

# Landscape-scale Conservation

USDA Forest Service  
Northeastern Area  
State and Private Forestry



## *Collaboration by Design*

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**Description:** Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry (NASPF) has a decades-long history of working with a broad spectrum of interests, specifically State forestry agencies, to focus on landscape-scale conservation. NASPF has facilitated numerous cooperative forest resource projects to address priority resource issues, from urban forests to vast, non-Federally owned rural forests. Premier examples of landscape projects with NASPF leadership and coordination include the forestry component of Chesapeake Bay activities; development and coordination of the Highlands Study Reports for New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania; and cooperation on New York City watershed initiatives.

Landscape-scale conservation relies on linking resource issues or opportunities to geography, as identified and defined by communities of interest. These conservation efforts may be of varying scale and scope. Those interested in or affected by potential resource management initiatives generally recognize the need to achieve shared conservation objectives. *Cooperation and collaboration* among landowners and managers, bound together by mutual interest in their geographic area, are key to achieving landscape-scale conservation objectives.

Increasingly, leaders of Forest Service units in the Northeast and Midwest—NASPF, the Northern Research Station, and the Eastern Region of the National Forest System—as well as State forestry agencies and the District of Columbia recognize that collaborating on landscape-scale conservation leads to greater social, economic, and ecological benefits from forest resources. U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack’s vision of all-lands management reinforced this recognition and need, solidifying a regionally focused agreement among Forest Service entities and the State Foresters Association in the Northeast. That agreement, jointly prepared, signed, and dated December 2009, is known as the Landscape Scale Conservation position paper.

### **Key Issues:**

- **State Assessments and Strategies** – State forestry agencies are developing State forest resource Assessments and Strategies, which must be completed by June 2010 to receive Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act funding in FY 2011. In preparing their Assessments and Strategies, States are required to involve relevant stakeholders, incorporate other resource plans, and identify priority landscapes and regions and strategies for addressing them. National forest planners and leadership have worked with NASPF and State forest planners as they define state-specific and multistate priority areas across ownerships.
- **Foundations of Collaboration** – The Landscape Scale Conservation position paper for the Northeast and Midwest, mentioned above, includes:
  - *Information* – High-quality information must be produced, gathered, synthesized, and shared to serve as the basis of informed decisionmaking.
  - *Shared Landscapes, Issues, and Investments* – These form focal points of intensive collaboration, integrating cutting-edge science, assessment, adaptation, monitoring, and other appropriate actions among the Forest Service, State Foresters, and other partners.
  - *Risk Management* – This involves the assessment and mitigation of various ecosystem stressors and effectively tests potential management responses at the landscape scale.
  - *Communication* – This is perhaps the most important component of successful collaboration, allowing all parties to benefit from the synergy of working together—*sharing decision space* and lessons learned, supporting common priorities, and accommodating different management objectives.
  - *Implementation* – Implementing activities on the ground is ultimately where success will be determined. Public lands (Federal, State, and local) provide a nucleus of forest habitat, access, and stewardship of forests, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest where forest ownership is fragmented.
- **NASPF Strategic Plan** – Landscape-scale conservation efforts respond directly to Goal 1 of the NASPF Strategic Plan (promote sustainable forest management) and specifically address Objective 1.a. (conserving biological diversity of important forest lands at risk of conversion or fragmentation, which “influences every other objective in the NA [SPF] Strategic Plan”).

- **Secretary Tom Vilsack’s vision** – The landscape-scale conservation efforts underway by State foresters and Forest Service units in the Northeast and Midwest are well aligned with Secretary Vilsack’s intent for the Forest Service to “seek out opportunities to work with conservation groups, with the forest industry, with State foresters, and others to ensure that we maintain the private forests and utilize this all-lands approach... Work together in partnership with all groups, [the] State forester, conservation groups, the forest industry, and others to develop a broad agenda for protecting our privately owned forests and our working lands.”

**Accomplishments and Status of Selected Efforts:**

- All Forest Service units in the Northeast and Midwest are working with State forestry agencies as they develop their Statewide Assessments and Strategies. Collaborative discussions have occurred to identify key information, multistate priorities, individual and regional national forest priorities, and individual State priority issues and landscapes. As Assessments and Strategies are approved, the opportunities for landscape-scale conservation will be addressed collectively by the Forest Service and State forestry agencies.

Some current landscape-scale conservation efforts among partners are underway and include:

- *Upper Mississippi River Forestry Partnership* – This partnership is intended to demonstrate the importance of forests to healthy watersheds, assess forest conditions in relation to water quality, promote forestry solutions that reduce sediment and nutrient losses from the basin, and support and develop forest restoration strategies within the basin.
- *Great Lakes Restoration Initiative* – This EPA-led initiative targets the most significant problems in the region within five main areas of concern: 1) toxic substances; 2) invasive species; 3) nearshore health and nonpoint source pollution; 4) wildlife protection, habitat, and restoration; and 5) accountability, monitoring, evaluation, communication, and partnerships.
- *Chequamegon-Nicolet Climate Change Response Framework* (with focus on all forest lands in northern Wisconsin) – The Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest Climate Change Response Framework will incorporate landscape management activities that will help land managers adapt forests to new and changing conditions, as well as mitigate greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate change.
- *Development and Implementation of the Stewardship Project* – This effort is designed to expand the Forest Stewardship Program’s influence on private forest management and the support for forest management. The program will focus at a landscape scale, providing technical assistance for forest management, access to ecosystem services markets, better coordinated government services, and support for associated collaborative efforts.

Future Direction: The Forest Service units and State forestry agencies of the Northeast and Midwest will continue their commitment to the foundations of landscape-scale conservation as they collaboratively identify and implement landscape-scale projects that are consistent with Secretary Vilsack’s and Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell’s vision of an “all-lands” approach.

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May 19, 2010