

# Chesapeake Watershed Forestry

*Forests are needed to protect and restore a national treasure*

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service  
Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry



**Description:** Trees are vital for protecting water quality and habitat for more than 3,000 species of plants and animals in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Eighty percent of the forests in the Chesapeake Bay watershed are privately owned. Despite the importance of these forests, suburban sprawl claims about 100 acres of the region's forests every day.

The U.S. Forest Service provides scientific and policy guidance to interagency teams to ensure that forest conservation, restoration, and stewardship are effectively addressed and integrated into the Chesapeake Bay Program, a regional partnership that leads and directs Chesapeake Bay restoration and protection. For more than 20 years, the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry (NAS&PF) Chesapeake Bay Watershed Forestry program has worked with Federal, State, local, and nonprofit partners to demonstrate how forests improve water quality and the Chesapeake ecosystem. Within the Forest Service, NAS&PF coordinates with Research and Development and the two national forests in the Chesapeake Bay watershed: the George Washington and the Monongahela.

## Key Issues and Accomplishments:

- **Presidential Executive Order for Protecting and Restoring the Chesapeake Bay.** The *Strategy for Protecting and Restoring the Chesapeake Bay Watershed—2011 Action Plan* is a blueprint for bold, coordinated Federal action through the year 2025. In 2011, the NAS&PF and other Federal agencies, including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, EPA, and U.S. Geological Survey carried out forest conservation and restoration strategies that support the Executive Order Strategy.
- **Bay-wide Total Maximum Daily Load.** The NAS&PF provided technical assistance to key State and Federal contacts during development of Watershed Implementation Plans to comply with EPA's new Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the Chesapeake. The TMDL affects the entire 42-million-acre watershed, 29 million acres of which is forested, including 1.3 million acres of national forest land. The forestry work done in support of the TMDL is groundbreaking.
- **Brook Trout.** Eastern brook trout is one of four focus species in the Chesapeake Executive Order Strategy, and the only one found in the headwaters of the Bay. The U.S. Forest Service Fish & Aquatic Ecology Unit and the National Fish Habitat Action Partnership analyzed water and climate change factors to use in setting restoration priorities. Forest Service fisheries, Forest Service watershed and engineering staff, the NAS&PF Chesapeake Bay Watershed Forestry program, Trout Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service are working to extend habitat improvements on the George Washington and Monongahela National Forests to nearby private lands, targeting road crossings and areas without streamside forests.
- **Forestry Work Group.** The Forest Service coordinates several key activities through joint initiatives and an advisory group of State, Federal, and nongovernmental partners working on forestry issues in the six Bay States and the District of Columbia. In 2011, they produced a *Tracking and Reporting Summit of Forest Best Management Practices* to support the TMDL for all six Bay States and the District of Columbia.

- **Forest Conservation Directive.** All six Bay State governors, the EPA Administrator (on behalf of all Federal agencies), and the mayor of Washington, DC committed to ambitious annual and long-term goals as stated in the 2007 Forest Conservation Directive. The Forest Service has provided technical assistance, and in 2011, provided \$626,000 in grants to Bay State forestry agencies and other key partners towards meeting those goals. Special emphasis is on restoring riparian forest buffers (trees along waterways) and expanding urban tree cover. The U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program has helped the Bay States reach their forest land conservation goals.

The Forest Service contributed leadership, technical assistance, and grants that helped partners achieve the following outcomes watershed-wide:

- **Restored more than 7,440 miles of riparian buffer since 1996.** Restoring riparian forests (those along waterways) is the Best Management Practice for water quality on agricultural lands. Bay partners have set a goal to restore 900 miles per year.
- **Conserved 132,000 acres\* of high-value private working forests** since 2008 (when tracking began), preventing millions of pounds of nonpoint source pollution from flowing into the Bay each year. Accomplishments will continue to grow at current Stewardship Program budget levels and with the help of the Forest Legacy Program.
- **Completed tree canopy assessments** in 64 local jurisdictions as of 2011, including seven entire counties. Detailed tree canopy assessments show where additional tree planting can occur and are an important step toward improving air and water quality as well as the quality of life in these jurisdictions.

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\*Acres are estimated for 2011 based on 2010 accomplishments.

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