

**TITLE VIII
FORESTRY**

SUMMARY OF FORESTRY TITLE REFORM

Recommendations In Brief

Encourage states and private forest owners to proactively manage and preserve their forests through innovative initiatives. Create a wood-to-energy program to support better utilization of low value woody biomass for energy production.

Problem

Complex issues are facing our nation's forest owners, yet only 30 million of the nation's 345 million acres of private nonindustrial forestland is covered by Forest Stewardship Plans to ensure sustainability.

Forest landowners face increased pressures to convert their forestland to development – houses, roads, and buildings continue to encroach. Land covered by urban areas has more than doubled over the last 40 years, and more than 44 million acres of private forests are at-risk of being developed by the year 2030. Much of this development is expected on the urban fringe, threatening open spaces and increasing fire prone areas, potentially putting more people and property in harms way.

Additionally, our nation's forests contain enormous amounts of woody biomass that cause waste disposal problems, degrade forest health, and add fuel that can drive uncharacteristic wild land fires. Often, forest thinning as well as forest fires, insect damage, and disease can generate large quantities of biomass that has little commercial value. Currently, these wastes are not reused or recycled. Technological advancement could provide a pathway to better utilize these products, contributing to forest health and protection while helping to meet our nation's energy needs.

These forestry problems were noted during USDA Farm Bill Forums. Robert from New York said, "The need to invest in sustainable forestry continues and remains a critical tool that will address such modern environmental challenges as global climate change, sprawl, and energy independence. A Forestry Title within the 2007 farm bill is required to promote the sustainable use and management of the nation's private forest lands." And Kristen from Massachusetts added, "Forests provide important ecosystem services like clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, and serve as a soil bank for high-value soils... The next farm bill must have a major emphasis on forests as well as farmlands, including a separate Forestry Title to ensure that these programs receive adequate attention."

Recommended Solution

The Administration is recommending authorization of several new initiatives within Title VIII of the farm bill – entitled "Forestry." Following is a list of the major components of the package.

1. Provide technical and financial assistance to each state forestry agency for the development and implementation of a Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Plan. (For further information, see the proposal entitled "Comprehensive Statewide Forest Planning" on page 137.)

2. Create a competitive landscape scale grant program to develop innovative solutions that address local forest management issues; develop local nontraditional forest product markets; and stimulate local economies through creation of value-added forest product industries. (For further information, see the proposal entitled “Landscape Scale Forestry Competitive Grant Program” on page 138.)
3. Initiate a new \$150 million wood-to-energy program over 10 years to accelerate development and use of new technologies to more productively utilize low-value woody biomass resources, offsetting the demand for fossil fuels and improving the forest health. (For further information, see the proposal entitled “Forest Wood to Energy” on pages 139 – 140.)
4. Create a Community Forests Working Lands Program to: 1) provide financial support to communities for the acquisition and conservation of community forests and 2) provide technical assistance to communities engaged in forest resource planning. (For further information, see the proposal entitled “Community Forests Working Lands Program” on page 141.)

COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE FOREST PLANNING

Recommendation In Brief

Provide technical and financial assistance to each state forestry agency for the development and implementation of a Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Plan.

Problem

Even as the public demand for products and amenities associated with forestlands grows, private forest landowners are faced with increased pressure to convert their forestland to development. More than 44 million acres of private forests are at risk of being developed by 2030. Much of this growth is in fire prone areas, adding to the complexity of managing fire adapted ecosystems and potentially putting more people and property in danger.

Recommended Solution

The Administration recommends initiating a program to provide technical and financial assistance for the development and implementation of Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Plans. This new initiative is modeled after a successful Department of Interior program that provides states with federal financial assistance to develop comprehensive plans to conserve wildlife within their boundaries.

These new assessments and plans would: identify critical forest resource areas; incorporate existing forest management plans; address national priorities and regional cross-boundary needs; and provide a comprehensive framework for management, public participation, monitoring, and grants administration. The plans, which would be reviewed by the Forest Service, would provide a formal multi-year tool to direct programs and funding into a cohesive integrated forest management strategy.

A comprehensive approach to forest management is necessary to sustain the benefits of forestlands in the face of increasing and conflicting demands. While a few states have begun making significant progress towards managing forests on a broad scale, accelerating and expanding strategic landscape-scale forestry planning is needed to fully address the threats facing these lands. USDA proposes up to \$65 million in discretionary funding for this new initiative.

Background

Nationwide, 430 million acres of forestlands are privately owned. These lands play a critical role in generating drinking water, controlling floods, storing carbon, producing timber and other wood products, sustaining biodiversity, and providing outdoor recreation for millions of Americans. Comprehensive forest management planning is necessary to ensure forests can continue to provide critical ecosystem services and products.

LANDSCAPE SCALE FORESTRY COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Recommendation in Brief

Create a competitive landscape scale grant program to develop innovative solutions that address local forest management issues; develop local nontraditional forest product markets; and stimulate local economies through creation of value-added forest product industries.

Problem

Even as the public demand for products and amenities associated with forestlands grows, private forest landowners are faced with increased pressure to convert their forest land to development. With 63 percent of family forest landowners over 55 years old and 33 percent over 65, a substantial portion of the Nation's private forestlands will be transferred during the next two decades. The Forest Service estimates that 44 million acres of forestland is at risk of conversion or fragmentation by 2030.

While small scale or individual landowner focused programs are helpful, they cannot alone address the complex issues of today's current forestry scenarios - global markets, urban sprawl, and public disconnection with natural environment. As the Kansas State Forester stated at a farm bill forum, "To meet our objectives on priorities and [make] a measurable difference, I believe a landscape approach to implementing programs is needed."

Recommended Solution

The Administration proposes the authorization of a new landscape scale competitive grant program to protect critical forest areas, generate income and employment through niche timber markets, and contribute to the economic health of rural communities. This cooperative conservation approach at the landscape scale is needed to maintain the environmental, social and economic benefits provided by healthy forest ecosystems.

The landscape scale of the grant program would ensure a comprehensive, coordinated approach to forest management and would ensure collaboration across ownership and jurisdictional boundaries. The competitive grant would provide "one-stop shopping" for grantees providing technical and financial assistance for all phases of a landscape level project from planning through implementation and management. The proposed program would authorize appropriations up to \$30 million annually.

Background

Landscape scale projects involve multiple watersheds. Competitive projects would be located in critical forest areas; would actively enroll new and underserved family forest owners; and would deliver on the ground projects that integrate private landowner goals, sustainable forestry goals, and sustainable community goals. State, county, local and tribal governments, conservation and environmental organizations and associations, private forest landowners, and academia would be eligible. Public/private partnerships

would be encouraged. Grant periods would be for 3-5 years to allow appropriate time to build capacity.

FOREST WOOD TO ENERGY

Recommendation In Brief

Initiate a new \$150 million wood-to-energy program over 10 years to accelerate development and use of new technologies to more productively utilize low-value woody biomass resources, offsetting the demand for fossil fuels and improving the forest health.

Problem

Public, private, and tribal forests contain enormous amounts of biomass. In many cases, woody biomass poses waste disposal problems, degrades forest health, and adds to fuel loads that contribute to uncharacteristic wild land fires. Millions of tons of woody biomass are available and must be disposed of at high costs. Because little commercial value is associated with wood generated by thinning operations or wood damaged by forest fires, insects, and disease, this wood is generally not reused or recycled in a sustainable manner.

This unique opportunity was not overlooked at USDA Farm bill Forums. For example, Daniel from Texas requested that the farm bill “invest in woody biomass technologies, including the use of woody biomass for energy, transportation fuels and other value added products. This would help to recover much of the lost infrastructure in logging and timber communities throughout the United States, while at the same time promoting healthy forests, reducing our dependence on foreign oil, creating jobs, and most importantly providing for national security.” And Dean from Minnesota echoed, “Agroforestry can contribute to energy independence through production of biomass energy from both herbaceous and woody perennials which also provide environmental benefits...The next farm bill should provide temporary support to biomass energy programs and other agroforestry systems until such systems become self-sustaining.”

Recommended Solution

The Administration proposes to establish a new Wood to Energy Program. This new initiative would:

1. Accelerate practical commercial development of cellulosic ethanol conversion from a diverse range of biobased products;
2. Increase use of Forest Service knowledge and technical capacity to advance research and commercialization of woody biomass as a transportation fuel;
3. Develop new or improved processes for wood to ethanol conversion, small scale wood to energy technology, biobased products from low-valued woody biomass sources, and technologies for separating high-value from low-value wood for primary and secondary processing; and
4. Apply new technologies, such as nanotechnology and biorefining, to product development.

The Forest Service would engage forest-based communities, entrepreneurs, small businesses, along with private investors in the implementation of this program to leverage Forest Service staff and other critical resources. The fiscal year 2006 Interior

Appropriations Conference Report provides up to \$5 million for this type of biomass research grants; we propose supplementing this investment with \$15 million annually in mandatory spending.

Background

Woody biomass is defined as woody materials that have historically been too small, scattered, or poor in quality to attract commercial buyers. Converting biomass to higher-value products and/or renewable energy can improve forest health; create thousands of rural-based jobs; millions of dollars in value-added revenue; and reduce dependence on imported oil.

COMMUNITY FORESTS WORKING LANDS PROGRAM

Recommendation in Brief

Create a Community Forests Working Lands Program to: 1) provide financial support to communities for the acquisition and conservation of community forests and 2) provide technical assistance to communities engaged in forest resource planning.

Problem

Forests at the urban fringe are being displaced as U.S. cities and towns are expanding, with new houses, roads, and buildings. The land covered by urban areas has more than doubled over the last 40 years with continued growth expected. The planning decisions of local governments significantly impact whether forests are protected or converted to other uses. Community planners make decisions about zoning, distribution of infrastructure, and development protocols that often affect the conservation of open spaces and forests. However, they are not often equipped to make informed decisions about the impact of land use on current or future forest resources. In some cases, community planners lack the financial or technical resources to create a community forest.

Recommended Solution

The Administration proposes the creation of the Community Forests Working Lands Program to provide financial and technical assistance to communities. The first element of the program would amend and complement the Forest Legacy program by providing funding for the conservation of forested tracts near cities and towns. Funding would enable local governments to designate and protect community forests through conservation easements and/or acquisition. The second element of the program would provide forest resource planning assistance to communities. The program would provide community-specific technical assistance, as well as general resources and training to help state and local planners better understand and manage their community forest resources. Community forests help protect environmentally important land within and near urban areas, provide a local source of timber and forest products, and also provide recreation and education opportunities for urban citizens. The program would be authorized up to \$65 million annually in discretionary funding.

Background

This conservation program specifically targets threatened forests near cities and towns because these lands are highly vulnerable to development pressure. Conservation of forests within and near communities play a critical role in protecting riparian habitats, purifying water, controlling floods, storing carbon, and providing outdoor recreation for urban populations. Community forests also enable citizen engagement in the management of their forests and the production of local forest products. As Dennis stated at the Vermont Farm Bill Forum, “We’re seeing a groundswell of interest at the local municipal level for communities to purchase and manage their own timberlands.”