

Keep Working Forests Working

Private Forests, Public Benefits

Private working forests are a vital part of America's natural resources infrastructure, contributing significantly to the quality of life enjoyed by all Americans. In addition to open space and aesthetics, private working forests provide important consumer products, clean water and air, energy, wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities, and strengthen rural economies, just to name a few of their many public benefits. They are also key to addressing critical issues facing our nation today: increasing our use of renewable energy, offering solutions to address climate change, maintaining a healthy natural environment, and providing a stable source of jobs that support American families.

Because private forests are so fundamental to meeting the pressing and future needs of our nation, tapping their potential as part of America's critical infrastructure is a necessary component of the nation's overall economic, social, and ecological health and productivity. All Americans benefit from the fact that eighty percent of renewable biomass energy comes from wood, ten percent of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions is absorbed by forests, eighty-six percent of forestland is available for recreation, fifty-three percent of all freshwater in the U.S. originates on forestland, and 689 tree species and 1,486 terrestrial animals species live in our forests.ⁱⁱ It is through such abundance that America's forests sustainably account for more than \$200 billion a year in sales of consumer products and services, employ more than 1 million people, and further the nation's environmental and ecological goals.ⁱ

The public benefits of working forests are derived from over 755 million acres of forests in the United States – the fourth largest acreage in the world and an amount that has remained relatively stable over the past 100 years.ⁱⁱ Private forests account for more than 427 million acres, owned by over 10 million private landowners.ⁱⁱⁱ

Private forest acreage in the United States has remained relatively stable over the past fifty years, and standing timber inventory on these forestlands has increased.ⁱⁱ A primary reason for this is viable markets for the goods and services private forests provide. These markets provide the opportunity for an economic return to private forest owners, which translates into long-term investments that promote forest retention and expansion and thereby a continuation of environmental, economic and social benefits to society.

But the success of the past does not secure the future. As existing markets weaken or disappear, goods, services and uses associated with working forests are becoming less competitive with other economic uses of private forest land over time. While some conversion from forests to other uses is acceptable to accommodate a growing population or to optimize land use, it is critical to develop policies and programs that help working forests remain competitive with other land uses and thereby help sustain the many benefits they provide as part of our nation's natural resources infrastructure. This is especially critical as we advance our efforts to meet our nation's growing need for renewable energy, climate change solutions, a healthier environment, and family-waged jobs in rural communities.

A Call to Action. Sustaining and enhancing the value of private working forests both to society and to forest owners is of vital national importance and essential to meet some of our nation's most pressing needs, including renewable energy, addressing greenhouse gas emissions, a healthy

environment, and jobs in rural communities. To achieve this, the forestry community, consisting of forest owners, conservation and wildlife groups, resource professionals, environmental organizations and other interests call for the development of an actionable national policy platform focusing on three areas:

I. Strengthen existing and emerging markets for goods and services working forests can provide. Working forests depend on strong and dependable existing and new markets for forest-derived products and services. Such markets benefit society, the environment and forest owners alike, because they put forest owners in an economic position that incentivizes continued investment in sound forest management over the long term. Areas of focus should include:

- Steps to maintain traditional markets that provide sustainably produced consumer goods and services, such as housing materials, recyclable products and recreation.
- Support for emerging and potential markets such as renewable energy and fuels, green building, and wood-based technologies.
- The promotion and development of markets for environmental services, such as climate change mitigation and carbon offsets, enhancement of water quality and quantity; endangered species conservation and other services, including the effective utilization of new authorities provided under the 2008 Farm Bill.

II. Support and align public and private investments, partnerships and policies to maintain working forest landscapes. Public and private investments are an important means of maintaining key economic, social and environmental benefits of working forests. Investments can include both direct investments in forest management and conservation and investments in the infrastructure that supports forest stewardship and market development. Market-oriented public/private partnerships are frequently among the most effective forms of such investment. Areas of focus should include:

- Developing and improving tax provisions supporting forest conservation that apply to all classes of forest ownership.
- Strengthening investments in public/private conservation partnerships that equitably benefit both forest owners and the environment and that demonstrate results. Such partnerships may include existing programs, such as Forest Legacy and the Healthy Forests Reserve Program, or may require the improvement of existing or the development of new investment or partnership tools.
- Supporting targeted and effective research and development and strengthening the workforce engaged in private forest management.

III. Align government policies to support the long-term viability of working forests.

Over time, Federal, state and local governments have established policies affecting private forests in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes. Such policies should both align with one another and support the long-term viability of working forests. A conscious effort to

promote and coordinate government policies to help sustain working forests is essential to maintaining the benefits they can provide over the long term. Areas of focus should include:

- Identifying and reforming policies that discourage private forest ownership or investment in private forest stewardship.
- Developing mechanisms to align new and existing policies affecting private forests with the objective of sustaining private working forests over the long term.

Developing a Plan of Action. The undersigned seek to work with Congress, the Administration, and all interested parties who support working forests to advance the concepts in this platform and identify priority action items that will most effectively sustain and enhance the value of private working forests across landscapes over time. This approach contemplates utilizing the considerable body of research on private forest management that has already been done, developing from this information a set of specific recommendations for policy makers to consider, and working with policy makers to put in place national policies to reaffirm that our private forests are a vital part of our nation's natural resources infrastructure for the long term.

ⁱ American Forest and Paper Association. "Our Industry: Economic Impact." <http://afandpa.org/ourindustry.aspx?id=35> (accessed July 15, 2009).

ⁱⁱ Society of American Foresters. *The State of America's Forests*. 2007.