

My Family's Christmas Tree, from a Colorado National Forest

Posted on USDA Blog by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, December 12, 2013 at 3:00 PM

Across the nation, 193 million acres of National Forest land provide incredible benefits to every American – from outdoor recreation opportunities to cleaner air, soil and water that impact folks from all walks of life.

And with a simple permit and some planning ahead, a National Forest can also provide a great Christmas tree during the holidays – as well as an incredible experience in visiting the forest. This year my family joined thousands of others in venturing onto a National Forest to find our tree.

Our visit to Pike National Forest in Colorado was truly memorable. The Forest encompasses more than one million acres, is home to many exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities, resources and landscapes such as the 14,110-foot Pikes Peak. The forest also is home to the headwaters of the South Platte River, which provides 60 percent of the Denver metropolitan area's water supply.



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack (second from right) and his family recently at the Pike National Forest in Colorado. USDA photo.

The communities in this area have weathered terrible natural disasters the last two years. However, they have remained resilient and brave in the aftermath of these events. Local, state and federal partners have joined together to mitigate the impact of disaster and restore the landscape for the future.

In the face of hardship, we are reminded how important spending time with friends and loved ones truly is. Cutting a Christmas tree on a national forest is a favorite holiday tradition for many Americans. It's an event that involves every member of the family – from packing a picnic lunch, to preparing tools and safety essentials, to helping get the tree out of the Forest.

I'm also inspired every time I visit a forest by the good work of U.S. Forest Service employees to preserve and protect the land. Their efforts in recent years have resulted in a modern new plan to care for the forest and create jobs, as well as a record effort to ensure our forests are resilient to wildfire by treating or harvesting timber.

There is always an incredible spirit of community, partnership, respect and renewal on our National Forests – and during the holiday season, I'm glad so many Americans choose to venture out and return to the land.

USDA FOREST SERVICE • ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

COLORADO: Arapaho Roosevelt NF & Pawnee NG • Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, & Gunnison NFs
Pike-San Isabel National Forests and Cimarron-Comanche NGs • Rio Grande NF • San Juan NF • White River NF
NEBRASKA: Nebraska & Samuel R. McKelvie NFs • **SOUTH DAKOTA:** Black Hills NF
WYOMING: Bighorn NF • Medicine Bow-Routt NFs & Thunder Basin NG • Shoshone NF