Overview of the NA S&PF Strategic Plan for FY2013-2017

We are looking for review of the draft strategies by November 30, 2012. Please provide your input online through the link at: http://www.na.fs.fed.us/strategic-planning/.

Background: The U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry (NA S&PF) is committed to strategic planning to focus resources on the most important issues and priorities that we are uniquely positioned to address. A Strategic Planning Team made up of NA S&PF staffs that represent each business unit, field office, and program area reviewed volumes of information to compile these draft strategies for NA S&PF to address over fiscal years (FY) 2013-2017. In this process, we considered:

- Common themes from the 2010 State Forest Action Plans
- Objectives from the NA S&PF FY 2008-2012 strategic plan
- NA S&PF program and resource-specific strategies
- Input from employees and an external Scoping Team consisting of a cross-section of NA S&PF partners on opportunities, challenges, strengths, and areas to improve
- Resource conditions and trends across criteria and indicators of forest sustainability
- Events and emphasis areas that arose since 2008
- Internal and external input on the draft strategic issues (shared in July 2012) and suggestions for strategies

About Us

Mission: The Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry collaborates with States, other Federal agencies, tribes, landowners, and other partners to protect, conserve, and manage forests and community trees across the 20 Northeastern and Midwestern States and the District of Columbia. We provide leadership, technical support, sound science, and financial assistance to help ensure that our forests and trees continue to provide clean water, forest products, wildlife habitat, recreation, and other benefits for present and future generations.

Motto: We work with a diverse group of partners to protect, conserve, and manage forests, community trees, and related resources.

Vision: The Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry is a conservation leader that supports forest sustainability—providing the best for both people and the environment now and into the future. We are collaborative, focused, adaptive, and quick to identify and address emerging issues.

Framework for the Strategic Plan and Your Review

In July, we shared a draft list of strategic issues for NA S&PF to address, for internal and external review. Each of the 10 draft "issues" were given high importance ratings (see a summary of input), confirming that each one is important for NA S&PF to address. Based on the input received, the issues were reframed as "objectives" and slightly revised. We considered suggestions from employees and partners, as well as other information, to draft strategies for each objective.

NA S&PF Objectives: The NA S&PF objectives are overarching, long-term objectives for NA S&PF that emerged from our strategic planning process. While each objective is important on its own, the objectives are highly interrelated and were considered holistically. As shown in the sidebar on the next page, the NA S&PF objectives are organized according to four priorities that serve as broad goals. The first three are the national S&PF priorities from the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act.[1] The fourth priority ("organizational effectiveness") was added based on input from employees and the Scoping Team.

Draft NA S&PF Strategies: The draft strategies are action-oriented and outline the role of NA S&PF in addressing the NA S&PF objectives. Since most individual strategies contribute strongly to multiple objectives, we present the strategies holistically starting on page 10. We plan to identify measures for each strategy to track progress and report accomplishments on the Strategic Plan.

[1] Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act as amended by the 2008 Farm Bill: http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/library/SPF-CF%20handbook.pdf

The purpose of the draft strategies is to outline the role for NA S&PF, working with partners, to address the national S&PF priorities and NA S&PF objectives. Consider this as you review the draft strategies. Since we have already asked for input on the objectives, they are provided here for reference rather than review.

Core Commitments:

Along with the objectives, we have core commitments to civil rights and diversity, safety, and sustainable operations.

Civil Rights and Diversity—We will continue to lead by example in implementing Title VII equal opportunity, anti-harassment, and diversity requirements; conducting Title VI compliance reviews and monitoring in employment and program delivery; and fostering a culture of "inclusiveness."

Safety—The greatest resource that we manage is our people. We will continue to integrate practices to ensure employee safety and welfare in our operations and establish a positive, learning approach to safety. We will proactively identify and address practices of concern throughout our work.

Sustainable Operations—We will continue to integrate efforts to reduce the environmental footprint of our operations and help the agency comply with related mandates.

Comparison to Our Last Strategic Plan

It was time to take a fresh look at our strategic focus and activities and fully engage employees and partners in that process; however, continuity in strategic planning is important to achieve long-term results. The FY 2008-2012 Strategic Plan had 2 goals, 8 objectives, and 3 management principles. Our new objectives carry over well from the prior plan. One key difference is the strategies—we currently have 26 draft strategies that outline NA S&PFs' specific role; in comparison, the prior plan had 82 strategies that were more general in nature.

Priorities and NA S&PF Objectives*

National S&PF Priority: Conserve and Manage Working Forest Landscapes for Multiple Values and Uses

A. NA S&PF will support conservation of important forest landscapes across the urban to rural continuum.

B. NA S&PF will support sustainable forest management for biodiversity and multiple benefits for people.

National S&PF Priority: Protect Forests from Threats

C. NA S&PF will support management of trees and forests for resilience to natural and human-caused disasters and threats.

D. NA S&PF will encourage forest management approaches that facilitate resilience and adaptation to, and mitigation of climate change.

E. NA S&PF will reduce wildfire threats to people, communities, and natural resources.

National S&PF Priority: Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests

F. NA S&PF will advance conservation and sustainable management of trees and forests for water quality across all landscapes.

G. NA S&PF will support a competitive forest industry with diversified markets, forest-related jobs, and sustainable use of woody biomass for energy.

H. NA S&PF will support the engagement of urban residents and communities in the stewardship of trees and forests.

Organizational Effectiveness

I. NA S&PF will maintain technical expertise, improve communications and productivity, capitalize on new technology, and ensure employee safety.

J. NA S&PF will leverage resources and technical expertise in a transparent and collaborative way with other Federal agencies, State agencies, academia, American Indian tribes, and other partners in support of common goals.

* No priority or ranking is implied by the order in which the priorities and objectives are listed.

NA S&PF Objectives for Fiscal Years 2013-2017

Background: The draft "issues" shared for review in July were reframed as "objectives" and slightly revised based on input received. The NA S&PF Strategic Planning Team, after carefully considering suggestions from employees and partners, drafted strategies for each of these objectives. Since we have already asked for input on the objectives, they are provided here for reference rather than for review.

National S&PF Priority: Conserve and Manage Working Forest Landscapes for Multiple Values and Uses

Objective A. NA S&PF will support conservation of important forest landscapes across the urban to rural continuum.

Vision: Urban tree cover and rural forests continue to be a key feature across the landscape and will cover large, contiguous blocks, of which the most special will be permanently protected.

Critical Issues: Forests provide enormous environmental, social, and economic benefits. They provide wildlife habitat, clean air and water, recreation, and products that we as a society rely heavily on. From 1990 to 2000, urban areas expanded by 4 million acres, 37 percent of which had been forested.[i] Seventy-four percent of the forest land across the Northeast and Midwest is privately owned.[ii] As urban and developed areas expand and as families pass forest land from one generation to the next, private forests are converted and fragmented at a rapid rate. Urban expansion is expected to overtake an additional 1.5 million acres of forest land in the next decade and unless conservation and preservation of these working landscapes become a priority, this will continue at alarming rates.[i]

Loss and fragmentation of forest reduces ecological and forest-based benefits and renders remnant forests more vulnerable to threats. We need to maintain forests within a broader landscape context. A critical mass of green infrastructure—networks of contiguous forests and corridors of natural lands, working landscapes, and other open spaces—is required to adequately provide the services we rely on.

As urbanization increases and contiguous forests are developed and fragmented, the value of urban forests has become more apparent. Trees and the canopy they provide are recognized for their ability to reduce stormwater runoff, urban heat island effects and air pollution. Science shows tree planting increases property values, reduces the incidence of asthma in children and improves overall community livability.[iii] There is still a great need to plant, protect, and maintain tree canopy in urban areas. Urban tree canopy assessment and goal setting has become part of a cost effective solution to include trees in water quality and green infrastructure management for multiple goals.

Our Role and Influence—Draft Strategies to Address this Objective Include:

1. Encourage new and support existing landscape-scale partnerships across State and local boundaries, as identified in the State Forest Action Plans, to leverage resources and more efficiently achieve results across larger geographic regions.
2. Increase perpetual conservation of important forest landscapes through the Forest Legacy Program and Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program.
3. Increase conservation, restoration, and management of important tree and forest landscapes in communities and metropolitan areas through support of partner assistance to communities to set natural resource goals and institute land-use policies.

Objective B. NA S&PF will support sustainable forest management for biodiversity and multiple benefits for people.

Vision: The forests of the Northeast and Midwest are characterized by a diversity of species and age classes. Forest owners understand the importance of managing their forest land for forest products, water, wildlife, energy, and many other benefits for current and future generations.

Critical Issues: To maintain forest and tree health and to increase resilience to forest threats, we need to actively manage across the continuum from street trees to contiguous forested tracts. The forest threats outlined in Objective C, coupled with less than optimal management of private forests, have degraded forest health, hampered natural regeneration, and produced an imbalance of forest age classes in many places. Seventy percent of forests in the Northeast and Midwest are between 40 and 100 years old; young and very old forests are relatively scarce.[i] Improving the management and health of the region's forests is both critical and challenging, since over half of forest land in the Northeast and Midwest is held by nearly 5 million private family forest land owners.[iv]

Sound management can enhance the capacity of forests to provide ecological, social, and economic benefits now and in the future, such as habitat for wildlife; clean water; places for outdoor recreation; better quality of life in urban areas; and economic benefits to those who utilize wood for products, forest-based industry, and related jobs. The growing trend toward producing and consuming local products supports jobs and local economies and reduces the energy costs associated with shipping goods from distant locations.

Our Role and Influence—Draft Strategies to Address this Objective Include:

4. Encourage and support the development of plans in important forest landscapes to improve the management of trees and forests for the public benefits they provide.
5. Support assistance to landowners to increase the financial viability of owning forest land through educational efforts about tax incentives, intergenerational transfer of forest land, and access to existing and new forest product markets.
6. Strengthen the management knowledge and skills of public and private sector forest land managers through technology transfer activities related to silviculture, arboriculture, storm response, and tree risk assessment.

National S&PF Priority: Protect Forests from Threats

Objective C. NA S&PF will support management of trees and forests for resilience to natural and human-caused disasters and threats.

Vision: The forests of the Northeast and Midwest are healthy. People understand and recognize threats to healthy forests and work closely with professionals to minimize the adverse impacts of these threats by being engaged in early detection, control activities, and long-term monitoring of forest pests.

Critical Issues: The current scale and rate of adverse effects on forested ecosystems from a variety of threats is alarming. Trees and forests are being increasingly threatened by invasive species (insects, pathogens, plants) and natural disasters, including extreme weather events. From 2006 to 2010, an average of 8.3 million acres of Northeast and Midwest forests were damaged annually by pests such as emerald ash borer, gypsy moth, hemlock woolly adelgid, and beech bark disease.[v] The overpopulation of white-tailed deer is a serious issue in localized areas.[vi] In addition, the decline in pollinators and white nose syndrome in bats impacts pollination of flowering plants and shrubs in forests.[vii] Human-caused stressors such as pollution, forest land conversion to other uses, potential impacts from outdoor recreation, and surface disturbance from energy development are also adversely affecting forests.

Invasive species are diminishing forest benefits, including cultural values. For example, the emerald ash borer, which kills ash trees, is also threatening an American Indian tradition of basket-making. To adequately protect forests, we must remain vigilant in detection and monitoring and prepared to deal with new invasives, and to manage forests to keep them resilient. NA S&PF works with partners to address these issues across all ownerships and has primary responsibility for pest management support on Federal lands.

Our Role and Influence—Draft Strategies to Address this Objective Include:

7. Work with partners to develop and use methods and approaches for early detection and rapid response of new, introduced, or unknown harmful organisms.
8. Provide assistance to partners for treating high-threat damaging agents using direct control, silvicultural, and phytosanitary methods (treatment of logs with heat or chemicals); treating outlier invasive populations where eradication is a realistic possibility; and using bio-control methods when possible.
9. Support management to increase tree and forest resilience and to restore after disturbances.

Objective D. NA S&PF will encourage forest management approaches that facilitate resilience and adaptation to, and mitigation of climate change.

Vision: Our forests are resilient and adaptively managed to limit the negative effects of changes in climate and weather and to take advantage of potential opportunities presented by the changing climate, while continuing to provide sustainable goods and services.

Critical Issues: Climate change effects are being assessed across all landscapes. Documented changes that are likely linked to changing climate conditions include significantly altered seasonal weather patterns of precipitation and drought, more frequent days with temperatures above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, a longer growing season, reduced snowpack and increased snow density, earlier breakup of winter ice on lakes and rivers, earlier spring snowmelt resulting in earlier peak river flows, and rising sea-surface temperatures and sea levels.[viii] These changes will affect forest health, growth, and mortality and over time will influence the range of specific tree species and forest ecosystem functions. The changing climate may also lead to stressors such as drought, flooding, and extreme storms. Changing conditions are likely to make forests more susceptible to other threats, including the spread of invasive insects and pathogens.[viii] Additionally, U.S. forests sequester a significant amount of greenhouse gas emissions annually,[ix] and can be actively managed to further reduce forest industry-related emissions while sustaining or even increasing the amount of carbon they store.[x]

Our Role and Influence—Draft Strategies to Address this Objective Include:

10. Increase the capacity of NA S&PF staff and partners to engage in dialogue on climate change and incorporate applicable science into their management activities for increased resilience and adaptation.
11. Encourage tree and forest management approaches and the use of forest products, biomass, and ecosystem service markets that have the potential to mitigate greenhouse gases.

Objective E. NA S&PF will reduce wildfire threats to people, communities, and natural resources.

Vision: Wildfire risks to people, communities, and forests are minimized through science-based reduction of hazardous fuels and public education efforts in the wildland urban interface. Overstocked forest stands and high fuel loading no longer exist in high-risk, fire-prone areas.

Critical Issues: Wildland fires threaten public safety, property, and forests, especially in areas where developed lands mix with rural forests, referred to as the wildland-urban interface. Across the Northeast and Midwest, there are more than 62 million acres of land and more than 14 million housing units within the wildland-urban interface.[i] In these areas, public safety and the protection of property from the threat of wildfire are of greater concern.[xi] Additionally, the number of human-caused wildfires is higher in these areas. Across the Northeast and Midwest, one-third of the population lives in the wildland-urban interface.[xii] This is of growing concern as the acreage of wildland-urban interface continues to increase at alarming rates.

Our Role and Influence—Draft Strategies to Address this Objective Include:

12. Assist in restoring and maintaining fire-resilient landscapes through the strategic use of prescribed fire, mechanical treatments, and appropriate fire management techniques.
13. Participate in safe, effective, and efficient risk-based wildfire management decisions through the support of State and community fire programs that strengthen preparedness, response, and firefighting capacity.
14. Promote and support planning and activities that encourage communities in forested areas to reduce wildfire risks and become fire adapted, such as Firewise, Community Wildfire Protection Plans, and community wood energy projects.

National S&PF Priority: Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests

Objective F. NA S&PF will advance conservation and sustainable management of trees and forests for water quality across all landscapes.

Vision: Forested watersheds will be a focus of our work to protect water quality. Impaired riparian areas will be restored and highly functional. Stormwater will be effectively managed through improved green infrastructure systems that clean and reuse it.

Critical Issues: Forests are the source of an estimated 48 percent of the region's water supply, and more than 52 million people consume water that originates from the region's forested watersheds.[xiii] These critical forests exist within a patchwork of unconnected landscapes interspersed with densely populated urban areas, post-industrial sites, and agricultural lands. Rivers, streams, and lakes are showing the impacts of development and its associated impervious cover. Forty-five percent of all subwatersheds in the Northeast and Midwest contain impaired waters designated under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act.[xiv] Developed areas with overburdened stormwater, septic, and other infrastructure systems dump millions of gallons of sediment,[xv] pollution, and nutrient-laden stormwater into our waterways. When conserved and managed, healthy tree cover and forest land are critical to maintaining and improving water quality across the entire continuum from urban to rural. Clean water matters to everyone and more support for trees and forests and recognition of their vital role in water quality and stormwater management is needed.

Our Role and Influence—Draft Strategies to Address this Objective Include:

15. Provide information and collaborate with partners to advance the inclusion of trees and forests in source water protection, stormwater planning, green infrastructure, and land use policy.

16. Restore tree and forest canopy cover and connectivity in critical and impaired watersheds using science, sustainable management practices, integrated planning, and assistance across programs.

Objective G. NA S&PF will support a competitive forest industry with diversified markets, forest-related jobs, and sustainable use of woody biomass for energy.

Vision: A sustainable forest-based industry is thriving throughout the Northeast and Midwest; providing good-paying jobs; contributing to local and regional economies; and providing economical management options for the NA S&PFs' key forestry programs, including stewardship, forest health, fire, and urban and community forestry.

Critical Issues: Over 400,000 people are employed in forestry, logging, wood products, and the pulp and paper sectors—40 percent of all U.S. jobs for these sectors.[i] The forest products industry and traditional markets face many challenges, including lower demand due to economic recession; foreign competition; cost of materials, labor, and transportation; and product substitution. Ripple effects include loss of jobs; struggling local economies in rural, forestry-based communities; and loss of expertise in forest product manufacturing. From 2008 to 2009 alone, the total value of forest products shipments declined from $145.5 to $121.7 billion. Accordingly, employment declined from 556,741 in 2008 to 464,626 in 2009.[xvi] Urban wood waste created from insect and disease infestations, extreme storms, and routine maintenance could be better utilized. In addition, biofuels, alternative and traditional wood markets, and ecosystem services are all potential incentives for landowners to manage their forests and keep land forested, allowing them to achieve their economic objectives and environmental sustainability.

Our Role and Influence—Draft Strategies to Address this Objective Include:

17. Support a competitive forest industry with diversified products and markets, and related jobs with workforce knowledge and skills development, training, information exchange, and problem solving.
18. Cooperate with new and existing partners to develop and expand traditional and emerging markets for wood products, including woody biomass and utilization of trees damaged by insects, diseases, and weather events.

Objective H. NA S&PF will support the engagement of urban residents and communities in the stewardship of trees and forests.

Vision: In communities large and small, residents will feel connected to nature and actively care for trees and forest resources. People will understand that healthy forests are fundamental to our well-being and will support monitoring and management needed to maintain healthy forests.

Critical Issues: Eighty percent of people in the densely populated Northeast and Midwest live in urban areas that cover 6 percent of the land base.[i] As the percentage of people who live in urban areas continues to grow, it becomes increasingly important to provide people with opportunities to connect to nature. Urban residents, especially youth, who engage in nature-based activities, including urban and community forestry tree care programs, are more likely to have an affinity for the environment as adults and develop environmentally-friendly attitudes and behaviors.[xvii] Children who have had positive experiences in nature are also more likely to consider nature-based professions as adults. Participation in educational opportunities and hands-on tree and forest stewardship, especially in urban and metropolitan areas where most people live, will lead to life-long support for conservation and sustainable management of trees and forests across the landscape.

Our Role and Influence—Draft Strategies to Address this Objective Include:

19. Encourage support for tree and forest conservation, management, and forest-related products through communication and educational activities, especially for urban and metropolitan residents and decisionmakers in priority landscapes.
20. Support outreach to underserved communities and traditional and nontraditional partners to engage people in programs that plant, protect, and maintain trees and forests.

Priority: Organizational Effectiveness

An organization's overall effectiveness depends upon a number of factors—how well it manages its resources and sets priorities, how it treats its employees, its relationship with partners and customers, how well it fosters communication and innovation, and whether it effectively uses technology and other tools that allow employees to achieve their full potential, among others. In lean budget times, when doing more with less is at the forefront, an organization's ability to carry out its mission depends even more heavily upon these factors. The objectives and draft strategies in this section reflect our commitment to continuous improvement as an organization.

Objective I. NA S&PF will maintain technical expertise, improve communications and productivity, capitalize on new technology, and ensure employee safety.

Vision: NA S&PF will be recognized as a center of excellence for its technical support and customer service. We will be leaders in the use of emerging technology. Employee safety, well-being, and respect for diversity will be integral to our operations. We will hold ourselves accountable for results.

Our information products help build support for forests and the role they play in people's lives. NA S&PF, together with our partners, produces quality tools and information for both natural resources professionals and the public, including students, educators, and underserved audiences. To continue to engage and educate our customers, we need to stay current and active in the use of social media and other technology for communications and outreach.

Within NA S&PF, we need to consistently share more and better information across units, programs, and levels. Similar sharing among U.S. Forest Service branches in the Northeast and Midwest would likewise improve access to information; strengthen internal relationships across the organization; and ensure that we use consistent, credible information. Technology can potentially help us meet this challenge in addition to streamlining administrative tasks.

Facilitating communications and outreach will help us cope with likely budget reductions and employee attrition, but we also need to boost productivity by building and retaining expertise to ensure that our workforce has the necessary skills and tools to be drivers of positive change. In addition to the expected loss of expertise and institutional knowledge, the loss of capacity in delivering forest conservation leadership has many other internal and external impacts. For example, reductions in travel budgets for Federal and State programs are impacting our collective capacity to deliver programs on the ground. We must meet these challenges without compromising employee safety and well-being.

Our Role and Influence—Draft Strategies to Address this Objective Include:

21. Develop and carry out a comprehensive, Area-wide external and internal communication plan, including messages, methods, technology, and social media to renew our emphasis on technology transfer, strengthen communication skills among NA S&PF staff, and maintain expertise and institutional knowledge.
22. Increase use of technology to streamline and automate processes, share expertise, and provide broad access to important information, including revamping the NA S&PF Intranet and Website.

23. To improve results and accountability, establish a simple annual process to carry out the Strategic Plan, including reporting and enhancements to accomplishment databases.

Objective J. NA S&PF will leverage resources and technical expertise in a transparent and collaborative way with other Federal agencies, State agencies, academia, American Indian tribes, and other partners in support of common goals.

Vision: The NA S&PF will be a regional leader, advocating for natural resources with traditional partners while seeking ideas and involvement from new partners. We will be collaborative, focused, adaptive, and quick to identify and address emerging issues. Targeted investments, along with those of our partners, will multiply the value of each Federal dollar.

NA S&PF has long-standing partnerships with the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters (NAASF), State forestry agencies, and the U.S. Forest Service Eastern Region and Northern Research Station. By sharing our technical expertise and strengths across a broader group of partners, we can further enhance collaboration to achieve shared goals. Agencies and organizations such as the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and Farm Services Agency; University Cooperative Extension staff; Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies; American Forest Foundation; U.S. Geological Survey; U.S. Department of Interior National Park Service; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; State fish and wildlife agencies; American Indian tribes; and nonprofit organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy, present outstanding opportunities to share expertise and pursue mutual goals.

We are committed to collaboration with State forestry agencies and other partners, especially as it pertains to carrying out the State Forest Action Plans. We also seek to identify and focus on shared priorities across the State Forest Action Plans and Wildlife Action Plans.

This objective can also be considered a solution that contributes to all other objectives, including our commitment to collaborate with partners on landscape-scale conservation efforts.

Our Role and Influence—Draft Strategies to Address this Objective Include:

24. Establish an Area-level, multi-disciplinary technology transfer team to capture and share lessons learned from grant projects and partners as well as identify and focus investments on proven technologies and effective outreach and dissemination models.
25. Provide value-added information, to expand the scope of resource data available to partners, NA S&PF staff, and others through databases, clearinghouses, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools, and other information products.
26. Strengthen collaboration with other Federal partners whose mission and goals align with ours to deliver stronger and more cohesive services; better leverage Forest Service resources; and provide a seamless interface for States, nonprofit organizations, and landowners.

Draft Strategies for NA S&PF*

Background: Although each strategy was initially drafted for a specific objective, many strongly address multiple objectives, so they are presented holistically here. The "objectives" column lists the primary objectives each strategy addresses; many strategies also contribute to additional objectives.

Draft Strategies for FY 2013-2017: NA S&PF Role to Address the Listed Objective(s)	Objectives
1. Encourage new and support existing landscape-scale partnerships across State and local boundaries, as identified in the State Forest Action Plans, to leverage resources and more efficiently achieve results across larger geographic regions.	A, B, J
2. Increase perpetual conservation of important forest landscapes through the Forest Legacy Program and Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program.	A, B, C, D
3. Increase conservation, restoration, and management of important tree and forest landscapes in communities and metropolitan areas through support of partner assistance to communities to set natural resource goals and institute land-use policies.	A, B, J
4. Encourage and support the development plans in important forest landscapes to improve the management of trees and forests for the public benefits they provide.	B, A, C, E
5. Support assistance to landowners to increase the financial viability of owning forest land through educational efforts about tax incentives, inter-generational transfer of forest land, and access to existing and new forest product markets.	B, A
6. Strengthen the management knowledge and skills of public and private sector forest land managers through technology transfer activities related to silviculture, arboriculture, storm response, and tree risk assessment.	B, C, D, I, J
7. Work with partners to develop and use methods and approaches for early detection and rapid response of new, introduced, or unknown harmful organisms.	C, J
8. Provide assistance to partners for treating high-threat damaging agents using direct control, silvicultural, and phytosanitary methods (treatment of logs with heat or chemicals); treating outlier invasive populations where eradication is a realistic possibility; and using bio-control methods when possible.	C, B, G
9. Support management to increase tree and forest resilience and to restore after disturbances.	C, B, D
10. Increase the capacity of NA S&PF staff and partners to engage in dialogue on climate change and incorporate applicable science into their management activities for increased resilience and adaptation.	D, I, J
11. Encourage tree and forest management approaches and the use of forest products, biomass, and ecosystem service markets that have the potential to mitigate greenhouse gases.	D, G
12. Assist in restoring and maintaining fire-resilient landscapes through the strategic use of prescribed fire, mechanical treatments, and appropriate fire management techniques.	E, B, C, D
13. Participate in safe, effective, and efficient risk-based wildfire management decisions through the support of State and community fire programs that strengthen preparedness, response, and firefighting capacity.	E, J

14. Promote and support planning and activities that encourage communities in forested areas to reduce wildfire risks and become fire adapted, such as Firewise, Community Wildfire Protection Plans, and community wood energy projects.	E, J
15. Provide information and collaborate with partners to advance the inclusion of trees and forests in source water protection, stormwater planning, green infrastructure, and land use policy.	F, A, H, J
16. Restore tree and forest canopy cover and connectivity in critical and impaired watersheds using science, sustainable management practices, integrated planning, and assistance across programs.	F, A, B
17. Support a competitive forest industry with diversified products and markets, and related jobs with workforce knowledge and skills development, training, information exchange, and problem solving.	G, I
18. Cooperate with new and existing partners to develop and expand traditional and emerging markets for wood products including woody biomass and utilization of trees damaged by insects, diseases, and weather events.	G, B, C, J
19. Encourage support for tree and forest conservation, management, and forest-related products through communication and educational activities, especially for urban and metropolitan residents and decisionmakers in priority landscapes.	H, G, A, B, D
20. Support outreach to underserved communities and traditional and nontraditional partners to engage people in programs that plant, protect, and maintain trees and forests.	H, C, J
21. Develop and carry out a comprehensive, Area-wide external and internal communication plan, including messages, methods, technology, and social media to renew our emphasis on technology transfer, strengthen communication skills among NA S&PF staff, and maintain expertise and institutional knowledge.	I, H, F
22. Increase use of technology to streamline and automate processes, share expertise, and provide broad access to important information, including revamping the NA S&PF Intranet and Website.	I, H, J
23. To improve results and accountability, establish a simple annual process to carry out the Strategic Plan, including reporting and enhancements to accomplishment databases.	I, J
24. Establish an Area-level multi-disciplinary technology transfer team to capture and share lessons learned from grant projects and partners as well as identify and focus investments on proven technologies and effective outreach and dissemination models.	J, H, I
25. Provide value-added information, to expand the scope of resource data available to partners, NA S&PF staff, and others through databases, clearinghouses, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools, and other information products.	J, H
26. Strengthen collaboration with other Federal partners whose mission and goals align with ours to deliver stronger and more cohesive services; better leverage Forest Service resources; and provide a seamless interface for States, nonprofit organizations, and landowners.	J, A, B, C

* No priority or ranking is implied by order the strategies are listed.

Description of the NA S&PF Draft Strategies

1. ***Encourage new and support existing landscape-scale partnerships across State and local boundaries, as identified in the State Forest Action Plans, to leverage resources and more efficiently achieve results across larger geographic regions.***

   The U.S. Forest Service NA S&PF, Northern Research Station, and Eastern Region coauthored a position paper in 2009 with the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters to formally recognize the value of landscape-scale collaboration to yield greater outcomes.[2] This effort includes landscape-scale conservation activities and coordination, support of existing and emerging partnership efforts, and the landscape stewardship approach.[3] Continue support for landscape-scale partnerships and support new partnerships to achieve conservation goals in priority landscapes identified in the State Forest Action[4] Plans. Partnerships at basin-wide, watershed, and metropolitan scales are models for effective landscape-scale implementation.

2. ***Increase perpetual conservation of important forest landscapes through the Forest Legacy Program and Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program.***

   The Forest Legacy Program and the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program are the S&PF programs that offer unique assistance and funding to perpetually conserve highly valued forests. The Forest Legacy Program allows for both fee-simple and conservation easement purchases. The Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program allows for fee-simple purchases. Both programs require a forest management plan and collaborative work by States, local governmental units, and nonprofits. In addition, the Forest Legacy Program requires the project to meet the goals and objectives of the State's Forest Action Plan. Both programs require easement monitoring and collaboration with stakeholders and partners, ensuring local and regional support in the decision to pursue perpetual conservation and future management of forested land.

3. ***Increase conservation, restoration, and management of important tree and forest landscapes in communities and metropolitan areas through support of partner assistance to communities to set natural resource goals and institute land-use policies.***

   Forest Stewardship and Urban and Community Forestry goals and objectives are met specifically through this strategy that targets high-priority landscapes in partnership with State, regional, and nonprofit partners. Establishing local goals and broad-based natural resource policy with community support can have long-term impacts on how the benefits provided by trees and forests can be used to meet societal needs.

4. ***Encourage and support the development plans in important forest landscapes to improve the management of trees and forests for the public benefits they provide.***

   There is a continuing need for technical assistance in the development of forest management plans through S&PF programs, including Urban and Community Forestry, Forest Stewardship, Forest Legacy, Firewise, and the new Community Forest and Open Space Program. NA S&PF support for State Forest Action Plans is also critical. In addition, integrating these plans into land use management and planning at the local and regional levels will help to address forest

[2] Landscape Scale Conservation in the Northeast and Midwest. Dec. 2009. Available at: http://www.na.fs.fed.us/stewardship/pubs/conservation/landscale_conservation.pdf

[3] U.S. Forest Service, Landscape Stewardship Guide (NA-IN-06-11): http://na.fs.fed.us/pubs/detail.cfm?id=5252.

[4] State Forest Action Plans and a regional summary: http://www.forestactionplans.org/regions/northeastern-region

sustainability across geographic and political boundaries. Our participation, with partners, in the development and adoption of sound planning practices, ordinances, zoning tools, and best management practices at the community scale will achieve results in conserving, protecting and enhancing forest resources in populated and developing areas.

5. ***Support assistance to landowners to increase the financial viability of owning forest land through educational efforts about tax incentives, inter-generational transfer of forest land, and access to existing and new forest product markets.***

   Develop and support educational materials, technical assistance, and initiatives that help private forest landowners to meet their financial needs and retain forest cover. This includes encouraging planning for intergenerational transfer of forest land, awareness of and access to forest products markets, and education about tax incentive programs. Existing tax incentive programs and forest product markets can lessen the financial burden of forest landownership and enable landowners to maintain their forest land and pass it on to future generations.

6. ***Strengthen the management knowledge and skills of public and private sector forest land managers through technology transfer activities related to silviculture, arboriculture, storm response, and tree risk assessment.***

   New and proven approaches to training and effective technology transfer will multiply regional capacity to meet urgent local needs for skilled public employees and consultants to maintain and restore the health and condition of trees and forests. Hands-on and experiential opportunities for peer-to-peer learning offered through State and professional networks can improve response to storms and other natural disasters. Support and provide training opportunities that deliver continuing education to resource professionals to ensure that the current knowledge of forestry is shared.

7. ***Work with partners to develop and use methods and approaches for early detection and rapid response of new, introduced, or unknown harmful organisms.***

   Develop a regional invasive pest response and continue work with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U.S. Forest Service Research and Eastern Region, other Federal land managers, and States to detect forest damage and identify damage agents. Include development of new tools and technology transfer using lessons learned from projects such as Slow-the-Spread, Slow Ash Mortality (SLAM), and urban forest health monitoring efforts, and put those tools to use. In general this involves pest exclusion; eradication (when feasible); protection; and resistance using cultural, chemical, and biological control practices. Lack of specific tools for a given pest will help identify research and methods development needs. It is important to note that NA S&PF has primary responsibility for pest management support on Federal lands, including national forests.

8. ***Provide assistance to partners for treating high-threat damaging agents using direct control, silvicultural, and phytosanitary methods (treatment of logs with heat or chemicals); treating outlier invasive populations where eradication is a realistic possibility; and using bio-control methods when possible.***

   Eradication of a select few pests is possible if they are detected early. Once invasive pests are established, slowing their spread is the economically and socially preferred alternative. Direct controls are effective for small populations far removed from the core infestation. If these outliers are aggressively treated, it will prevent consolidation of numerous “spot fires” and reduce the rate of spread in the landscape. Cultural controls in advance of infestations make forests less vulnerable to attack and more resilient if they become infested. Treatment of logs and bark-on products emanating from infested or quarantined areas will reduce chances of human-assisted spread of known pests. Heat

and chemical treatment of logs and firewood are known to reduce the spread of all pests. Sometimes restricting access to infested areas or treating equipment being used in such areas may prove beneficial, e.g. movement of earthworms and some root diseases.

Coordinate closely with State agencies and other partners at the local level on emerging and localized threats, such as deer overpopulation. To be proactive, it is also important to have resources to respond quickly to new outbreaks. As part of this, NA S&PF could explore establishing a mutual aid compact along the lines of the fire compact model in order to have emergency response personnel and funds available.

9. ***Support management to increase tree and forest resilience and to restore after disturbances.***

   Once a new pest becomes "naturalized" the only tools available to managers are to limit the pest's impact through biological control and develop host resistance to the pest. Certain threatened tree species are known to have genetic resistance. We can use this resistance to make trees and forests more resilient through selection, propagation, breeding, and out-planting. In addition, we can develop tools to identify resistant trees in the wild and reserve them during management activities.

10. ***Increase the capacity of NA S&PF staff and partners to engage in dialogue on climate change and incorporate applicable science into their management activities for increased resilience and adaptation.***

    This includes support for synthesizing and disseminating research as well as demonstration projects by the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science (NIACS), the U.S. Forest Service Northern Research Station, and others that focus on resilience and adaptation. Evaluate and understand an array of potential threats posed by climate change, including threats posed to urban forests and share with employees and partners.

    For NA S&PF staff, consider climate change in monitoring, planning, and related activities in all programs. Use publications and tools like Forest Adaptation Resources and elements in the U.S. Forest Service climate change scorecard if adapted for S&PF.

    For partners, implement technology transfer and encourage vulnerability assessments. This should include a broad-based, forward-thinking communication strategy that is sensitive to how climate change is viewed locally. Training modules will be shared for inclusion in programs by States and others to educate foresters, communities, and landowners.

11. ***Encourage tree and forest management approaches and the use of forest products, biomass, and ecosystem service markets that have the potential to mitigate greenhouse gases.***

    Mitigation and adaptation actions to reduce greenhouse gases will focus on increasing the long-term amount of carbon stored in wood products by expanding current markets and creating new markets; increasing the storage of carbon by forests through sustainable forestry practices, including thinning and prescribed burning; and reducing greenhouse gas emissions by increasing the sustainable use of woody biomass for domestic energy needs.

12. ***Assist in restoring and maintaining fire-resilient landscapes through the strategic use of prescribed fire, mechanical treatments, and appropriate fire management techniques.***

    This strategy includes prescribed burning and mechanical treatments of forests at risk from wildfire. Activities will target fire-dependent and fire-adapted ecosystems as well as use these techniques to achieve multiple benefits in addition to hazardous fuel reduction. Initiatives under this strategy can

focus on "event" fuels (blowdowns, ice storms, etc.) and areas impacted by invasives. Woody biomass supply and markets will be expanded by these efforts.

13. ***Participate in safe, effective, and efficient risk-based wildfire management decisions through the support of State and community fire programs that strengthen preparedness, response, and firefighting capacity.***

    This includes traditional State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance funds to States and local entities that are used to improve the effectiveness of State and local firefighting resources. Activities include improve coordination and cooperation among fire management agencies on all levels, improve shared response capacities including response to wildfires and other events such as extreme storms, increase and improve initial response capabilities, provide critical and updated training, and address special and critical fire management issues.

14. ***Promote and support planning and activities that encourage communities in forested areas to reduce wildfire risks and become fire-adapted, such as Firewise, Community Wildfire Protection Plans, and community wood energy projects.***

    This includes supporting the creation, implementation, and maintenance of Community Wildfire Protection Plans, Firewise communities, fire safe ordinances, and community-level Firewise initiatives. This also includes hazard mitigation work in and adjacent to communities such as the creation of defensible space and prescribed and mechanical fuel reduction in the wildland-urban interface. These initiatives also tie into woody biomass use and local community forest management and urban forestry plans. Traditional prevention efforts would also be implemented under this strategy.

15. ***Provide information and collaborate with partners to advance the inclusion of trees and forests in source water protection, stormwater planning, green infrastructure, and land use policy.***

    From impaired, upland watersheds to combined sewer overflows affecting downriver water quality, local governments are seeking guidance on best management practices that include trees and forests as part of a community's green infrastructure. Opportunities exist to collaborate with State and Federal partners to establish advanced stormwater management practices, create riparian buffers, and include trees and forests in public strategies that protect water quality and support efforts to protect urban waters.

16. ***Restore tree and forest canopy cover and connectivity in critical and impaired watersheds using science, sustainable management practices, integrated planning, and assistance across programs.***

    Collaborative planning at the watershed scale across forested and urban landscapes is key to addressing these water quality issues. This includes holistic approaches that bring Federal, State, regional, and local partners to the table, such as the Chesapeake Bay Partnership, and engages them in dialogue that recognizes the vital contributions that trees and forests make to water quality. Restoration work involves tree planting and forest conservation, particularly in riparian areas. Collaboration will advance dialogue and expand how data, science, and tools are accessed and used to identify and prioritize critical landscapes. Collective thinking and cross-programming will ensure limited resources contribute to basin-wide successes.

17. ***Support a competitive forest industry with diversified products and markets, and related jobs with workforce knowledge and skills development, training, information exchange, and problem solving.***

    Continue to foster interaction and information exchange with the forest products industry through the activities of the Wood Education and Resource Center in cooperation with NA S&PF field staff, NAASF

Forest Utilization Committee members, academia, and industry partners. Activities include workshops, conferences, webinars, technical assistance, and financial assistance focused on problem solving.

18. ***Cooperate with new and existing partners to develop and expand traditional and emerging markets for wood products, including woody biomass and utilization of trees damaged by insects, diseases, and weather events.***

    Support implementation of NA S&PF's woody biomass business plan with focus on using low-value woody biomass for domestic thermal and combined heat and power needs; assist local communities in need of economical markets to help offset tree removal and sanitation costs through technical and financial assistance; partner with local, regional, and national organizations to obtain appropriate recognition of locally produced and sustainably managed wood products in green building and similar programs with an emphasis on new generation of wood products such as cross laminated timber.

19. ***Encourage support for tree and forest conservation, management, and forest-related products through communication and educational activities, especially for urban and metropolitan residents and decisionmakers in priority landscapes.***

    Outreach and education efforts engage people in forest and tree issues, including connections within, and between, urban and rural communities. Targeted messages and new or expanded curricula should emphasize the link between sustainable forest management and forest health, climate change, wood products, and renewable energy. By collaborating with universities, cooperative extension, environmental and science education networks, and non-profit partners, we can collectively reach a wider audience including urban constituencies. Workshops, training sessions, institutes, courses, and demonstrations can also build ladders to education and employment. NA S&PF could also support demonstration projects and provide information to urban planners, architects, engineers, and policy makers regarding the use of green infrastructure, renewable materials and renewable energy sources. This strategy also recognizes landscape stewardship planning in targeted landscapes as an important vehicle for providing information, increasing skills, and enhancing knowledge for residents and community officials.

20. ***Support outreach to underserved communities and traditional and nontraditional partners to engage people in programs that plant, protect, and maintain trees and forests.***

    Engaging people in activities to conserve and care for trees and forests is a key function of NA S&PF programs and, in turn, can lead to more support for trees and forests and forestry programs. This outreach should encourage community and citizen involvement in tree care, detection, and monitoring programs through science-based education, tools, and technical assistance. Such tools include providing Web-based and hard copy information and curricula for formal and informal educators. Partner with State agencies to provide training and certification of citizen scientists to care for trees and monitor for tree and forest pests as "first detectors."

21. ***Develop and carry out a comprehensive, Area-wide external and internal communication plan, including messages, methods, technology, and social media, to renew our emphasis on technology transfer, strengthen communication skills among NA S&PF staff, and maintain expertise and institutional knowledge.***

    It is important for the public to understand the role of trees and forests in water quality, public health, and energy conservation. Communication tools and natural resource issues evolve rapidly, affecting how people connect with each other, gather information, and form opinions about important issues. NA S&PF must continuously adapt both its messages and its media, including wider use of social media,

to effectively reach the public, our customers, and employees. NA S&PF can also support outreach campaigns by our partners.

However, information, by itself, is not enough. People are often overwhelmed with information but lack the time or expertise to capture what is most important or to apply it to their situation. Providing this service is the essence of our role in technology transfer and central to effective conservation education.

Internal audiences are a vital component of effective communications. Within NA S&PF, employees need to share information across all levels of the organization and to collaborate across disciplines and programs. Facilitating internal collaboration will improve productivity, foster holistic approaches, and capture institutional knowledge, ultimately leading to better service and results.

22. Increase use of technology to streamline and automate processes, share expertise, and provide broad access to important information, including revamping the NA S&PF Intranet and Website.

We could save the average employee up to a third of their day by providing easy access to information, effective search features, and a user-friendly repository of existing products and templates.[xviii] Improving access to information, expanding the scope of available information, and capturing accumulated knowledge would improve productivity and the quality of information products.

Routine administrative tasks also reduce the amount of time that specialists have to create knowledge and serve customers and partners. We can improve overall efficiency and productivity by consolidating some tasks and assigning them to staff dedicated to administrative duties and by placing all instructions, forms, and other needed information in one convenient location, using the "NA Web" (Intranet site) as a one-stop portal. Grants administration and monitoring is an area that needs further review to minimize the administrative workload across staff groups.

23. To improve results and accountability, establish a simple annual process to carry out the Strategic Plan, including reporting and enhancements to accomplishment databases.

The Strategic Plan sets general direction and priorities. Annual work plans provide direct guidance to individual work groups and field offices. The annual planning process will fill the gap between the strategic and tactical levels. It will provide emphasis areas from the Strategic Plan for a given year, and include reporting to allow us to measure progress toward implementing the 5-year Strategic Plan. This strategy also includes work to make sure our accomplishment reporting databases, such as the Forest Legacy Information System (FLIS), Stewardship Mapping and Accomplishments Reporting Tool (SMART), and the Community Accomplishment Reporting System (CARS), are user-friendly and meet information security requirements. It will also ensure that we collect data to review and report on progress.

24. Establish an Area-level, multi-disciplinary technology transfer team to capture and share lessons learned from grant projects and partners as well as identify and focus investments on proven technologies and effective outreach and dissemination models.

Some of NA S&PF's most successful, far-reaching projects have involved contributions from multiple programs and staff areas, developed or utilized new technology, included non-traditional partners, or used innovative outreach models. One of NA S&PF's unique roles—and a greatest strength—is our ability to provide technology transfer at a regional scale. An Area-wide multi-disciplinary team, in consultation with the U.S. Forest Service Northern Research Station and others, would focus on capturing methods, tools, and lessons learned from successful projects, such as competitively allocated grants, and then share that information widely with employees and partners.

25. Provide value-added information to expand the scope of resource data available to partners, NA S&PF staff, and others through databases, clearinghouses, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools, and other information products.

Information, in and of itself, has limited value. It is the *meaning* of information that gives it value. Knowledge workers, given the time to analyze information and see how others have analyzed and applied it, often add value in important and unexpected ways. By providing user-friendly access to more and better information as well as providing value-added data on important topics, we can greatly increase our understanding of natural resources and the people who depend on them. This also includes sharing expertise and information from other Federal and State agencies.

26. Strengthen collaboration with other Federal partners whose mission and goals align with ours to deliver stronger and more cohesive services; better leverage Forest Service resources; and provide a seamless interface for States, nonprofit organizations, and landowners.

The U.S. Forest Service, State forestry and agriculture agencies, and other Federal agencies all have responsibilities concerning forests and provide direct or indirect services to landowners and communities. In some cases the responsibilities overlap, potentially causing duplication of effort, lack of coordination, and confusion among customers and partners. As the Federal agency charged by law with protecting and conserving forests and trees on private lands in the Northeast and Midwest, NA S&PF needs to collaborate with U.S. Forest Service Research and Eastern Region and other Federal agencies and clearly define responsibilities. Cutting across program areas, this requires building relationships at multiple levels. NA S&PF Forest Management staff collaboration with the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service is essential to ensure seamless delivery of landowner assistance programs including the Conservation Reserve, Environmental Forest Restoration, and Environmental Quality Incentives programs. Also critical is NA S&PF Forest Health staff coordination with U.S. Forest Service Research and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Effective collaboration could also include linking or synchronizing duplicative databases and Web resources provided by multiple agencies.

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