



## Shared Stewardship for Landscape Scale Conservation in the Northeast and Midwest

*Foundations of Collaboration for the Forest Service<sup>1</sup> and Northeast-Midwest State Foresters Alliance.*

Connecticut	Indiana	Massachusetts	New Jersey	Rhode Island
Delaware	Iowa	Michigan	New York	Vermont
District of Columbia	Maine	Minnesota	Ohio	West Virginia
Illinois	Maryland	Missouri	Pennsylvania	Wisconsin
		New Hampshire		

### **Foreword**

The Nation’s forests are a fundamental part of our landscape and American identity. They are the legacy we keep in trust for future generations. Forests provide clean air and water, recreational opportunities, jobs, and a host of traditional and nontraditional forest products. With one-quarter of the Nation’s forests, and 40 percent of the Nation’s population in the Northeast and Midwest region, state forestry agencies and the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperatively play critical roles in protecting and restoring America’s forests across landscapes throughout a complex rural to urban land gradient. This cooperation lays the foundation for relationships with partners and private landowners, whose collaboration is critical for sustained stewardship of our forests on a landscape scale.

Shared stewardship for landscape scale conservation<sup>2</sup> requires that we all seek to understand how our distinctive roles, authorities, and collective responsibilities contribute to greater landscape goals. The intent of the [national shared stewardship strategy](#)<sup>3</sup> is for the Forest Service to work with states and other partners by, “...setting priorities together and combining our mutual skills and assets to achieve cross-boundary outcomes desired by all.” The Forest Service, working with the National Association of State Foresters (NASF), identified three strategic priorities to focus state and private forestry actions: *Conserve Working Forest Landscapes*, *Protect Forests from Harm*, and *Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests*.<sup>4</sup> The signatory organizations of this document agree to focus collaborative work by treating these priorities as shared goals. Successful actions within these priorities will address threats we all share, including a changing climate, loss of rural working lands, loss of tree canopy in urban areas, uncontrolled fire, and destructive pests. This agreement builds on the landscape scale position paper and foundations for collaboration signed in 2009 and 2014. Each organization has unique and shared authorities and capabilities in research, adaptive management, regional and local inventories and assessments, monitoring, planning, private landowner assistance, partnership development, communication, and education.

As NASF expressed in [A Century of Shared Stewardship](#),<sup>5</sup> “Once state forestry agencies and the Forest Service are empowered to work with all landowners to make decisions and set priorities for forest management *together*, America’s forests will not only be healthier and more productive, Americans will be safer and better off.” [State Forest Action Plans](#), which identify shared management priorities for each state, are an essential component of shared decision-making and priority-setting for the management of America’s forests. The Forest Service and the Northeast-

Midwest State Foresters Alliance (NMSFA) recognize that public benefits as well as forest threats cross boundaries and are best addressed through integrated partnerships and infrastructure.

### **Forest Service and NMSFA Vision**

The work of the Forest Service and state forestry agencies focuses on maximizing the public benefits derived from trees and forests. The Forest Service and state forestry agencies serve people in this region through a cohesive, comprehensive Landscape Scale Conservation approach to land management, protection, and wise use. We work with a wide range of partners in a process to design collaboration in pursuit of landscape scale conservation. Using the concept of shared stewardship, we seek to work seamlessly within the Forest Service, state forestry agencies, and a broad array of partners at a landscape level to achieve conservation objectives consistent with the issues and priorities that define and identify those landscapes. Shared stewardship for landscape scale conservation is a foundational concept of Forest Service and state forestry agency behavior and stewardship actions across the Northeast and Midwest.

### **Foundations of Collaboration**

The successful pursuit of landscape scale conservation requires exceptional collaboration, openness to multiple goals and approaches, and shared purpose, responsibility, and communication. A driving principle of this approach is to take advantage of existing programs and efforts, while lending focus to the efforts of willing partners to address issues on landscapes. The State Forest Action Plans, National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans, and outputs from the Northern Forest Futures Project are integral examples to emerging landscape scale conservation opportunities. Five key aspects of successful collaboration, referred to here as Foundations of Collaboration, include: Information; Shared Landscapes, Issues, and Investments; Risk Management; Communication; and Implementation.

**Information** is at the core of decision-making both at the ground and policy levels. High-quality information must be produced, gathered, synthesized, and shared to create the basis of informed decision-making. This information ranges from basic science and resource assessments, through adaptive management techniques and other applied science, to sharing information about management goals across ownerships and landscapes. Multiple scientific and management entities working together can better identify and fill knowledge gaps, and address public concerns and benefits.

**Shared Landscapes, Issues, and Investments** form focal points of intensive collaboration, integrating cutting-edge science, assessment, adaptation, monitoring, and other appropriate actions between the Forest Service, State Foresters, and other partners. The intent is to bring shared expertise and resources to bear on existing priorities and efforts with ongoing investments in the short term, such as contributing to the development of State Forest Action Plans that identify and address priority landscapes, and developing and applying new techniques in land management, and many others. In shared landscapes, the overarching goal is to integrate these and other efforts where appropriate and possible, while fundamentally enhancing collaboration and public involvement and awareness throughout the region in the long-term.

**Risk Management** involves the assessment and mitigation of various ecosystem stressors and effectively tests potential management responses at the landscape scale. Key tenets of adaptive management include accepting some risk for failure, monitoring and evaluating results, and learning from experiences. By focusing our collaborative efforts on specific portions of shared landscapes, we ensure that we efficiently test ideas and approaches, and thereby replicate wise-use

decisions through sound ecosystem management and protection.

**Communication** is a critical component of successful collaboration, allowing all parties to benefit from the synergy of working together: sharing lessons learned, supporting common priorities, and accommodating different management objectives. Documenting and effectively communicating the processes described above will better enable management recommendations and guides for decision making that have a documented basis in science, testing, collaboration, and future predictions. Outreach is crucial in educating the public about current and future ecosystem challenges, the options in meeting those challenges, and why it matters.

**Implementation** of activities on the ground is ultimately where success is determined. The Forest Service, states, and other partners must identify and implement priority activities. Success is determined by how the elements work in concert to affect the provision of public benefits from forests in the Northeast and Midwest. Furthermore, the level of success is correlated with the ability of the Forest Service and states to do this work in a manner that builds on existing mechanisms and is done in concert with existing and new partners. The Forest Service and state forestry agencies provide important resources, services, coordination, infrastructure, oversight, research, and professional expertise needed to manage and protect forests across all ownerships.

### **Context of Forest Service Interest**

The Forest Service contributes to landscape scale conservation as one of many interests in the intricate web of conservation. The Forest Service is itself an internal community of interests and service. By creation of the Forest Service more than a century ago, the agency is bound together by a fundamental mission of “*sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of current and future generations.*” The Eastern Region, including National Forest System and State and Private Forestry; the Northern Research Station; and the Forest Products Laboratory maintain complementary goals with unique roles to meet the Agency mission across the 20 states of the Northeast and Midwest and the District of Columbia. Each has land stewardship at its core, with authorities respectively focused on land management, landowner and community education and assistance, resource use, basic and applied ecosystem science, technology development, and technology transfer.

### **Context of State Forester Interest**

The state forestry agencies are responsible for protecting and sustainably managing the forests of their respective states, including the District of Columbia. They accomplish this through direct action, guidance to other forest landowners, and through an array of partnerships.

In 2010, each state forestry agency nationwide completed a [Forest Action Plan](#). These plans outline important issues, opportunities, and strategies for each state and meet the [Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act](#) (as amended by the 2008 Farm Bill) requirement for the states to be eligible for funds authorized by the act. State Forest Action Plans are revised at least every ten years. This Forest Action Plan process is intended to ensure that federal and state programs target shared management priorities and achieve meaningful outcomes across the landscape.

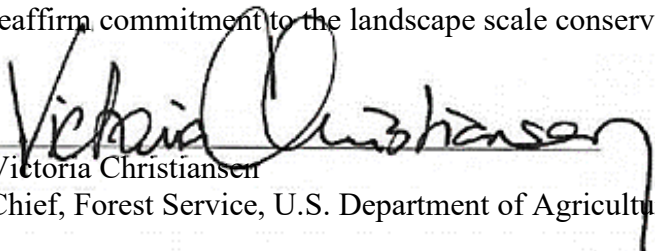
As public servants, State Foresters are credible sources of information and provide leadership based on detailed knowledge of local economies, forest resources, partners, and landowners. State forestry agencies provide essential “boots on the ground” infrastructure that includes delivering technical and financial assistance to landowners, administering Best Management Practices programs and forest practices regulations, implementing conservation tools such as easements, and providing

wildland fire suppression and invasive species control. State forests and state tree seedling nurseries supply essential elements for landscape scale conservation. Most importantly, State Foresters foster partnerships with citizens and local, regional, and national stakeholders that multiply the efforts of all resource professionals and conservation experts. The infrastructure provided and supported by state forestry agencies is essential for maximizing public benefits from forests and meeting emerging challenges.

### Statement of Intent

The Forest Service, State Foresters in the Northeast and Midwest and the District of Columbia, and Northeast-Midwest State Foresters Alliance will collaborate in the pursuit of landscape scale conservation with other federal, state, and local agencies; tribes; private landowners; and non-profit organizations to make shared decisions and set priorities for forest management *together*.

The signatories and key leadership staff commit to an annual working session to review collaborative accomplishments for the past year, set collaborative priorities for the coming year, and reaffirm commitment to the landscape scale conservation principles by re-signing this document.

  
Victoria Christiansen  
Chief, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture

  
Date

  
Forrest Boe  
Minnesota State Forester  
President, Northeast-Midwest State Foresters Alliance

7/13/2020  
Date

<sup>1</sup> Forest Service units engaged in this collaborative agreement:

- Eastern Region, National Forest System and State and Private Forestry: Protection and management of natural resources on National Forest System lands and collaborates with States, Federal agencies, tribes, landowners, and other partners to protect, conserve, and manage forests and community trees to provide clean water, forest products, wildlife habitat, recreation, and other benefits.
- Research and Development, Northern Research Station: Working at the forefront of science on all aspects of forestry, rangeland management, and forest resource utilization.
- Research and Development, Forest Products Laboratory: Promoting healthy, resilient forests and forest-based economies through the efficient, sustainable use of wood resources.

<sup>2</sup> **Landscape** is defined by a combination of geography and resource issues or opportunities, and may be of varying scale and scope. Landscape efforts give rise to communities of interest and a family of local, state, and federal resource agencies, tribes, and other landowners bound together by a mutual interest in the outcomes within the landscape. *Source: Levitt, James N. Grappling with the Green Matrix. Land Lines: January 2004, Volume 16, Number 1.*

**Landscape Scale Conservation** is a framework to conceive, plan, finance, and manage projects with significant conservation value—ecological, economic, and social. The broad concept of Landscape Scale Conservation includes three basic features: (1) A regional system of interconnected properties along a complex rural to urban gradient, (2) Actions organized to achieve one or several specific conservation objectives, (3) Landowners and managers within a given conservation region cooperate or collaborate in some concrete fashion to achieve those objectives. *Source: Ericson, Peter. Conservation on the Edge: Landscape Scale Conservation at Colorado's Urban-Rural Interface. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Urban Studies and Planning. 2004.*

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Forest Service, "Toward shared stewardship across landscapes: An outcome-based investment strategy." FS-1118, 2018. [<https://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/toward-shared-stewardship.pdf>].

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Forest Service and National Association of State Foresters. "Redesign Components: National Themes." September 10, 2007. These themes were codified as national priorities from the 2008 Farm Bill amendment to the [Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 \(Public Law 95-313\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> National Association of State Foresters. "A century of shared stewardship: State Foresters and the Forest Service." 2019. [[https://www.stateforesters.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/NASF\\_SSCD\\_final-spreads.pdf](https://www.stateforesters.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/NASF_SSCD_final-spreads.pdf)].