



Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition

Photo: David Harvey, Dixfield, Maine

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 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 such projects 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.

The following Farm Bill programs have been enhanced to invest in the health of private forests:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding for forests increased by nearly 134% 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 Forest Stewardship Program helped nearly 16,000 forest owners develop management plans covering over 2 million acres, bringing the total acreage covered by forest stewardship plans to 34 million. US Forest Service monitoring found that 86% of acres enrolled in the program are managed consistent with landowners' Forest Stewardship Plans.
- Participation by forest owners in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) nearly met its cap of 10% for 2009, enrolling more than one million acres of forest land.

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

Why Forests in the Farm Bill?

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



Photo: Tony Jewell, Seaford, Delaware

Jobs/Rural Economies

- Forestry and related industries directly and indirectly support more than 2.8 million family-wage jobs.
- Investments in forestry jobs equate to a stronger return on investment — every 1,000 acres of private forests supports an average of 8 jobs.
- Forests are part of the rural landscape. Almost ½ of family forest land is associated with a farm.
- 92% of trees harvested for the wood products we use every day come from private forests.¹
- Forests can supply renewable biomass for electricity, heat, 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

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 absorb 12% of America's carbon dioxide emissions and with improved management this could rise to 20%.
- 60% 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



Photo:USFWS

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 (including agroforestry) programs 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.



¹Stein, 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.

²Kenny, Alice, "Ecosystem Services in the New York City Watershed," Ecosystems Marketplace, February 2006.

³Stein, 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.

⁴Ibid

⁵Summary and Analysis of Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies 2010, USDA Forest Service, 2010.

⁶Pimentel, 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

⁷Fire and Fuels Buildup, USDA Forest Service, 2003.

Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition

American Bird Conservancy

American Forests

American Forest Foundation

American Forest & Paper Association

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

Environmental Defense Fund

Forest Guild

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