



Climate Change and Reforestation

Forest Service Chief Gail Kimbell
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It's a pleasure to be here on behalf of the Forest Service together with the National Forest Foundation. Our mission, as many of you probably know, is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. We do that partly by working with partners like the National Forest Foundation to manage the 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands.

The national forests include 20 percent of the nation's forests. The other 80 percent is privately owned or is public land managed by other agencies—federal, state, and local. The Forest Service's conservation mission includes providing forest-based research findings and recommendations to all forest managers, and we work across ownership boundaries with a whole array of state, private, and federal partners.

The nation's forests are facing one of the gravest threats in our history: climate change. Temperature increases are already bringing changes in precipitation, in snowpacks, in streamflow, in wildfire severity, in forest pest activity, and in the range and behavior of some species of plants and animals. We don't know exactly what all the effects are or will be, although Forest Service scientists are working on it; we do expect the effects to be profound. In my own 30-plus years with the Forest Service, I have seen some of that change myself.

The challenge we face is threefold: first, doing what we can to understand climate change through research; second, doing what we can to minimize climate change; and third, doing what we can to mitigate the inevitable effects of climate change on ecosystems.

Forestry absolutely contributes, given that trees take up carbon. America's forests currently offset 10 percent or more of carbon emissions in the United States. Forest Service scientists tell us that the figure could be substantially higher by doing such things as planting more trees in urban areas, reforesting old farm fields, and ensuring that forests are healthy and growing.

We can also use forestry to counter the worst effects of climate change. Climate change raises stress levels on ecosystems. It has made them more vulnerable to drought, large wildfire, insects, and disease. The Forest Service is treating millions of acres each year to make forests more resistant to drought and more resilient to the effects of wildfire, infestation by insects, or disease.

Forest Service researchers are helping us lay the groundwork for what we can do. On national forests, we are working to determine where and how we might manage certain areas for more carbon sequestration. For example, we know we can sequester more carbon through the right

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kind of reforestation projects in the right places; and, with the help of the National Forest Foundation, people can contribute towards the needed funding.

That's the beauty of the system we are here to announce. Everyone in this room can go onto the National Forest Foundation website and do it in a matter of minutes. You can choose to offset your own carbon emissions by purchasing carbon offsets. The proceeds go toward growing trees on national forests, and the trees will take up carbon from the atmosphere.

Planting trees isn't the whole answer; there is a lot more that we can do to ameliorate the accumulation of greenhouse gases. But it's a start. By planting trees, Americans have an opportunity to contribute to the health, diversity, and productivity of their national forests, both for today and for the benefit of future generations.

I think that's something worth celebrating, and I'd like to thank the National Forest Foundation for making it possible.