

Family Forests Facing Increasing Risks

~ More than 40% of the nation's forestlands are family-owned forests! ~

America's family forests are faced with several challenges that threaten to degrade the ecological, economic, and recreational value of the land.

If these valuable forestlands vanish we all lose!

WHAT ARE THE CONSERVATION BENEFITS OF FAMILY FORESTS?

 **Drinking Water Supply** - Privately-owned forestlands supply nearly 2/3 of the nation's drinking water. Forestlands serve as a natural filter and reservoir for water, helping save billions of dollars in filtration and storm water control costs.

 **Endangered Species** - Approximately 90% of endangered species depend on forests, including family forests, for the habitat they provide. Other important wildlife species, including aquatic species and many game species, reside in family forests as well.



Key Facts About Family-Owned Forestlands

- **Significant Acreage** - About 42% of the nation's forestlands are family owned and cover an area larger than the states of Oregon, Washington, California, and Idaho combined.
- **Many Owners** - There are more than 10 million family forest owners.
- **Small Tracts** - 9 out of 10 family forest owners own small tracts between 1-99 acres.
- **Near Urban Centers** - A large portion of family forestland is located near urban areas.
- **Concentrated in the South & East** - Approximately 88% of family forestland is located in the eastern and southern U.S.
- **Diverse Ownership Objectives Dominate** - Most family forest owners cite scenic beauty, hunting and fishing, biodiversity conservation, preservation, privacy, and family legacy as the primary reasons for owning land.

 **Healthy Rural Economies & Working Forests** - Thriving family forests result in jobs and healthy economies in rural areas. Recreation, tourism, hunting, fishing, and forest products bring income to family landowners and the communities in which they live. In return, these communities supply the workforce and infrastructure needed to maintain working family-owned forests.

 **Clean Air** - For every ton of wood a forest grows, about 1.5 tons of carbon dioxide are removed from the air and replaced with 1.1 tons of oxygen. A single tree can absorb more than 10 pounds of carbon dioxide per year.

 **Recreation** - Family forests provide countless recreation opportunities including camping, fishing, birding and hiking.

 **Hunting** - More than 14 million people hunted this past year, contributing \$22.1 billion to the US economy and creating over 700,000 jobs. More than 60% of this hunting takes place exclusively on private lands, most of which is forested.

WHAT THREATENS FAMILY FORESTS?

 **Increasing Development Pressure** - Forests are lost forever once they are converted to development. From 1963 to 2002, the US experienced a 13 million acre net loss in forestland – larger than Vermont and New Hampshire combined – to nonforest uses. An estimated 44.2 million acres of private forestland are projected to experience substantial increases in housing density by 2030.



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Shrinking Size of Forested Tracts - As the tracts of family forestlands become smaller and more fragmented, their ability to provide important ecological services, such as clean water and suitable wildlife habitat, decreases. Further as the number of landowners grows, the resources available to

help family forest owners become increasingly scarce. The average age of family forest owners is 60+ years. Consequently, a significant portion of family forests will soon change hands, from current owners to heirs or new owners – often splitting forests among several heirs or selling smaller parcels to other owners.

 **Minimal Land Management Planning** - Management planning helps families make a long-term commitment to the land. Yet current estimates suggest that only 3% of family forest owners have a written management plan.

 **Harvesting without Professional Advice** - Without professional management advice, family forest owners may engage in management practices that degrade the quality and productivity of their land for years to come. Only 22% of family forest owners have sought professional advice prior to timber harvesting on their lands.

 **Declining Forest Health & Ecological Values** - Unhealthy forests can lead to degraded water quality and wildlife habitat and limited opportunities for recreation. Family forests are threatened by invasive species, insects, diseases, and wildfire threats. Family owners often lack financial and technical resources needed to treat their land and minimize these problems.

 **Reduced income opportunities** - Without income from their lands, families find it difficult to resist development pressures. Today, globalizing markets and other factors reduce opportunities for families to sell products and get income from their lands.

What are the Solutions?

- **Targeted** educational, technical, and financial assistance that addresses priority societal resource concerns while meeting landowner objectives.
- **Implementing a Landscape Approach** in assistance programs so investments in family forestland make a difference on the landscape scale.
- **Integration** of assistance programs to address a broader national strategy for family forest conservation with locally identified priorities.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** of programs to show improvements on the ground and how these efforts are meeting stated goals and objectives.
- **Market-based approaches** to forest conservation that allow for both public and private investment in public goods from family forests.
- **Continued Scientific Advances and their application** from universities, agencies, and other partners that help continue good stewardship and economic benefits from family forests.

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