

**2002 Farm Bill**  
**Community-based forestry Issues and Strategies**  
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**Background**

In the 1990 and 1996 Farm Bills, titles dealing significantly with forestry issues have included the Rural Development and Forestry Titles. The Rural Development Title in the 1990 Farm Bill created the Economic Recovery Program, one of many programs that fall under the Economic Action Programs (EAP) of the USDA Forest Service. EAP programs provide rural development opportunities through forestry. The Forestry Titles in past Farm Bills have traditionally addressed issues concerning nonfederal forests. Nonfederal forests cover two-thirds of our nation's forest lands, as well as urban and community forests. This paper, written from the perspective of urban and rural community forestry practitioners, discusses the 2002 Farm Bill as a vehicle to address both federal and non-federal forest lands through a Forestry Title and other titles.

Public and private forest issues such as forest fragmentation and wildfire need planning, action, monitoring and evaluation at a large landscape or ecosystem scale. These activities require collaboration and coordination among many landowners—public and private—and agencies. The Forest Service, other federal agencies, and non-federal entities all have unique and important but often overlapping and always interrelated roles in forest ecosystem management from a larger spatial perspective and when considering ecological, social, and economic sustainability. Therefore, national policies must address threats to ecosystems in ways that recognize the following factors:

- forestry issues affect not only the communities living in and near forested ecosystems, but have also become both nationally and internationally significant;
- forest ecosystems cross political boundaries, including urban and rural areas, and are in mixed ownership;
- planning and implementation happen in communities of place with very different social, political, and ecological contexts.

The 2002 Farm Bill can address several emerging needs in forestry to allow for collaborative planning, stewardship of and investment in forested ecosystems, and monitoring and evaluation of programs implemented at a landscape-level scale. To address these needs, community forestry practitioners would like the 2002 Farm Bill to:

- 1) provide incentives for non-federal forest landowners and planning mechanisms to ensure forestry issues are addressed at a landscape level;
- 2) provide the Forest Service with adequate authority and funding to be able to offer technical and financial assistance to communities and private landowners;
- 3) ensure communities play a substantive role in fire planning and management;
- 4) ensure programs include adequate direction and funding for monitoring;
- 5) provide mechanisms to strengthen outreach to underserved and minority communities.

The Farm Bill can help to achieve these goals by creating programs that clarify the role of the Forest Service with respect to non-federal entities. The Forest Service must play a key role in connecting the local and regional levels to the national and international levels. First, in this role, there is an urgent need for the Forest Service to provide research, technical assistance, and leadership at local and regional levels and to help connect the lessons from more localized efforts to national and international initiatives. Second, the Forest Service must take a leadership role in setting national and global priorities on sustainable forest management. Third, it must assist in stimulating and learning from state and local efforts. Fourth, it must assist urban and rural communities and work with state and local resource agencies

to tailor national policies to local and regional contexts.

The Farm Bill can also establish programs to assist public and private landowners in stewardship activities, including programs that invest in urban and rural communities and community-based management of forested ecosystems. Public and private forest landowners and a diverse set of interests and business enterprises in communities--including workers and traditionally underserved groups--have a vested interest in the health of the ecosystem and the community in which they live. All of these stakeholders should have the opportunity to play a role in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of resource management activities, if those activities are to be sustainable on an ecological, social, and economic basis. In addition, "communities of place" are in a unique and important position to help develop models of sustainability. Community-based approaches provide an innovative alternative to the interest-based and conflict-ridden approaches that have resulted in forest policy gridlock over the last two decades. They often involve collaborative efforts through which diverse stakeholders focus on their common interest in restoring ecosystem health and providing social and economic benefits to local communities through innovative, small-scale businesses. It is also important to remember and include national interests, particularly in activities related to federal lands.

These broad principles can be incorporated into the 2002 Farm Bill using the following strategies and specific suggestions:

**1) Provide incentives for non-federal forest landowners and planning mechanisms to ensure forestry issues are addressed at a landscape level**

Several trends necessitate treating forestry issues at a landscape-level scale. First, the Forest Service is changing its focus from timber management to managing for landscape objectives such as fish and wildlife habitat, watershed improvement, and hazardous fuels reduction. These issues cannot be dealt with at the forest stand level, but only at the watershed level scale. Second, many problems that have emerged in recent decades, including sprawl, forest fragmentation, wildfire, and habitat degradation, require a large-scale perspective and a coordinated response among landowners to be effective. Third, there has been increasing recognition of the connections between stewardship of the land and the health of communities. Working to ensure the health of the land and communities near and distant requires landscape level thinking. The Forest Service needs to strengthen its capacity to participate in and promote collaborative, cross-jurisdictional planning efforts, engaging other federal, state, and local agencies, as well as private landowners and community leaders and practitioners.

The Forestry Title of the Farm Bill provides a unique opportunity to revise existing programs or institute new ones in ways that recognize the growing need to manage across urban and rural divides, agency jurisdictions, and multiple ownerships. Three suggestions on how to achieve this in the Farm Bill include the following:

Priority would be given to landowners in areas where there has been watershed planning and the landowner's activities are tied to the watershed plan.

***a) Include permanent authority for provisions in the Wyden Amendment.***

This amendment provides authority for the Forest Service to use appropriated funds and to enter into cooperative agreements with government agencies, landowners, and others for activities that benefit watersheds containing national forest system lands within them. The emphasis is on supporting activities on non-federal lands that benefit entire watersheds. Authority has been provided on an annual basis since 1996. The authorities have worked well for the Forest Service and the watersheds being protected. In addition, under P.L. 105-277 (Title I, Sec. 156) the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has already been granted such permanent authority. Therefore, we suggest using the 2002 Farm Bill to provide permanent authority to the Forest Service for provisions in the Wyden Amendment.

Suggested language

“Hereafter, authority is granted for Forest Service appropriations to be used by the Secretary of Agriculture for purposes in accordance with section 323 of Title III of Public Law 105-277.”

b) *Within cost-share programs (FIP, SIP, or the Forest Land Enhancement Program described in Section 802 of the House version of the Farm Bill), provide incentives for landowners and/or groups of landowners to participate in collaborative planning at a watershed or larger landscape-level scale.* The goal is the same as provisions in the Wyden Amendment: to encourage planning and activities on non-federal land that benefit watersheds.

Suggested language

Add the following to House Farm Bill Title VIII, Sec. 802(c), Sec. 4 (d) (2)

“(J) development of an individual stewardship, forest, or stand management plan for the purposes of protecting, restoring, or enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, and other resources on public or private land; reducing the risk from natural disaster where public safety is threatened; or a combination thereof or both that benefit these resources within the watershed.”

“(K) participation in collaborative planning and implementation of activities that benefit public and private resources within the watershed in which the forest land is located”

c) *Within the cost-share incentive programs, provide incentives for non-industrial private landowners to participate in sustainable forestry certification programs which involve multiple landowners.* Many non-industrial private forest landowners are interested in certification and there is a growing demand for certified products, but the expense required for individual non-industrial private landowners to invest in certification is often prohibitive. For example, Wallowa Resources in Wallowa County, Oregon estimated that for landowners with less than 1000 acres, certification could cost from \$5 to \$20 an acre. Landowners with 200,000 to 300,000 acres pay approximately 25 to 35 CENTS per acre. Wallowa Resources also estimated that building associations of landowners with a collective total of 20,000 to 30,000 acres could lower costs to become certified, through a certification process for multiple landowners, to approximately \$1 per acre. A federal investment in certification would promote cooperative efforts among non-industrial private forest landowners to have their land certified.

Suggested language

Add the following to House Farm Bill Title VIII, Sec. 802(c), Sec. 4 (d) (2)

“(E) sustainable forest management certification through an individual or group forest certification process”

**2) Provide the Forest Service with adequate authority and funding to be able to offer technical and financial assistance to communities and private landowners**

Forests in both urban and rural landscapes provide valuable ecological, social, and economic benefits to individual landowners, adjacent communities, and to the general public. The services urban and rural forests provide include but are not limited to filtering water and air pollution, reducing stormwater flows, sequestering carbon emissions, and conserving energy, reducing soil erosion, as well as providing human health benefits, recreational opportunities, fish and wildlife habitat, raw materials for wood products manufacturing, and non-timber forest products. Forested watersheds are primary sources of drinking water for rural and urban communities. Valuable forestlands, the services they provide, and the communities that depend on them are being threatened by urban decay, suburban development and sprawl, forest fragmentation, timber harvest pressures, fuel buildup and the risk of destructive wildfire in the urban-wildland interface, invasive species, pests and diseases, and other factors. While the benefits provided by trees and forests are rarely disputed, current public policies are inadequate to sustain and restore the integrity of healthy forest ecosystems.

In addition, the social and economic conditions of both urban and rural communities are often

closely associated with forest conditions; the health of forest ecosystems is often reflected in the social and economic conditions of adjacent communities. For example, two of every three rural counties are highly dependent on natural-resource-based earnings, and 72 percent of all U.S. counties are rural counties. Of about 2,200 rural counties, 500 are classified as being in persistent poverty; 1,500 are under severe growth stress; and 1,300 are within 100 miles of a national forest boundary, are dependent on natural resources, and have the potential to be adversely affected by land management decisions. Timber is the highest valued crop in 8 Southern States and ranks among the top 3 agricultural crops in all of the 13 Southern States.

With the expanding importance of non-federal forestlands and the interdependence of multiple landowners in watersheds or large-scale ecosystems, the Forest Service as a whole should be able to collaborate with and deliver assistance directly to urban and rural communities. There is a need for permanent authority for all Forest Service employees to interact with and provide technical and financial assistance to communities in support of activities such as hazardous fuels reduction, forest plan revisions, diversification of local economies, urban forestry, large-scale ecosystem or watershed planning, and community-based stewardship. It is important for the Forest Service to provide leadership on issues related to sustainable forests and communities, federal policy impacts on nonfederal lands, and the impacts of nonfederal land management on national forests.

Currently, the Forest Service has authority to work with non-federal entities under a number of pieces of authorizing legislation. This paper focuses on authorities provided specifically for rural communities.

#### *Rural communities*

***THE AUTHORITIES DISCUSSED BELOW IN RELATION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES DO NOT HAVE TO GO IN A FORESTRY TITLE. THEY CAN BE INCLUDED IN A RURAL DEVELOPMENT TITLE OR IN A MISCELLANEOUS SECTION.***

-- The effort to strengthen the link between the USDA Forest Service and rural communities dates back to the Organic Administration Act of 1897 and its direction to manage forest preserves for water and timber supplies for the Nation. The Forest Service began concerted efforts to engage in rural development activities after the release of *A Strategic Plan for the '90s: Working Together for Rural America*, completed in 1990. This document outlined strategies for providing direct financial, technical, and organizational assistance based on community needs and opportunities for long-term change. Legislative changes were instrumental in helping the Forest Service achieve the vision in this document. Two chapters in the 1990 Farm Bill (Subtitle G--Rural Revitalization through Forestry; Subchapter 1--Forestry Revitalization; and Chapter 2--National Forest-Dependent Rural Communities; , also known as the National Forest-Dependent Rural Communities Economic Diversification Act of 1990) led to the creation of the Economic Recovery Program of the Forest Service. The Act significantly enhanced the Forest Service's formal authority to work directly with rural communities in close proximity to national forests. A program was established and funded within the State and Private Forestry budget in 1992 to implement this new authority.

To help the Forest Service implement this authority, language in annual appropriations bills since 1993 have also authorized the agency to use appropriated funds to provide technical assistance to rural communities. The FY2001 bill (PL 106-291, Title II ) reads: "Funds appropriated to the Forest Service shall be available for interaction with and provision of technical assistance to rural communities for sustainable rural development purposes." This authority allows Forest Service employees to engage in activities with communities as part of their work, using funding allocated for their salaries (i.e., they do not need to use funding allocated for State and Private Forestry). The Forest Service provides more than forestry assistance, so they are not duplicating but are rather complimenting the cooperative work of state foresters with urban and rural communities. Forest Service employees engaging in rural development activities include engineers, information

technology experts, GIS experts, soil scientists, landscape architects, business managers, and others. Technical assistance in utilization and marketing of small diameter trees, for example, is one emerging need in many rural communities wanting to build their expertise and capacity to process hazardous fuels and other small diameter material coming off the national forests for watershed enhancement purposes.

In 1994, the Forest Service placed their rural development programs under the umbrella “Economic Action Program” (EAP). The overall goal of EAP is to help rural communities and businesses dependent on natural resources become sustainable and self-sufficient. The Economic Recovery Program is one program within EAP. In September 2000, the USDA updated its rural development strategy in *Working Together for Rural America: 2000 and Beyond*.

As outlined in Chapter 95, Subchapter II, Sec. 6611, it is vital for the Forest Service to provide technical assistance to rural communities for the following reasons: “1) the economic well-being of rural America is vital to our national growth and prosperity; 2) the economic well-being of many rural communities depends upon the goods and services that are derived from national forests; 3) the economies of many of these communities suffer from a lack of industrial and business diversity; 4) this lack of diversity is particularly serious in communities whose economies are predominantly dependent on timber and recreation resources and where management decisions made on the national forests by Federal and private organizations may disrupt the supply of those resources; 5) the Forest Service has expertise and resources that could be directed to promote modernization and economic diversification of existing industries and services based on forest resources; 6) the Forest Service has the technical expertise to provide leadership, in cooperation with other governmental agencies and the private sector, to assist rural communities dependent upon national forest resources to upgrade existing industries and diversity by developing new economic activity in non-forest-related industries; and 7) technical assistance, training, education, and other assistance provided by the Department of Agriculture can be targeted to provide immediate help to those rural communities in greatest need”

In some rural communities, the Forest Service has developed a long-standing presence and capacity to help implement such provisions. Because the EAP efforts have achieved some measure of success, and because of changing demographics and increasing needs in rural communities, the demand for this type of assistance from the Forest Service continues to grow. The potential exists for expanded use of the programs to achieve collaborative stewardship objectives.

The language suggested below is intended to make permanent the authority provided annually in appropriations bills since 1993 for the Forest Service to provide technical assistance to rural communities (the language is taken from PL 106-291, Title II).

“Hereafter, funds appropriated to the Forest Service shall be available for interaction with and provision of technical assistance to rural communities for sustainable rural development purposes.”

### **3) Ensure communities play a substantive role in fire planning and management**

The following are suggested additions to House Bill Title VIII Section 804, Enhanced Community Fire Protection:

The suggestions are based on the idea of sustainability meaning “meeting environmental, economic, and community aspirations simultaneously.” They are meant to strengthen the community component in the existing proposals, so that ensuring sustainability can ultimately be achieved.

While the focus of this section is on private land assistance, it is essential to go beyond private

landowners to include collaborative and community processes because fire prevention must occur at a landscape level scale.

There are many benefits to engaging in community-based and collaborative processes, as outlined in *Working Together for Rural America: 2000 and Beyond (A Strategic Plan for the USDA Forest Service Economic Action Programs* (September 2000)): 1) collaborative planning, management, and stewardship activities—including the development and use of new technologies—establish healthy watersheds and fire-safe communities; 2) integrating ecological restoration with rural community sustainability improves public and private forests and grasslands; 3) community capacity building and empowerment enable grassroots partnerships, increase volunteerism and other efforts to contribute to activities benefiting forested ecosystems on a watershed scale, as well as mobilize community knowledge and resources; 4) informed and engaged rural communities contribute to protecting and enhancing working forests and grasslands, increase the understanding of the need to reduce fragmentation, and work toward conserving and extending natural resources; 5) deliberately engaging interested stakeholders in an open, inclusive, and transparent process with the agency enhances knowledgeable participation in public decisionmaking that facilitates the resolution of natural resource conflicts; 6) taking into account natural, cultural, and historical resources as part of an integrated development strategy can reduce conflict and lead to more sustainable solutions; 7) new community partnerships can make better use of services and programs by increasing coordination, leveraging limited funds, and broadening political support; 8) the participatory approach increases internal and external buy-in, pools limited resources, increases agency credibility, improves plans, and promotes goodwill; 9) the Forest Service has demonstrated its ability to help rural communities meet their economic and social objectives within environmental parameters; 10) engagement—from the planning process through project design—of skilled workers, successful locally owned businesses, new and diverse markets, and supportive publics in ecosystem restoration and enhancement maintains and enhances a "stewardship infrastructure" in rural communities associated with national forests and grasslands; 11) through involvement in national forest or grassland management and policy, the community may identify and realize the potential economic opportunities offered by the proximity of National Forest System lands; 12) involvement is increasingly important as relationships change between the Forest Service and rural communities; 13) community involvement may result in empowerment, pride, and motivation to begin or continue taking steps to improve local economic and social conditions as desired; 14) changes in national forest management and policy may provide economic opportunities to local communities.

The language suggested below is intended to provide provisions for collaborative and community processes:

Sec. 804 (b), Sec. 10A (a)

- expand (2) to read "protect communities and key ecological resources from the threat of wildfires"
- to address wildfire and wildfire risk more directly, replace (3) so it reads "restore forest ecosystems to conditions in which wildfire plays a regenerative rather than destructive role"
- add (5) "create opportunities for open collaboration and community-based approaches in addressing wildfire concerns"

Sec. 804(b), Sec. 10A(b)(1):

- Add (E) "strengthen collaborative approaches of the federal government, state, and community-based entities to plan and implement landscape level wildfire protection strategies"
- Add (F) "build on and strengthen the capacity of communities to perform integrated forest restoration and protection activities through job training and employment opportunities"

Sec. 804(b), Sec. 10A(b)(2)

Points A through H (on how to achieve the expected outcomes and purposes) do not really get at some of the language in Title IV of last year's Interior Appropriations Bill supporting communities. Key elements in Title IV supporting communities include provisions for incorporating, through a collaborative process, community-based strategies for fire planning, fire prevention, fire fighting, and post-fire restoration at Federal, state, and local levels.

Here are some suggestions to strengthen community engagement:

--Modify (C) to read "multi-resource and community-based wildfire planning at a landscape level scale"

--Combine (F) and (G) to read "build community capacity to help implement wildfire protection strategies and to develop job opportunities and small-scale businesses through community-based stewardship."

--Add a Sec. 804(b), Sec. 10A(b)(4): "MONITORING – The Secretary, or someone appointed by the Secretary shall, create and implement a plan for the monitoring and evaluation of ecological, social, and economic conditions to ensure accountability and collaborative learning. The monitoring plan shall include an assessment of the following: Whether or not the project met or exceeded desired ecological conditions; created local employment or training opportunities, including summer youth jobs programs such as the Youth Conservation Corps where appropriate; and whether the project improved the use of, or added value to, any products removed from lands"

A provision could be added similar to the monitoring provision in Section 347 of P.L. 105-277 (which authorizes the original 28 USDA Forest Service stewardship contracting pilots) or the provision in the 2000 Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (County Payments Bill).

#### **4) Ensure programs include adequate direction and funding for monitoring**

Monitoring is one cornerstone of a well-designed community-based forestry project. It is a learning process that requires identifying the right questions to ask about a project; assessing whether the project is meeting stated social, economic, and ecological goals; and identifying accomplishments and enduring challenges so practices can be changed to improve outcomes. Data needs to be collected to help determine whether social, biophysical, and economic goals are being met and whether these goals are acceptable to a broad constituency. For example, monitoring teams might track impacts to soil water and wildlife; the number of jobs or training opportunities created by a project; and opportunities for partnerships with non-Federal entities.

Monitoring is a dynamic process. It allows for innovations to be tested on the ground, adapted for different geographical and institutional settings, and used to improve future planning and management. Engaging multiple stakeholders—including but not limited to agency officials, community practitioners, academics and national interest groups—in effective monitoring of the social, economic, and ecological conditions resulting from forest management activities can help to build trust, improve accountability, promote learning, and ensure corrective action when needed. Monitoring should focus on planning objectives and provide practical indicators of project effectiveness. Clear authorities and a commitment to funding are necessary to design and carry out such monitoring programs.

Within FIP, SIP, or a combined Forest Land Enhancement program, there is a need to ensure accountability and collaborative learning. *A provision for monitoring could be added to cost-share incentive programs*, similar to the monitoring provision in Section 347 of P.L. 105-277 (which authorizes the original 28 USDA Forest Service stewardship contracting pilots) and the provision in the 2000 Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (County Payments Bill). The provision could require a monitoring and evaluation process implemented through the Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees. The Committee would be required to develop and implement a monitoring plan that identifies a set of ecological, economic, and social objectives and uses specific

criteria and indicators to determine the how the program is improving the contribution of non-federal lands to watershed level ecological, economic, and community sustainability.

Suggested language for the Land Enhancement Program:

“The Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees shall establish a monitoring and evaluation process that tracks and identifies how well the goals of the program are being met, positive and negative impacts of the program, and provides for validation monitoring. The monitoring plan shall include an assessment of the following: whether or not the project met or exceeded desired ecological conditions; whether funds enhanced the sustainable growth and management of forests for timber and non-timber forest product production; the reduction of hazardous fuels; and the enhancement of economic opportunities for communities and private landowners”

***Within the Enhanced Community Fire Protection program authorities, there is also a need for assessment and collaborative learning***

Suggested Language for Enhanced Community Fire Protection: (as stated in point 3)

Sec. 804(b), Sec. 10A(b)(4): “MONITORING – The Secretary, or designee of the Secretary shall, create and implement a plan for the monitoring and evaluation of ecological, social, and economic conditions to ensure accountability and collaborative learning. The monitoring plan shall include an assessment of the following: Whether or not the project met or exceeded desired ecological conditions; created local employment or training opportunities, including summer youth jobs programs such as the Youth Conservation Corps where appropriate; and whether the project improved the use of, or added value to, any products removed from lands””

**5) Provide mechanisms to strengthen outreach to underserved and minority groups.**

Policies and programs need to help communities address social and economic concerns, such as poverty, unemployment, and low capacity, at the same time they address ecological issues. They also need to address social and environmental justice concerns related to minority groups. Many underserved and minority groups are becoming a larger percentage of the population in urban areas, often living in the areas with the worst environmental conditions, such as the highest density of brownfields. In addition, the current workforce doing reforestation and forest restoration in the West is composed primarily of minority workers. Blacks, American Indians, or Hispanics compose at least one-third of the population in 333 nonmetro counties, which tend to be clustered geographically by racial and ethnic groups. Poverty rates among rural minorities in the mid to late 1990’s were nearly three times higher than those of rural whites and substantially higher than those of urban minorities. Employment growth in nonmetro counties has slowed since 1995. For example, for those counties associated with Federal lands, annual employment growth has fallen from 3.1 percent (1991–1995) to 1.8 percent (1995–1998) annually. Employment growth in metro areas has been increasing over the same time period. There are significant numbers of minority forest landowners, especially in the South.

It is vital to create targeted outreach programs for underserved and minority groups to help address local environmental, social, and economic concerns while providing technical and financial assistance, as well as education and training opportunities. We therefore suggest a targeted outreach effort to underserved and minority communities through the Sustainable Forestry Outreach Initiative.