

## Assessing the Need for Forest Legacy

## Forest Legacy Program Focuses Land Protection Efforts

## The Challenge

The forests of West Virginia provide employment for thousands of workers and recreational opportunities for millions of residents and visitors annually. At the same time, the state's woodlands serve as habitat for a rich variety of native wildlife and plants. While West Virginia is a rural State, it is also under significant development pressure in terms of rural housing, second-home development, and recreational developments. This growth is largely seen as stringers, reaching out from community centers along the highways and byways of the State. As growth proceeds, it captures many of the best sites, along narrow streams and river valleys, in coves and hollows. The result may be significant as a loss of forest management opportunities.

## The Solution

West Virginia decided to identify important forest areas within the State that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses. By analyzing and identifying these forest areas and proceeding through an Assessment of Need, West Virginia proposed four Forest Legacy Areas within the State. These Forest Legacy Areas became eligible for Forest Legacy funding on December 2, 2003, when the Secretary of Agriculture approved the Assessment of Need. Forest Legacy promotes the use of conservation easements to protect land from development, allow rights of public access and sustainable forest management and keep the land privately owned. Funding is now available to West Virginia to protect important forest land.



Funding from the USDA Forest Service Forest Legacy program can now be used to protect forests from conversion to non-forest uses on eligible lands in the four identified Forest Legacy Areas.

## Resulting Benefits

- The effort to identify important forests within West Virginia was a collaborative effort that included the State Stewardship Committee and the public. By going through a public process, a common understanding of the purpose of the West Virginia Forest Legacy Program was reached. Further, by identifying the important forest areas requiring attention, other non-governmental organizations working in the State are able to focus their forest land protection efforts in the same places.

## Sharing Success

- The Forest Legacy Program is a cost-share program. This means that funds from other sources are necessary to complete the effort. Conversely, non-governmental organizations having goals compatible with the West Virginia Forest Legacy Program, will be able to partner with the State and achieve land protection over property within their area of interest where donating a conservation easement on the part of the landowner was not feasible.

*The Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program helps protect the New Jersey Highlands by protecting the forest lands from future development.*



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