

## **Summary of Changes from the 2002 Farm Bill to the 2007 Farm Bill:**

Since the 2002 Farm Bill, conditions at both the global and local levels have changed. There have been increases in: 1) global climate change, 2) sprawl, 3) land use conversion, 4) housing density, and 5) parcelization. Working lands continue to be converted from natural resource uses like forest, range, and farmland to urban applications. As one commentator noted, “land shifting into urban use seldom shifts back.”

Changes have also occurred nationally at the federal level. There is now a greater need to achieve energy independence. This has produced a heightened sense of urgency related to energy imports and environmental impacts, with the potential for increased use of biomass for fuels, products, and power. In addition, though total funding for and the demand to participate in conservation via the Farm Bill has grown rapidly in recent years, 2007 Farm Bill funding will be limited. William O’Conner, Chief-of-Staff of the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture stated: “The political and economic climate surrounding the 2007 Farm Bill will be different from that of 2002, as we are now facing budget deficits, whereas the 2002 Bill was written at the end of a period of budget surpluses. There will simply be less money for funding government programs. Funding for any new program would have to come from existing program dollars. ....In times of tight budgets, the Committees tend to confine spending to essential programs that are already in existence.” According to the National Council On Private Forests, forests produce the largest single crop in the U.S., yet receive less than one-half of one percent of all commodity support.

The situation regarding forest lands is also different. Since 2002, the world timber supply and competition in the forest products industry have both increased. Globalization of capital markets has occurred. Sustainable forestry and forest certification have become significant issues. According to Jerry Franklin and Norm Johnson, other changes include: “1) the adoption of agronomic approaches to wood production, in particular the expanded use of intensively cultivated, short-rotation tree plantations in temperate and subtropical regions of the Southern Hemisphere; 2) the selling of large tracts of land in the U.S. by North American wood products corporations; 3) the increase of imports as a significant share of U.S. wood consumption; 4) the consumption of U.S. wood is projected to significantly exceed production over the next 50 years, yet stumpage prices are projected to be fairly stable; 5) the market premium paid for large logs has disappeared, reducing the benefit for holding timber stands for long periods, further shortening rotations, and penalizing trees such as Douglas Fir that start relatively slowly but sustain growth for long periods; 6) the relatively high production costs of the U.S. forest products industry will likely make the U.S. a marginal timber producer; 7) the retention of private forests in forest cover will be a challenge as major markets for wood products decline; and 8) the stewardship maintenance of forests will decrease without revenues from timber harvests.”

Forest landowners face many challenges. Development pressures, rising taxes, and mounting land values make it financially difficult to keep large parcels of land intact. Forested properties are being divided into smaller parcels, with some being sold to

developers. These smaller parcels make forest management inefficient and expensive. Parcelization also leads to the fragmentation of forest cover and the loss of wildlife habitat. As Sampson and DeCoster note: “Forest fragmentation is increasing at an even faster pace than originally projected....As urban areas are spreading, they are controlling and consuming their surroundings....Often the result is both a loss of land and a loss of the ability to manage forestlands....As urbanization encroaches onto rural land, businesses with low economic yields – such as farming, logging, tree farming, and milling – are pushed out, and their workers move away. Unfortunately, in the case of forestry, what is also lost is the knowledge and services that once maintained the forests.”

As mentioned previously, private forests are threatened by “suburban development and sprawl; lack of professional advice and assistance in forest management decisions; fuel build-up and the associated risk of destructive wildfire; pests and disease; and an array of other factors.” The Rural Voices For Conservation Coalition believes that “if landowners are to successfully restore their lands and continue to provide valuable ecosystem services to the public, they cannot bear the costs alone. Simply holding these lands as forests is a challenge for many private landowners. Maintaining and improving the ecosystem services from their lands is more than most landowners will be able to achieve without assistance. Current public policies are inadequate to sustain and restore the integrity of healthy forest ecosystems.”

American Forests reiterates these same themes in their article. “Private forests are facing rapid and unprecedented change, including divestment of industrial forestlands; shifts in the global market for wood products; soaring land prices that make traditional forestry uses uneconomic; and rapid population increases, urbanization, and fragmentation.” Other changes they mention are growing population pressures, increasing recreation demands, declines in forest health, lack of professional advice, and restrictions on the use of fire.

Since the 2003 Farm Bill, the age of forest land owners has grown higher, with 60% of this group older than 55, and more than half over 65. Offspring of these forest land owners are increasingly remote from their family’s forest, do not know much about their parents’ family forest lands, have livelihoods less connected with the land, and lack the knowledge to manage the family forest lands.

There have been changes connected with the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) over the past five years. The available of cost-share assistance has declined while opportunities to develop biomass and small diameter utilization efforts have improved. Studies demonstrated that participants receiving technical assistance were more likely to start implementing their Forest Stewardship plans. Educational attainment was determined to be a key factor. According to Dixon and others, the higher the educational level of FSP participants, the more likely they were to: “1) start implementing their FSP plans; 2) spend at least a thousand un-reimbursed dollars on applying plans; 3) carry out at least one plan-recommended management activity that was new to them; and 4) believe that they were very likely to seek management advice from a forestry professional sometime in the next two years.”