to forest health throughout the nation. While fire is a natural occurrence in the forest ecosystems of the continental U.S., many forests now exhibit dangerously high fuel loads. In addition, drought, insects, and disease have weakened trees and made them more prone to fire. As urban areas expand, the number of acres where man-made improvements are built close to, or within, natural terrain is also expanding. Prescribed burning is an important tool to maintain native species and ecosystems because they are fire-adapted; it also helps reduce fuel loads thereby reducing the intensity of naturally occurring wildland fires. However, in a more urbanized forest, landowners tend to be opposed to prescribed fire for many reasons, including loss of view; air quality impacts; and threats to people, homes, and other structures. Many Forest Action Plans propose greater outreach to landowners to educate them on the need for good forest management and stewardship. State forestry agencies respond to 75% of all wildfires in this country. Forest

Action Plans guide how they work with federal, state and local partners to maintain resilient landscapes, create fire-adapted communities, and respond to wildfires.

Preparedness and Prevention

Most states cited critical preparedness needs, including firefighter safety and training, fire planning, increased initial attack



capability, and mobilization readiness, for the efficient suppression and prevention of wildfires. Wildfire prevention and mitigation, including preventing arson, was another common land management strategy.

Forests Where People Live

Urban forests provide a number of benefits to communities, including stormwater management, energy conservation, and improved quality of life. Although the nation's urban and suburban forests are integral parts of working forest landscapes, they are often not adequately conserved, utilized, or managed, and lack of funds and expertise often limit their health. State foresters express concern that, while these forests play a crucial role in providing needed shade, carbon sequestration, and improved water quality, the resources needed to help maintain the health and

Ninety-two percent of voters believe that helping to keep the air clean is a very important benefit of forests. The same number believe forests' role in filtering water is highly important. Appreciation of the economic benefits of forests has also increased sharply in recent years.

Source: NASF Voter Attitudes Poll, April 2011

safety of these trees often are lacking. Many Forest Action Plans place emphasis on the benefits of trees and forests as green infrastructure that contributes to the quality of life in communities. Strategies seek to protect and maintain existing tree cover, implement best management practices, and engage local officials and the public in planning, sustaining, and improving trees and forests in and around cities, suburbs, and towns.

Water Quantity and Quality

Water shortages from drought and changes in weather patterns are of more significant concern for the arid Western states, but states in the South also are expressing concern. Clean and safe drinking water is one of the most valued commodities in the Northeast. Throughout the U.S., water quality is a significant concern as areas of urbanization increase and forests become more fragmented, with decreasing forest health. Forests provide clean water and are the preferred land use in municipal watersheds. Forest Action Plans have identified a range of strategies for protecting, monitoring, and/or restoring high-priority watersheds, headwaters, riparian areas, and wetlands. Other common themes include protecting and enhancing the health of urban watersheds and using forest ecosystems as a solution to address nonpoint source pollution on agricultural lands.



Investing in the Forest Action Plans to protect Forests: Good for people and wildlife, now and into the future.

Who developed the Forest Action Plans?

Through the 2008 Farm Bill, Congress charged forestry agencies in the states and U.S. territories with assessing the forests within their boundaries and developing strategies for addressing the threats they face. State forestry agencies have a long history of working with landowners, conservation groups, industry and other state and federal partners to preserve, manage and protect the nation's forests. They drew on these partnerships, public input, and the expertise of foresters and land managers to develop the Forest Action Plans, known technically as Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies.

What other groups contributed to the plans?

Many states engaged in a wide-ranging stakeholder involvement process that included meetings, polls, surveys, and other outreach efforts to state agencies, private landowners, tribes and indigenous peoples, and other user groups. They also consulted existing resources such as Community Wildfire Protection Plans, State Wildlife Action Plans, the Forest Legacy Program and National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans.

What do the Forest Action Plans say?

Each plan is unique to the forests and issues of its respective state or territory. Some states identified the *issues* of greatest priority among all lands, such as threats from invasive species, development or wildfire. Others identified priority *areas* with the greatest need, like the Chesapeake Bay watershed in Maryland, the Black Hills of South Dakota, or the Appalachian region of Kentucky. Each Forest Action Plan reflects a different set of local issues, management needs, and priorities, so no two look alike. However, all plans are tackling three national priorities: conserve working forests, protect forests from threats, and enhance public benefits from trees and forests.

What kinds of strategies are in the Forest Action Plans?

The Forest Action Plans focus on all lands—state, private, tribal, and federal—and identify strategies to target resources efficiently, especially in these tough economic times. The Forest Action Plans employ a variety of tools for protecting and conserving forests and the benefits they provide to people, from quarantines related to invasive species, prescribed fire, practices to reduce hazardous fuels buildup, to enhanced landowner outreach and education on sound forestry practices. The plans also identify data gaps—the information we need in order to improve our understanding of the quantity and quality of forest resources, and the risk and impact of forest threats to better decide which steps to take. States also value and make significant use of programs under State & Private Forestry in the USDA Forest Service, including Forest Health, Forest Stewardship, and Forest Legacy.

How do the Forest Action Plans track progress?

Assessing forest resources and engaging in strategic planning are not new for many states and territories. For others, the action plan process presented an opportunity to revise their usual agency planning approach. The Forest Action Plans will be formally updated every five years, providing an ongoing window into the changes on the landscape.

Action plans with an eye to the future.

Forest Action Plans can guide us toward healthier and more resilient landscapes; better and more fire-adapted communities; improved habitat, air, and water quality; and a host of other public benefits derived from actively and sustainably managed forests. By addressing problems before they arrive, the action plans can save us money over the long term. Taken together, they create – for the first time – a nationwide approach to protecting forests and their benefits to people and wildlife.