Communities and Forests

The Newsletter of the Commmunities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress

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Inside this issue

Burning Backyards: A Radical Conservation Ethic Rises in Flagstaff

by Ian Leahy, Editor

While the debates over how to manage western forests have raged from Washington, D.C., to Show Low, there have traditionally been a few harbors where diverse perspectives could always find safety from the political storms:

- Plant trees in cities, don't cut them.
- Keep fires as far from homes as possible.
- City fire departments fight fires in cities.

A Flagstaff Fire Department Fuel Management crew prepares for work.

As if the whole forestry and firefighting professions hadn't already been tilted and shaken enough in recent years, along came the Flagstaff, Arizona Fire Department. According to Fuel Management Officer Paul Summerfelt, since 1996, they have started more fires than they have put out. Many of these fires started by the fire department burn right to the roof drip-line of houses. Some other fires that start on their own accord, the fire department actually makes bigger on purpose. They intend to cut 75% of the trees within the Flagstaff city limits, anticipating cutting their millionth tree within the next five years. The most intriguing part of it all is that residents across the political spectrum have embraced their tactics wholeheartedly and neighbors are lining up to have their houses engulfed by flames!

Quite understandably, integrating forest management with fire fighting within the Flagstaff Fire Department presented some challenges. Traditional fire department training emphasized putting out fires, plain and simple. But as fuel loads in the surrounding forest increased, the community realized an integrated, progressive approach was needed. To appreciate just how progressive, consider the prevailing attitudes of less than a decade ago.

As recently as 1995, in response to a question of what the city's fuels management plan was, the Flagstaff fire chief at the time reportedly responded, "Don't worry, we don't use a lot of gas." In other words, nobody in the city's fire department was even thinking about trees. There was a city ordinance against cutting trees. The prevailing view was that cutting an urban tree was bad and lighting fires near homes was just plain stupid.

But the writing was on the wall. The average size of wild-

See BACKYARDS on page 5

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Listserv

The Committee's listserv, communityforestry@lists.nau.edu, is a bulletin-board type list where committee members post weekly federal policy updates, announcements of upcoming workshops and conferences, job announcements, and related notices.

Subscribers may also post questions or comments for general discussion. However, use of the listerv for extended debate is discouraged and personal attacks are not tolerated.

To subscribe to the listserv, send the following message to listserv@lists.nau.edu:

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From the President

Carol Daly

Welcome to the Summer 2004 issue of *Communities and Forests!*

From time to time I am asked to testify before Congress on certain issues that impact the future of community-based forestry. I wear many hats, sometimes testifying as the President of the Communities Committee, other times as a member of the Society of American Foresters or the Executive Director of the Flathead Economic Policy Center in Montana. These testimonies provide opportunities for us to increase support for and awareness of a variety of issues urban and rural forest-dependent communities face.

Included in this issue are exerpts from testimony I presented on June 24 to the United States Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Subcommittee on Forestry, Conservation, and Rural Revitalization. For a complete copy, please visit our website at communitiescommittee.org.

Yours,

Carol

Congressional Testimony
Submitted on the Implementation of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and Community Wildfire Protection Plans
by
the Communities Committee and
the Society of American Foresters
June 24, 2004
before the United States Senate
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Subcommittee on Forestry, Conseration, and Rural Revitalization

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I am Carol Daly, representing the Communities Committee and the Society of American Foresters. The Communities Committee grew out of the Seventh American Forest Congress. Its constituents work to increase the stewardship role for local communities in restoring and maintaining the integrity and biodiversity of their forest ecosystems, thereby enhancing both community well-being and the long-term sustainability of our forests – public and private, urban and rural.

While the issue on which I testify today is focused around community planning and collaboration, it has far reaching forest management implications. Thus I am representing not only the Communities Committee but am also representing the views of the Society of American Foresters, professional foresters who have a deep commitment to stewardship of our forest resources and working with communities to maintain and improve their forest resources.

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) gives professional forest managers, community forestry practitioners, landowners, and federal, tribal, state, and local governments a variety of new tools to use in

See **TESTIMONY** on page 4

One Year Later:

The First National Urban and Community Forestry Conference for Minority and Underserved Communities

by Zhu H. Ning, Ph.D.
Southern University,
and Ian Leahy

As we mark the one year anniversary of a land mark event, the first ever National Urban and Community Forestry Education and Outreach Conference for Minority and Underserved Communities, we reflect on what it strived to achieve and what it did achieve. The driving force behind the conference was to increase participation and career opportunities for minorities and underserved individuals in managing and growing urban and community forests. So often, there is a disconnect between the values of the forest managers and the values of the communities they serve. There are also significant career opportunities not being capitalized upon by minority and underserved residents simply because they do not know these opportunities exist.

With financial support from the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council, the Ford Foundation, USDA Forest Service Southern Region, and the Southern University Center for Energy and Environmental Studies, the conference set out to establish a foundation from which these shortcomings could be overcome. Specifically, the conference sought to:

1. Educate minority sectors in the care and stewardship of urban forests where they live, work, and play.
2. Create a strong network of minority communities, non-profit UCF organizations, federal agencies, and private industries to better target the needs of the communities.
3. Provide information on educational, funding, and career opportunities in UCF.

Joel Holtrop, Deputy Chief, USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry, delivered the keynote address. Seated to his right is Communities Committee board member Dr. Zhu Ning.

The Energy of a New Vision

The energy was high as almost 500 people streamed through the doors. Living up to its title, conference participants were very diverse - representing African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and more. It was the host university from Baton Rouge, Southern University A&M College (SU), that successfully brought such a diverse audience together for three days of education, networking, and visioning for the future of urban forestry. Southern University is a historically black university that has long played a strong role in serving minority and underserved communities.

Joel Holtrop, Deputy Chief, USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry, delivered the keynote address. He emphasized the importance of urban and community forestry and the USDA Forest Services' commitment to increasing minority and underserved communities' involvement. He highlighted Southern University's Urban Forestry Program for its efforts and success in educating and preparing minority students for the workforce.

Participants Views

But, the real story isn't what the existing leaders said. It's what the future leaders and other conference attendees experienced. More than 30 minority high school students attended the conference. Many expressed significant interest in working in the urban forestry field after only one day at the conference. Some of them told Joel Holtrop himself that they would like to work in a forestry related field.

A principal of a high school for at-risk youth said the conference was a great opportunity for her students. "Let me know if you have more of these types of activities."

There was, however, some room for improvement for future conferences. For example, Pat Arnold, Director of the Louisiana Governor's Office for Native Indian Affairs, told the conference chair of Southern University, Dr. Zhu H. Ning, that urban and community forestry is a critical issue for Native Americans and there is a need to get more Native American involved at the next conference.

Putting Money Toward the Future

As a result of this minority conference, the USDA Forest Service committed scholarships to attract more minority participants to the National Urban Forest Conference in San Antonio, including $25,000 worth of travel scholarships. As post-conference energy grew, however, so too did the pot of money. Eventually the scholarship was increased to $120,000. The result was a much larger number of minority participants in the conference than ever before.

The groundwork has been laid and the networks of communities established across the country. A year later, more minorities and underserved are entering the field of urban forestry than ever before. Many participants indicated that a conference of this kind should be hosted more often both at the national and regional levels.

TESTIMONY from page 2

addressing hazardous fuels reduction and forest restoration needs on national forests and nearby private lands. Today I would like to address one of these tools, the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) process and the opportunities and challenges it presents as we move forward in implementing HFRA.

Preparing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan

To help communities participate fully in HFRA's benefits, SAF and the Communities Committee, together with the National Association of Counties, the National Association of State Foresters, and the Western Governors' Association, recently wrote and published *Preparing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan: A Handbook for Wildland-Urban Interface Communities.*

Ideally, the creation of a CWPP draws together forestry professionals, local governments, fire departments, and other concerned agencies, groups, and individuals to collaboratively identify areas at risk of wildfire and develop an action plan for reducing those risks.

Planning issues needing further consideration

Collaborative planning is the heart of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan process, yet in this (as in other recent forest-related legislation) mandates for collaboration are not backed up with financial and technical support. Local governments, fire departments, and state forestry agencies generally have little or no experience in collaborative processes. It therefore falls to community-based forestry groups or other non-governmental organizations to organize and facilitate the collaboration. Lacking HFRA, National Fire Plan, stewardship contracting, or other federal support for that work, it is necessary to seek funding from foundations or other private sources to pay for it. Such funders, however, are increasingly reluctant to pay for the facilitation of federal programs, arguing that they should be the government's funding responsibility. We are appreciative of the House's efforts to set aside $5 million in the FY 2005 Interior Appropriations Bill to cost share with communities for community wildfire protection plans. We hope the Senate will consider similar action.

> "We are appreciative of the House's efforts to set aside $5 million in FY 2005 for community wildfire protection plans. We hope the Senate will consider similar action."

There is also a need for better information and technical assistance to enable communities to participate in HFRA activities. The handbook prepared by the Communities Committee and our co-sponsors has been widely distributed but it alone is not enough. We need to give particular attention to poorer or low capacity communities. Without a CWPP and proactive risk reduction strategy in operation, they are more vulnerable to wildfire losses. Plus, should they have a severe wildfire, their ability to recover from it is less than that of a higher capacity community.

When a collaborative process *is* begun and communities study local forest stand conditions, watersheds, threatened and endangered species, and other critical resources, they are almost certain to identify ecosystem management and restoration work which goes beyond hazardous fuels treatment. CWPP planning should not be a process in isolation, but should feed into other relevant federal, state, and local planning activities.

Carrying out a Community Wildfire Protection Plan

When possible, HFRA projects on public lands should be conducted in coordination with similar projects on adjacent private lands, including those funded under the National Fire Plan. This results in more consistent and effective treatments.

Over-reliance on the stewardship contracting mechanism to fund HFRA projects to implement CWPPs should be avoided. While some hazardous fuels treatment activities will yield saleable products that can be exchanged to cover all or a significant part of the treatment services being provided, many will not. Until more or larger markets are created for what are now low- or no-value materials, adequate direct funding for HFRA on both federal and non-federal lands is essential.

The increase in hazardous fuels reduction contracting opportunities arising from HFRA and the National Fire Plan has encouraged new contractors specializing in such work to enter the field, while at the same time many existing forestry or logging contractors are re-focusing their operations and investing in equipment suited to this growing market niche. On public lands projects, the transition has not always gone smoothly. For example, the Forest Service's normal cruising practices still tend to focus on commercial materials, and the estimated amount of small diameter, low-value material to be removed has been greatly understated in some bid offerings, leading to large financial losses for contractors who relied on the accuracy of those figures. Bonding requirements and contracting processes that worked well on traditional timber sales also need to be revisited in the context of HFRA.

Monitoring and Evaluating Progress

Section 102(g)(5) of HFRA directs the Forest Service and BLM to establish a collaborative multiparty monitoring, evaluation, and accountability process for projects "where significant interest is expressed" to "assess the positive or negative ecological and social effects of authorized hazardous fuel reduction projects." These monitoring activities will be an important factor in proving the value of the program and allaying existing reservations about HFRA's intent and impact. Congress wisely included a provision for operational

See TESTIMONY on page 5

TESTIMONY from page 4

funding for these monitoring activities, and provided that the agencies could enter into cooperative agreements or contracts with, or provide grants to, "small or micro-businesses, cooperatives, nonprofit organizations, Youth Conservation Corps work crews, or related State, local, and other non-Federal conservation corps" to collect monitoring data.

The Wildland Fire Leadership Council also proposed monitoring protocol requiring that stakeholders wishing to participate should have "appropriate skills and knowledge for monitoring" and "must be willing to share costs." Such requirements could be used to limit or discourage multiparty participation and would defeat the purpose of this important component of HFRA.

Final Thoughts

HFRA is still very much a work in progress and will take time and leadership from all involved, including Congress, all levels of government, professional foresters, community practitioners, and concerned stakeholders to make it a success. We urge that adequate time be allowed for a full exploration of the Act's potential, and encourage Congress meanwhile to continue its strong commitment to and funding for HFRA.

Building on the concept of partnerships and community involvement in HFRA, we, as a nation, need to continuously seek opportunities to manage our forests comprehensively, meaning across ownerships within watersheds and ecosystems. CWPPs begin to create this comprehensive approach, and we urge similar partnerships and collaborations for forest management and restoration across the country, not just in fire-prone forests.

Both the Communities Committee and SAF would be happy to work with the Congress, the Forest Service, BLM, and others as appropriate, to help address the issues we have raised today.

BACKYARDS from page 1

fires was skyrocketing and devastating towns throughout the Southwest. Nothing seemed to work and Flagstaff officials had to take action of some sort. They soon realized that, in order to address fire, they would have to address the larger issue of fuels that cause the fires. Three short years after "fuels management" was confused for gas consumption, the city hired a Fuels Management Officer, and in 1999 it organized and outfitted a fuel crew. Fuels management work has since become a major part of the fire department's work.

Today, structure fires are actually a very small component of the Flagstaff Fire Department's overall work. Flagstaff has about 120 in-town fires a year. Lightning starts about half of them, while the other half are human induced. As managers examined the macro issue of regional fire management, the fire department's jurisdiction logically expanded far beyond the city limits. Traditional urban/wildland interface models focus on houses and structures, remaining relatively close to the city. Flagstaff's finest took it on themselves to manage a mostly rural landscape extending almost to Sedona, thirty miles to the south.

> "Today, structure fires are actually a very small component of the Flagstaff Fire Department's overall work."

The logic behind this seemingly inefficient approach to fighting fires lies in the notion that there are many other values that contribute more to the overall tax base than homes. Especially in a tourist-dependent city like Flagstaff, residents' motivations are far broader than family and job. The surrounding peaks are spiritual for Native Americans, and the vistas and recreational opportunities are critical to the economy of the region. When big fires rage, few tourists come north from Phoenix. After big fires burn through, nobody wants to look at black sticks – whether from their home or their hotel room. Even beyond tourism dollars, a fire burning outside of town in the watershed could have a much more disastrous effect through flood damage or diminished water quality than the loss of specific structures.

Suffice it to say, the public and the development community were initially quite skeptical of lighting fires next to homes and cutting urban trees. But the reality was that everybody saw the huge wildfires ravaging towns all around them and knew they could no longer sit and wait for their turn. With a fire department possessing limited capacity to respond to only one event at a time, it was obvious from the beginning that the public could never shoulder the tax burden of protecting everything. Priorities had to be set and decisions made. Values were placed on the most important assets worth protecting for the well-being of the overall city. With $69 million lost per year from fires, spending $200,000 in prevention and recruiting an educated public to do what they could to protect their own properties were far and away the most cost-effective solutions.

When even the staunchest opponents to cutting trees and starting fires found out the fuels management crew was already thinning about 1,000 acres per year inside city limits and lighting hundreds of fires without any disastrous impacts, public support grew. There was still a healthy forest there. In many ways, it was a much healthier forest. Even the complaints about smoke in the city diminished as it became a necessary nuisance.

Today, Flagstaff's fire department is a model for agencies throughout the West, as communities integrate municipal fire protection and fuel management practices.

Viewpoint

Fire Heats Up the South's Wildland-Urban Interface

by Wayne Zipperer, Ed Macie, and Amy Hermansen, USDA Forest Service, Gainesville, Florida

In most community forestry circles, as well as in the national media, western wildfires gain the attention and resources. Yet, southern states have quietly grappled with their own unique issues as wildfires have come face to face with rapid urbanization. The battleground, commonly known as the wildland-urban interface, represents a zone of physical, ecological, and social changes resulting from rapid conversion of rural to urban land uses. The wildland-urban interface is not new. What is new is the rate at which our rural landscapes are being developed for urban land uses.

This rate increase was first evident in the 1970s when, for the first time in our history, more people migrated out of cities and into adjacent rural areas than vice versa. The shift resulted from a number of factors. Our cities were suffering from a decline in fiscal budgets, which resulted in an increase in crime and a decrease in services. With our economy's shift from industrial to service and information, people suddenly had the freedom to live and work where they wanted. Many followed the climate, making the South one of the fastest growing regions in the United States. Additionally, our major highway system was nearly complete, facilitating outward migration within Southern metropolises. This outward migration pattern repeated itself again during the 1990s.

At current growth rates, over 800,000 acres of forestlands are forecasted to be lost annually through 2020 (Wear 2002). Interestingly, population growth does not account for all the land use conversions. For example, in Charleston, S.C., for each 1 percent increase in population since 1973, urban land use increased by 6 percent (Allen and Lu 1999). Additional urban land use conversions result from the increase of transportation, commercial, institutional, and educational land uses.

The Costs of Condos

Although there are numerous economic and ecological effects of this outward migration, fire issues placed the wildland-urban interface on the radar screen of natural resource managers, policymakers, and planners at the federal, state, and local levels. Interestingly, a high portion of new development has occurred in fire dependent ecosystems. These ecosystems depend on frequent fires to maintain their ecological integrity. Examples include the chaparral in the West and the coastal long-leaf pine in the South.

PHOTO BY LARRY KORHNAK

The Southern urban-wildland interface outside Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

Urbanization alters the structure of ecosystems and how they function. For example, developing just 10 percent of a forested watershed affects stream biota and stabilization. Urbanization introduces non-native, invasive species that alter ecosystems and threaten native species. Similarly, with new developments natural resource management options are altered, limiting our ability to provide needed goods and services.

Because the Nation's population continues to increase – most rapidly in southern climates – development will continue to occur in our rural landscapes. With the increase in population, there is a corresponding change in values and attitudes toward land management in rural and interface areas. Landowners may restrict recreational uses on their lands and/or oppose certain forest management practices. A survey of residents' values toward public forest land in the South showed that wood production was rated least important compared to clean air (most important), scenic beauty, and heritage. Interestingly, values did not differ between urban and rural residents (Tarrant et al. 2002). Overall, these findings reflect a shift from a utilitarian to a biocentric view of management.

Planning Tomorrow's Landscapes Today

How and where new development occurs depends on state, county, and local land-use policies and planning. Although attitudes and values influence land use policy decisions, developing and implementing sound policy is critical for long-term sustainability of ecosystem goods and services. Land use policies should incorporate known scientific information and account for the multiple ownerships and jurisdictions within the interface. To meet this goal, planning tomorrow's landscapes today requires a socio-ecological framework that utilizes current remote sensing technology to identify rates of change and implement planning at a broad scale perspective; implement sound planning techniques such as smart growth; and incorporate ecological importance of ecosystem goods and services in the decision-making process.

To address the unique urban-wildland interface challenges faced in the South, the USDA Forest Service has positioned itself to address the aforementioned

See FIRE on page 7

Community Wildfire Protection Plan Handbook: In order for a community to take full advantage of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003, it must first prepare a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). Local wildfire protection plans can take a variety of forms, based on the needs of the people involved in their development. Community Wildfire Protection Plans may address issues such as wildfire response, hazard mitigation, community preparedness, or structure protection—or all of the above. Download the Community Wildfire Protection Plan Handbook (Adobe PDF) at *www.communitiescommittee.org*, under "publications".

www.SouthwestWood.com is a new website designed to provide practitioners with timely and useful information about raw materials, products, services, and markets that are available to help their businesses achieve their goals and help facilitate forest restoration activities throughout the Southwest by providing assistance to forest practitioners, small-diameter wood industries, rural development professionals, business owners, vendors, educators, and interested community members.

Outcomes from the Western Week in Washington: The March event brought community forestry advocates and practitioners to Washington, D.C., to conduct outreach on the Community-based Restoration Funding Package and the HFRA. It was an incredible week with nearly 50 meetings with key federal staff, agencies and officials. Follow up is now critical to keep these efforts moving forward.

To learn how you can help, contact Maia Enzer of Sustainable Northwest at 503-221-6911, ext. 111. Issue papers on the Community-based Restoration Funding Package, Healthy Forests Restoration Act, Wildfire and Poverty, Stewardship Contracting, and Biomass are posted online at www.sustainablenorthwest.org/policy.

National Alliance for Community Trees hosts its annual meeting of non-profit urban forestry organizations September 9-10, 2004, in Washington, D.C. Community-based organizations dedicated to tree planting and protection in cities are encouraged to attend. Contact Alice Ewen Walker at 301-699-8635 or visit www.actrees.org for information.

CSREES Funding Opportunity: Enhancing the Prosperity of Small Farms and Rural Agricultural Communities. The purpose of this program is to foster interdisciplinary studies and improve our understanding of the interactions between the economic, social, biological and environmental components important to small farms and rural economic development. Applicants are expected to propose hypotheses that are testable and to use quantitative approaches. Projects should address small farms, rural agricultural communities, or both small farms and rural communities when interrelated. Investigators are encouraged to contact National Program Leaders SivaSureshwaran at (202) 720-3310 (ssureshwaran@csrees.usda.gov to arrange a telephone consultation) or Diana Jerkins (202) 401-6996(djerkins@csrees.usda.gov) with questions about the suitability of research topics. $5 million for fiscal years 2004 & 2005. Deadline for submissions: October 5, 2004. Please visit the website: *www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/fundview.cfm?fonum=1200*

www.redlodgeclearinghouse.org is an online clearinghouse to help build capacity for building collaboration and overcoming conflict regarding natural resource activities in the interior West.

FIRE from page 6

issues with the establishment of the Southern Center for Wildland-Urban Interface Research and Information (Center) in Gainesville, FL in January 2002. This Center addresses four key areas related to urbanization and changing land use in the South:

1) How ecosystems are being altered by human influences and the ability to predict these alterations. This is critical for evaluating changes to ecosystem goods and services along urban-rural gradients;

2) How disturbance regimes are altered through human influences along an urban-rural gradient and what the subsequent risks are to human and natural communities;

3) What the relationship of land use policies is to ecological processes and disturbances in the wildland-urban interface; and

4) Policymakers, natural resource professionals, and citizens need scientific information, guidelines, and tools to address and minimize risks due to changes from urbanization and other human influences on forest ecosystems. The Center is working closely with the Southern Group of State Foresters to develop and deliver technology transfer products.

New approaches are needed to address issues related to land use change and resulting consequences on forest ecosystems. The Southern Center for Wildland-Urban Interface Research and Information is adopting several approaches to disseminate new and existing information to help natural resource professionals, landowners, policymakers and others with interface issues. Though the focus of the Center is on the Southern Region, the resources being developed can be adapted to a much wider audience. For more information visit the Center's web site: *www.interfacesouth.usda.gov*.

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Communities and Forests

Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress
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Mark Your Calendars

Creating Community Forests from Corporate Divestment
Community Forests in the United States:
"Visions, Experiences, and Lessons Learned"

Missoula, Montana, June 23-26, 2005

Millions of acres of private forest lands in the U.S. are in imminent peril of conversion to non-forest uses. They are being divested by forest-products companies who now can get their timber more economically elsewhere. In response, the Communities Committee, the Bolle Center for People and Forests at the University of Montana, and other sponsors will organize a practitioner-oriented conference bringing together community leaders from around the country to explore issues and experiences in the establishment, governance, management, and use of community-owned and -managed forests.

Through presentations, group discussions, poster sessions, and field tours the conference will address such topics as: current and historic community forests in North America; corporate forest land divestiture - issues and opportunities for companies and communities; forest land acquisition and financing; options, tools, and techniques; developing and sustaining a collective vision for a community forest; community learning: multiparty monitoring and participatory science; who owns the forest – dealing with issues of property, tenure, responsibility, risk, and governance; managing a forest for multiple public and private values; and much more.

The target audience is forest practitioners from communities facing forest land conversions and either considering the possibility of a community forest or already involved in one. Scholarship assistance will be offered for those with limited budgets.

For more information call or write:
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Mission Statement:

The purpose of the Communities Committee of the Seventh American Forest Congress is to focus attention on the interdependence between America's forests and the vitality of rural and urban communities, and to promote:

- Improvements in political and economic structures to ensure local community well-being and the long-term sustainability of forested ecosystems;
- An increasing stewardship role of local communities in the maintenance and restoration of ecosystem integrity and biodiversity;
- Participation by ethnically and socially diverse members of urban and rural communities in decision-making and sharing benefits of forests;
- The innovation and use of collaborative processes, tools, and technologies; and
- The recognition of the rights and responsibilities of diverse forest landowners.