



Solutions for America's National Forests: Forest Management

We have a responsibility to take care of our land, water, and wildlife for future generations — including our national forests. These critical landscapes reduce runoff and toxics in the lakes, rivers, and streams that bring us clean drinking water. They also are a critical facet of our efforts to address the changing climate, preserve our outdoor heritage for future generations, and protect our way of life.

The U.S. Forest Service needs to refocus its management strategies to make our forests more resilient to wildfires, the changing climate, and other emerging threats. Policymakers should work with the Forest Service to identify and develop innovative approaches to ensure forest managers have the tools and incentives they need to undertake large-scale, climate-informed, ecologically appropriate forest restoration. These approaches should keep faith with the letter and spirit of existing environmental laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act, and should leverage the best available science and local knowledge to safeguard the water, wildlife, climate, recreation, and other benefits national forests provide.

Quick Facts

- Climate change is expected to increase the severity of pest outbreaks, wildfires, and storms, all of which pose threats to our national forests.
- Active prescribed burning programs can help reduce the intensity, size, and damage of wildfires.
- The National Forest System removes 113 million metric tons of carbon dioxide* from the atmosphere annually.
- Conserving, restoring, and better managing U.S. lands including national forests, can mitigate one-fifth of carbon emissions in the United States.
- National forests capable of adapting to changing conditions will be more likely to sequester and store carbon sustainably.

*Source material lists removal in Tg of carbon, rather than CO2 equivalent



CASE STUDY: Managing Against Wildfires

The outdoor recreation economy of Ashland, Oregon, located at the convergence of the Siskiyou and Cascade mountain ranges in Jackson County, is dependent on the health of the surrounding public and private forest lands, but decades of fire suppression has increased the risk of major wildfires. Through the Ashland Forest All-Lands Restoration Project – supported in part by the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration partnership – partners worked together to reduce excessive fuel loading and restore thousands of acres of forest, protecting both the health of the forests and the local economy.



Prescribed fire being used to restore and enhance resilience of forest in southern Oregon. Photo: Evan Barrientos/TNC

Recommendations

Specifically, our leaders should:

- Set science-based carbon stewardship goals that consider regional differences and the impacts of disturbances and a changing climate and that develop metrics at different scales.
- Update the National Forest System carbon assessment every five years, starting in 2020, and provide the data and trends to the individual states.
- Incorporate climate resilience in the Forest Service's Environmental Analysis and Decision Making efforts, including implementing the various agency-developed mapping and prioritization tools.
- Expand the purview of existing Forest Health Threat Centers, which are focused on insects and disease, to become centers of excellence for large-scale climate-informed forest management.
- Ensure reforestation and restoration programs conform with climate adaptation and mitigation best practices, and align with the recommended national carbon goal.
- Increase the capacity of USDA climate hubs and other research units for delivering climate-related science to forest professionals, and develop incentives for incorporating climate considerations into all restoration and reforestation activities.
- Increase use of prescribed burning as a climate resilience and restoration tool, especially in western landscapes.
- Develop educational and outreach initiatives to increase the social tolerance for prescribed burn smoke, as compared to the often more toxic wildfire smoke.



Red-spotted newt, Central Appalachians.
Photo: William Borne



Brown bear, Tongass National Forest, Alaska.
Photo: Larry Imhoff



Painted bunting. Photo: Russ Ergen