

Forest Resource Coordinating Committee 2016 Annual Report

Introduction:

Established in Section 8005 of the Food, Conservation, Energy Act of 2008 (Act) (Pub. L. No. 110-246), the Forest Resource Coordinating Committee's purpose is to provide direction and coordination of actions within the Department of Agriculture, and coordination with State agencies and the private sector, to address the national priorities of private forest conservation, especially non-industrial private forest landowners, for multiple values and use as well as public benefit.

The Committee was fully appointed in 2013 and consists of twenty members who represent the Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, State Foresters, State fish and wildlife agencies, private forest landowners, forest industry, conservation organizations, land-grant universities, private forestry consultants, State technical committees, Indian Tribes, and conservation districts.

Summary of Work in 2016

The Committee's 2016 objectives were:

1. Attain Department of Agriculture feedback on their recommendations
2. Develop a communication and outreach strategy to engage entities in the protection, conservation, and enhancement of private forests
3. Foster Committee development through presentations on strategic thinking and political savviness.

The Committee submitted their first set of recommendations to Secretary Vilsack in April 2014. To ensure their recommendations meet the Department of Agriculture's expectations, Committee members representing private forest landowners, academia, conservation organizations, State Foresters and forest industry met with Under Secretary Bonnie on August 1, 2016. During the meeting, the members discussed the Committee's mission, recommendations and future direction. Under Secretary Bonnie noted that as diverse individuals who can reach consensus they are a powerful tool for the agency. He encouraged the Committee to:

- Use success stories and on-the-ground examples to draw in other entities and their support, especially federal partners, influential offices, external groups and key individuals, to represent their issues. Use these coalitions to create links to other efforts and make on-the-ground outcomes that assist private forest landowners.
- Package Committee recommendations in targeted one-pagers, framed with the appropriate context for the audience. Align recommendations with current administration priorities such as climate change. Provide further clarity and research on the recommendations. Use the

recommendations to reinforce effective USDA programs, make existing programs more effective by identify gaps or effective restructuring.

- Focus on five key issues: climate change, water (quality, quantity, release timing), tax policy (property, capital gains, estate tax), markets/green buildings, and wildfire. Keep efforts focused at the policy and programmatic level.

The Committee used Under Secretary Bonnie's feedback, as well as input from policy and political experts, to develop a communications strategy for engaging new and existing entities. In particular, members broke up into four work groups to create targeted outreach strategies with the following audiences:

- USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment ,
- USDA Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agriculture Service & Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics
- Joint Chiefs for NRCS and Forest Service
- Partners

The in-person Committee meetings were also used for Committee professional development. Professionals with knowledge and experience in strategic thinking, political savvy, and coalition building gave presentations and lead discussions to increase the members' ability to collaborate with external partners to increase support and influence for implementing their recommendations. Educational presentations for FRCC committee members included such topics as role of the consulting forester; the value of forest certification; the FS Climate Scorecard; Green Building and LEED certified initiatives and Landscape Scale Restoration grants/projects.

In 2016, the Secretary appointed 2 new members to the Committee and re-appointed 2 members. Current members and Forest Service staff conducted targeted outreach and recruitment for underserved and diversity candidates for upcoming vacancies.