

Forest Management

Forests are dynamic -- always growing, renewing, changing. An old-growth forest of hemlock and beech once stretched along northern Pennsylvania, but heavy logging between 1890 and 1930 left only pockets of that early forest in places like Hearts Content. Since the Forest Service began to manage the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) in 1923, a vibrant new forest of light-loving hardwoods like black cherry flourished, and today the ANF boasts some of the world's finest hardwood forests.

A new kind of forest management...

The Forest Service brought new concepts in forest management to the Allegheny Plateau -- multiple benefits and sustainability. The Organic Act of 1897 introduced the National Forest mission: to improve the forest, provide favorable conditions for water flows, and furnish a continuous supply of wood to meet people's needs. On these lands, *seedlings* for tomorrow's forest are the focus of forest management activities. Watersheds are managed to ensure clear water for fisheries like trout and clean drinking water for all.

Over time, various laws added other benefits like wilderness, heritage resources and grazing to the original ideas of watershed protection and continuous wood supply. The Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960 recognized outdoor recreation and habitat for wildlife and fisheries.

The motto "Land of Many Uses" captures the National Forest goal of a healthy, vigorous forest that provides wood products, watershed protection, a variety of wildlife habitats and recreational opportunities -- not only for us today, but in a sustainable way so future generations can enjoy these benefits, too.

Forests grow, change, evolve....

When the Allegheny National Forest was established in 1923, the immediate challenge was nurturing the young trees growing amongst logging slash on the recently-cleared hillsides. Until that happened, wildfires, floods and erosion were a threat. With care, the forests grew. Since they started growing at roughly the same time, most of the trees in today's second-growth forest on the Allegheny Plateau are the same age (70-100 years old).

Between 1900 and 1940, the young forest grew and evolved from openings to young forest to maturing forest. Each stage in forest development brought different benefits for people, wildlife and plants. Like a community, a forest is healthiest and offers the most benefits if it contains a *variety* of ages and species of plants and animals.

Young forests offer diverse vegetation like seedlings, saplings, wildflowers and berries. Deer, grouse, songbirds and other wildlife thrive with the abundant food and cover. Rapidly-growing trees soak up carbon, add lots of oxygen to the atmosphere, and protect soil. Taller trees shade streams, helping to regulate water temperature for aquatic life.

By the 1940s, the forest began to take on an appearance familiar to us today. The older trees provide acorns, cherries, and beech nuts for bear and turkey. Birds find sites for nests in the leafy tree crowns and plants like trillium prefer the filtered light of the maturing forest. In the 1940s, the Forest Service gradually resumed wood harvesting under strict research-based guidelines to ensure sustainability for future generations.

Abundant browse led to a dramatic increase in the deer population, which peaked in the 1940s and again in the late 1970s. Since the mid-1980s, the deer population has remained fairly constant -- although at a level higher in many places than the forest can support.

Today the trees are mature and able to provide quality hardwood for furniture and other needs. Foresters deal with challenges like deer, insects, disease, drought and competing vegetation such as fern through research and careful management.

Forest Research...

The Forest Service also established a research station for the Northeast in 1923. Soon, research scientists were studying complex relationships among vegetation, animals, soil, nutrients, weather and disease. For decades, scientists have shared both research results and management guidelines based on these results with the ANF, other public and private landowners, and other scientists.

Recreation on the ANF....

During the 1920s, recreation on the ANF focused mostly on dispersed activities like hunting and fishing. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps changed the face of National Forests across the country by building hundreds of recreation facilities, including Twin Lakes and Loleta Recreation Areas on the ANF. These and other facilities became popular after World War II when newly-mobile families discovered the joys of outdoor recreation.

The creation of the Allegheny Reservoir when the Kinzua Dam was completed in 1965 brought the most dramatic change to developed recreation on the ANF. Within ten years, a tremendous development program resulted in campgrounds, boat launches, beaches, picnic areas, hiking trails and overlooks around the reservoir shoreline and elsewhere throughout the forest.

Over time, people's changing and more sophisticated expectations led to campground improvements like electricity, hot showers, and baby-changing stations. Areas to watch wildlife (Buzzard Swamp, Little Drummer), trails for cross-country skiing and motorized recreation (all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles)

and fully accessible fishing piers, trails and restrooms have been added, too.

Multiple benefits, sustainability and the future...

Today, the Forest Service carries out a variety of management and research activities, providing multiple benefits with a strong scientific basis. Sometimes managers must designate different locations for activities that are not compatible, such as wilderness hiking and snowmobiling. Usually, though, management activities are compatible and benefit vegetation, wildlife and people.

For example, harvesting trees provides wood products that we all use and creates openings which allow sunlight to reach the forest floor to stimulate tree seedlings, berries and other plants that wildlife need. This allows for a diversity of tree ages and vegetation species, which provides a variety of wildlife habitats and ensures seedlings for tomorrow's forests. The young forest provides new opportunities for berry pickers, birdwatchers and hunters.

Defining the way a National Forest is to be managed can be controversial. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 required each National Forest to implement a Forest Plan with extensive public involvement, outlining a vision for how and where management activities will be emphasized. The ANF's Forest Plan was approved in 1986. Forest Plan amendments are done when new information or conditions warrant. As we turn toward the 21st century, forest managers, scientists and people who value National Forests must continue to work together to care for and sustain the forest today and for the future.