

Statewide Assessment and Strategy for Forest Resources

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The Alabama Forestry Commission is engaging in an assessment and planning process to prioritize forestry efforts statewide. This effort reflects new requirements outlined in the Forestry Title of the 2008 Farm Bill. It will ensure that federal and state resources are being focused on important landscape areas with the greatest opportunity to address shared management priorities and achieve measurable outcomes.

The proposed plan will serve two primary functions: (1) provide an analysis of forest conditions and trends to delineate priority rural and urban landscape-level areas, and (2) provide long-term strategies for investing resources to manage priority landscapes identified in the assessment. The AFC will utilize this plan to identify projects and submit them to the USDA Forest Service for funding.

This effort should and must necessarily be a collaborative effort of natural resources professionals from across all disciplines such that the finished product will have broad support and a high degree of credibility. Although being led and facilitated by the Alabama Forestry Commission – as Congress requires state forestry agencies to take the lead in the assessment process – it further requires coordination with the State Forest Stewardship Committee, state technical committee, the state wildlife agency, landowner groups, and other partners and stakeholders. To that end, a State Natural Resources Stakeholder Brainstorming Meeting was held on December 17, 2008, at the AFC State Office in Montgomery to identify and prioritize the critical natural resource issues of Alabama.

This group will develop a forest resource strategy to provide a long-term, comprehensive, coordinated approach for investing state, federal, and leveraged partner resources to address the management and landscape priorities identified in the assessment. This strategy should:

- conserve and manage working forest landscapes for multiple values and uses.
- protect trees and forests from harm, including catastrophic storms, flooding, insect or disease outbreaks, and invasive species, as well as reduce wildfire impacts.
- enhance public benefits including air and water quality, soil conservation, biological diversity, carbon storage, forest products, production of renewable energy, and wildlife.

The forest resource strategy will serve as a living document for our agency's long-term planning. ♣