

Woodland

YOUR CONNECTION TO AMERICA'S FORESTS



A Publication of the



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Contact Nate Meehan with any suggestions at nmeehan@forestfoundation.org.

Also, you can access a complimentary, shareable online version of *Woodland* at forestfoundation.org/why-we-do-it/woodland-magazine if you know someone interested in learning about our work.



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New Hampshire's Current Use Law protects habitat for many wildlife species, like this young bull moose. *Photo credit: Tom Thomson*

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BY RITA HITE
PRESIDENT & CEO
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

American Family Forest Owners and Markets Have Global Significance

As 2023 drew to a close, the American Forest Foundation (AFF) was proud to send representatives to COP28. We were proud to share our work about family forest owners tackling climate change and currently, the most viable option to maximize the climate potential of nature is through voluntary carbon markets. Our team connected with project developers, companies, and governments from around the world and highlighted the impact American family forest owners are and can have on the environment.

Across our many conversations at COP28, it was clear that nature is indispensable to avoiding climate catastrophe. Government leaders from Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry to EU President Ursula von der Leyen affirmed this. Natural climate solutions, along with reducing emissions and technological advances, must be maximized to keep our planet from warming more than 1.5 degrees Celsius.

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“Here in the U.S., family-owned forests are key to unlocking the full potential of natural climate solutions.”

It also became clear that for the voluntary carbon market to truly succeed they must be designed for and with communities and smallholders. Here in the U.S., family-owned forests are key to unlocking the full potential of natural climate solutions. Making up the largest portion of forests in America, these lands have the potential to remove more than 1 billion tonnes of carbon by 2050. Family forest owners have long made vital contributions to our nation's conservation efforts and if given the support to manage and care for their land, they can do even more for our planet. In this edition of Woodland, like every edition, you can read the important policy work our team does to highlight family forest owners (pg 9) and inspiring stories of incredible landowners who are doing essential work stewarding their land in *A Walk in the Woods* (pg 16)

We left COP28 reminded that we have the tools to combat climate change and that all we need is resources and commitment. To build on the momentum from COP28 and maximize the impact of the carbon market will require collective action. It will require more private landowners to enroll in carbon programs, like our Field to Forest program we are piloting in Georgia right now alongside partners like the Southwest Georgia Project and the Georgia Forestry Commission,

and join the fight against climate change (pg 10). It will call for more companies to purchase and invest in high-quality carbon credits and do so at a larger scale. And it will necessitate government involvement to jumpstart both corporate and landowner participation.

There is still a lot of learning to do about markets and a lot of room for growth, and there is an excellent report that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently released (see page 6) highlighting rural landowners' integral role in activating America's lands to catalyze the climate potential. It emphasizes the many challenges and barriers family forest owners face in accessing carbon markets, the most financially viable mechanism for activating private forests as natural climate solutions as part of our country's broader climate mitigation strategy.

Though the report enumerates many challenges to the growth and adoption of carbon markets in rural America, it also details promising changes that the agency can make in order to unlock market access and participation.

This year, I hope you feel as energized as we do at AFF about the path forward. There has never been a time when you and I have been better positioned to make a difference one landowner at a time and, collectively, on a global scale. 🌲

The Challenge to Carbon Markets in Rural America

BY KRISTEN VOORHEES

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

Following deliverables in the Growing Climate Solutions Act of 2021, a piece of legislation to help farmers, ranchers, and foresters access carbon markets, helping the environment and boosting farm income at the same time, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released its latest assessment of agriculture and forestry's role in carbon markets. Among many other takeaways, this report highlights the critical importance of empowering family forest owners to create meaningful conservation impact through accessing the voluntary carbon market.

This report highlights rural landowners' integral role in activating America's lands to catalyze the climate potential. It emphasizes the many challenges and barriers that family forest owners face in accessing carbon markets, the most financially viable mechanism for activating private forests as natural climate solutions as part of our country's broader climate mitigation strategy.

The report highlights the close relationship between the success of capturing more carbon through agriculture and forestry projects and landowners' ability and willingness to participate in carbon markets. If landowners face barriers to market entry, we won't be able to catalyze the climate potential of family forests in the race to mitigate climate change. Barriers include high upfront costs for implementing projects, challenges, and costs to monitoring and reporting projects, and confusion over options to landowners, among others.

USDA'S ROLE

Though the report enumerates many challenges to the growth and adoption of carbon markets in rural America, it also details promising changes that the agency can make in order to unlock market access and participation.

USDA's commitments listed in this report are a game-changer for carbon markets. The government's investment in increasing market access has catalytic potential to provide rural landowners with the tools they need to sustainably steward their lands, access additional income, and help the planet.

The report outlines how USDA can provide technical assistance to landowners through existing programs, including their Natural Resources Conservation Service, Climate Hubs, and Office of Environmental Markets. Additionally, they identify the need to offer innovative grants and partnerships to organizations working in carbon, forestry, and agriculture and invest in research that provides more accurate and transparent data among carbon projects, thus reducing uncertainties and building confidence in the market. USDA will also play a critical role in reducing market confusion faced by producers by serving as a trusted authority for a range of relevant carbon market information.

WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN? OUR TAKE

Family forest owners want to do what's best for their lands—but as this report emphasizes, they need the tools to protect the health and value of their forests. Carbon markets make that possible.

“The program provides technical and financial support for landowners to implement climate-smart forestry practices to improve the health and value of their woodlands.”

We cannot afford not to figure out how to maximize market participation among all producers, both for the sake of our planet and for the rural, often underserved Americans that financially benefit from this market. This is critical work to ensure that rural America is not left out of yet another economic and environmental opportunity.

One of the key barriers the report names is that it's often impossible for small-scale and underserved landowners to access carbon markets because the margins are thin and there are so many upfront costs. At the same time, efforts to improve the quality of carbon credits add to those costs and reduce the upfront revenue available.

Just like USDA has played a critical role in other agriculture markets where the production of an agricultural commodity provides an economic, environmental, and social benefit, it can do the same for carbon markets by providing technical assistance, research, development, and innovation, as well as supporting the financing that's needed to unlock market access for rural America.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

USDA has existing tools they can use to break down barriers to carbon markets. But we also need new tools to catalyze public and private investment in the market. One tool is the Rural Forest Markets Act, which will grant USDA clear authority to finance and reduce the risks of launching and implementing high-quality carbon projects that produce credits that measure meaningful climate impact.

The Rural Forest Markets Act would enable USDA to issue guarantees for loans and bonds that help create carbon markets for small landowners, incentivize family landowners to adopt climate-friendly forest practices that increase the value of market commodities like carbon, water, and timber, and allow the U.S. to achieve the necessary scale of climate impact by bringing the power of private finance from companies, philanthropy, and social impact organizations to rural America.

Meanwhile, efforts are already underway to remove financial and technical barriers to carbon markets for family forest owners, such as AFF and TNC's Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP). FFCP was uniquely designed to expand access to carbon markets for small family forest owners, empowering them to capture and store carbon to improve their forests' health and address climate change. The program provides technical and financial support for landowners to implement climate-smart forestry practices to improve the health and value of their woodlands. It's a win-win for people and the planet.

USDA's commitment to making carbon markets work, despite the barriers that currently exist, is an important signal of confidence in its potential. We all know there are challenges with carbon markets. USDA's willingness to work with partners to get them right for rural Americans further builds confidence and integrity in this crucial piece of our country's climate mitigation puzzle.

The report, entitled, *A General Assessment of the Role of Agriculture and Forestry in U.S. Carbon Markets* can be found online at [USDA.gov](https://www.usda.gov). ▲

The Family Forest Carbon Program helps landowners **care for their woods while helping the planet.**

Family forests provide a wide array of ecosystem benefits, including wildlife habitat, clean air, and natural water filtration. They also help protect the planet by sequestering and storing carbon. The Family Forest Carbon Program creates a marketplace for landowners to sell carbon credits to environmentally conscious companies working to reduce their carbon footprint. Landowners can earn extra income to help achieve their goals for their land.

The Family Forest Carbon Program is uniquely designed to help forest owners adopt long-term sustainable management that improves carbon sequestration and storage while balancing other essential forest benefits. The program provides expert guidance from a forest professional, creating a forest management plan, and annual payments to implement practices.

Now available in Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Learn more at www.familyforestcarbon.org



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AFF Policy Team Update

BY SARAH JEWELL
POLICY MANAGER,
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

As Autumn quickly transitioned into the holiday season, thankfully Congress successfully saved Thanksgiving by averting a government shutdown.

The Senate passed the House's stopgap short-term spending bill, with two days to spare before the current continuing resolution ended on Nov. 17. Although the bill keeps federal agencies operating at current levels through the new year, it sets up a potential spending fight for certain agencies in January, including spending levels for the USDA and FDA.

This continuing resolution to avert a government shutdown funds the government using two different timelines. House Speaker Mike Johnson's two-tier structure will keep part of the government open until Jan. 19, while several domestic programs will last through Feb. 2.

The stopgap wasn't the only piece of legislation that was passed. The 2018 Farm Bill, which expired on Sept. 30, was extended through Sept. 30, 2024. With a one-year extension, Congress has an additional year to negotiate and develop a Farm Bill without a gap in funding.

This 2018 Farm Bill extension ensures funding for critical conservation and farm safety net programs through 2024, including funding for "orphan" USDA programs that

would have lost funding in the New Year without the extension. These "orphan programs" lack permanent funding mechanisms, and therefore are not part of the Farm Bill's budget baseline and as a result, would have been dead if not for an extension. Some of these "orphan programs" include small conservation programs. Additionally, this extension allows the USDA to process new applications for CRP, which were suspended when the 2018 Farm Bill expired on Sept. 30.

With the 2024 presidential campaign season next year, the Farm Bill will most likely be the hot topic of discussion among candidates. This means that many Farm Bill programs could be more heavily politicized, such as the billions of dollars for conservation funding that were included in the Inflation Reduction Act law and limits on SNAP.

Lastly, Senators Bob Casey (D-PA), Mike Braun (R-IN), and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) introduced the Rural Forest Markets Act (RFMA) on December 5th. We now have RFMA introduced in both chambers of Congress. This is a critical bill for small family forest owners to access carbon markets and build generational wealth.

With so much uncertainty in Congress, AFF's policy team remains vigilant and will keep striving to influence lawmakers to pass legislation that is most favorable to family forest owners. 🌲

Field to Forest:

Helping Families Transition Pastureland into Healthy, Productive Forests

BY MATT BONSALE

Georgia's pastureland managers now have a new tool to help them care for their land, earn revenue, and support a healthy environment. The Field to Forest initiative, from the American Forest Foundation (AFF), offers a solution for landowners who want to transition all or a portion of their pastureland to forestry. The initiative supports families in planting native loblolly pine seedlings on pastureland and cropland.

Through Field to Forest, AFF hires professional foresters to write management plans that best suit the condition of the land and pays for reputable contractors to coordinate the planting process from start to finish, including site preparation, planting seedlings, and post-planting maintenance.

In addition, landowners enrolled in Field to Forest receive \$30 per acre per year for their 30-year contract with AFF. During the contract, enrolled landowners can conduct one thinning treatment and a final harvest—and keep the profits from both operations. If the landowner opts for a final harvest, Field to Forest will pay for replanting another rotation of loblolly pine.

"If a landowner is interested in turning their field into forest land and is eligible for the Field to Forest initiative, AFF will cover the land transition costs," Natalie Omundson, Director of Product Implementation at AFF, said. "There are no out-of-pocket expenses for landowners to enroll in Field to Forest. AFF will cover the costs associated with clearing and planting trees on the land—demonstrating the organization's long-term investment in family forest landowners."

Through the Field to Forest initiative, AFF aims to plant 5,000 acres of loblolly pine trees in Georgia by the spring of 2025. These trees are anticipated to produce over 200,000 tonnes of additional carbon sequestration and storage, underscoring the significant impact that reforestation initiatives like Field to Forest can achieve.

"If a landowner is interested in turning their field into forest land and is eligible for the Field to Forest initiative, AFF will cover the land transition costs," Natalie Omundson, Director of Product Implementation at AFF, said.

"Forests and forest stewards hold the key to a sustainable future for us. Forests provide benefits such as carbon sequestration, clean air and water, wildlife habitat, and wood products. Forestry-related businesses support over 1.3 million jobs in the South. Through initiatives like Field to Forest, AFF empowers landowners to practice sustainable forest stewardship with technical guidance and financial incentives. By 2050, our ambitious target is to capture and store one billion tonnes of carbon in family forests across all our programs."

HELPING FAMILY LANDOWNERS ACCESS THE VOLUNTARY CARBON MARKET.

"The Field to Forest initiative will expand access to carbon markets for small family forest owners," says Bethany Mueller, Senior Manager of Climate Donor Relations at AFF. "Unlocking the carbon storage potential of America's family landowners will help fight climate change and give family landowners a sustainable income stream. We hope to expand this pilot initiative to other states in the coming years."

According to the Reforestation Hub¹, over six million acres of pastureland in the U.S. could be transitioned to forestry without materially diminishing food production. Often, these acres of land are already marginally productive or owned and managed by families looking to find a less intensive means of managing and profiting from the land. Climate finance can help motivate landowners to make this transition and plant trees.

The voluntary carbon market allows private entities to buy and sell carbon credits, enabling corporations and other institutions to address their residual emissions while investing in sustainable forest management. This helps them meet their climate commitments as they develop the technologies and economic strategies necessary for further decarbonization. In turn, carbon project developers and their respective programs provide landowners with an avenue to generate income from their land that can help offset the cost of needed sustainable forest management and reforestation activities, all while capturing and storing more carbon from the atmosphere.

THE UNTAPPED CLIMATE POTENTIAL OF FAMILY LANDOWNERS.

Science tells us that to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, we must rapidly reduce our use of fossil fuels and find ways to remove and store



Forestry professionals work on marginally productive pastures and croplands to identify areas where regional-specific loblolly should be planted.

carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Natural climate solutions—or the improved management of our land and ocean resources to allow them to keep more carbon—are critical to our ability to remove enough CO₂ to stay on track with our climate goals. In the U.S., the two most powerful natural climate solutions both involve trees, which are nature's most powerful machines for taking CO₂ out of the atmosphere. We must improve the management of our existing forests and reforest as much land as possible.

In the U.S., existing forests and forest products are our most significant terrestrial carbon sink, covering more than 750 million acres of land and sequestering 866 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, or nearly 16% of the country's total annual emissions, according to the USDA Forest Service. However, according to AFF, less than 1% of the land in existing forest carbon projects in the country is on properties under 1,000 acres in size. Meanwhile, families and individuals collectively own the most significant portion—39%—of U.S. forests. With proper management, this land, estimated to total nearly 300 million acres, has the potential to absorb around 350 million tonnes of CO₂ per year. This is equivalent to the emissions of about 78 million cars.

The United States has 21 million family forest owners—one in four rural Americans. Although some landowners seek out and attend courses and seminars offered by university extension offices and state forestry departments, most find it challenging to access the information and expertise needed for sustainable land

¹ www.reforestationhub.org



Creating planting rows for loblolly across difficult-to-manage fields is the first step to creating a new, productive loblolly plantation.

care. They often struggle to connect with trusted professionals who can guide them. Only one in five landowners across the United States have received formal forest management advice, and less than 13% of family forest owners have a written forest management plan.

Another extremely powerful climate solution involves expanding our forests by transitioning some pasture and cropland back to its historic forested condition. We must figure out how to engage family and individual landowners to take advantage of the opportunity. On the pastureland side, the Reforestation Hub estimates that 88% of viable opportunities for reforestation are on private land. And according to the U.S. Census, more than two-thirds of agricultural land in the U.S. is owned by 2.6 million individuals and families.

“Small individual landowners are a critical piece to solving the climate crisis puzzle—and unlocking access to the voluntary carbon market is one of the most viable ways to activate small landowners’ potential to fight climate change,” said Lynn Riley, Climate Science Senior Manager at AFF. In 2022, the voluntary carbon market was worth more than \$2 billion—four times higher than it was in just 2020—according to Ecosystem Marketplace’s State of the Voluntary Carbon Market report.

So, what’s keeping family landowners out of this growing carbon credit market? Low participation rates are primarily due to high upfront costs, complexity, and contract length. A recent Duke University Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions study revealed that 71% of rural American voters consider environmental issues personally important. The study also found that many rural Americans are well-informed about

the environmental impacts and how their choices affect the future. Many rural Americans want their voices heard to ensure that policy and land management choices are environmentally and economically sound for the land and themselves. But while family forest owners want to improve the environmental health of their land, they often face financial and technical barriers to doing so.

Landowners from historically underserved communities—particularly those who are economically disadvantaged and from racially and ethnically minoritized groups. That’s why AFF is collaborating with local partners like the Southwest Georgia Project. This collaboration works to help preserve and conserve Black farm ownership. Its mission is to serve people, especially Black farmers. It provides resources, contacts, and know-how to satisfy their farm’s produce and thrive.

Managing forestland sustainably requires specialized equipment, expertise, and various other resources. In Georgia, for example, preparing a forest management plan costs about \$1,100, and site preparation costs up to \$300 per acre. Planting seedlings can cost up to \$100 per acre, and ongoing forest management can cost up to \$75 per acre. These management practices are often challenging to afford for landowners seeking to transition their land to forests on their own.

“By offering upfront payments for implementing climate-smart forestry practices and providing professional guidance, Field to Forest makes the carbon market financing more accessible to landowners from all walks of life. By creating a more accessible and efficient carbon market, we can mobilize the capital needed to unlock the full climate mitigation potential of family-owned forests,” Omundson said.

NOT JUST CARBON: THE OTHER BENEFITS OF A TRANSITION TO FORESTRY

Pinus taeda, commonly known as loblolly pine, is a species native to the Southeastern U.S. Loblolly is found from East Texas to Florida and north to southern New Jersey. The forest products industry classifies the species as a southern yellow pine. Loblolly pines are known for their rapid growth and are champions in carbon sequestration, making them one of the most efficient carbon-storing trees in the country. They also supply a considerable portion

of the fiber for the southern region's wood product markets, ensuring landowners have additional revenue streams beyond carbon. The loblolly tree's dense, rot-resistant wood is desirable for high-grade saw timber (sawed into lumber). Loblolly pine can also be turned into poles, the highest-valued timber product.

In addition to carbon sequestration and wood product benefits, the forests established through the Field to Forest initiative provide essential environmental benefits. By managing these new forested stands for the duration of a 30-year contract, enrollees will support vital benefits for their larger communities, including clean water and wildlife habitats. These stands will offer food and shelter to diverse wildlife, including white-tailed deer, wild turkey, gray squirrels, rabbits, quail, doves, and songbirds. Loblolly pines also support bird life by providing seeds for songbirds and serving as nesting grounds for osprey and eagles.

A CALL TO ACTION FOR FAMILY LANDOWNERS

The Field to Forest initiative is a call to action for family landowners, conservationists, and all those who are deeply committed to the future of our planet. Investing in America's family-owned forests can collectively impact the fight against climate change while supporting local communities and advancing sustainable land management practices.

If you want to learn more about Field to Forest, please call the American Forest Foundation at 229-231-3818 or email fieldtoforest@forestfoundation.org.

ABOUT AFF


The American Forest Foundation developed the Field to Forest initiative in collaboration with local experts and partners in Georgia and across the southeast and through deep engagement with the communities that have managed the southeast's pastureland with pride and integrity for centuries. The American Forest Foundation provides America's family forest owners with technical and financial assistance to manage their land with climate-friendly, sustainable practices that help grow more resilient forests, conserve biodiversity, add value to timber stands, and mitigate climate impacts. For more information, visit forestfoundation.org. ▲

Verra Offers Innovative, High-Integrity Afforestation, Reforestation, and Revegetation Methodology

The American Forest Foundation proudly supports the new, innovative methodology known as VM0047, which focuses on Afforestation, Reforestation, and Revegetation, and is a part of the Verified Carbon Standard Program offered by Verra which manages the world's leading voluntary carbon markets program. AFF will be one of the first project developers to put this methodology into immediate use through the Field to Forest initiative. VM0047 is the first methodology in the voluntary carbon market that allows for dynamic performance benchmarks and relies on remote sensing data.

In addition to advancing the robust accounting for performance benchmarks, VM0047 provides tremendous new opportunities for small and underserved landowners. Matched dynamic performance benchmarks—including this Afforestation, Reforestation, and Revegetation methodology and the Improved Forest Management methodology (VM0045) already in use by AFF—increase the accuracy and quality of carbon projects while bringing more equity to a market that has largely been inaccessible.

“M0047 is the first methodology in the voluntary carbon market that allows for dynamic performance benchmarks and relies on remote sensing data.”



New Hampshire's Current Use Law protects habitat for many species of wildlife, like this young bull moose. Photo credit: Tom Thomson

Building on a Legacy of Working Forest Conservation in New Hampshire

BY TOM GRESHAM

As New Hampshire celebrates the 50th anniversary of the state's Current Use Taxation Law, a longtime landowner whose father signed the bill into law in 1973 says the law has never been more relevant to the state's economic and environmental health.

"Current Use is as important today as it was 50 years ago," said Tom Thomson, the son of former Governor Meldrim Thomson.

The law, which went into effect on July 1, 1973, provided a constitutional mechanism that allowed qualifying land to be taxed based on its current use value rather than on its "highest and best use value" as the constitution then required. At the time, the owners of farms and forestlands were seeing the values of their land base rising faster than they could afford, prompting some of them to sell their land. Those rural properties often were developed "into strip malls, poorly

planned subdivisions and additional roads and infrastructure that threatened two of our oldest N.H. industries—agriculture and forestry," according to an article written this year by Tom Thomson and Andy Peterson, son of former Governor Walter Peterson (Gov. Meldrim Thomson's predecessor in office).

The authors of this law saw conservation of working forests and agricultural lands not only as an economic benefit, but also as a matter of public interest, citing, "...the preservation of open space...a healthful and attractive outdoor environment for work and recreation of the state's citizens, [and] maintaining the character of the state's landscape," as the primary drivers behind the groundbreaking legislation. Gov. Walter Peterson called the effort "one of the most successful citizens' campaigns to amend the state constitution in our history." He helped shepherd the development of the law after

the proposition passed, and Gov. Thomson continued his efforts when he took office and signed the bill into law.

As a long-time member of the American Tree Farm System, Tom Thomson understands first-hand the importance of current use and other programs like it that help landowners keep their forest land forested. He bought his first woodlot with his two older brothers when he was just 11 years old in the 1950s. He still has that land and has added to it over the years. Thomson has served on the Current Use Advisory Board in the state for 28 years and was recently reappointed for two more years. "I saw what my dad and Walter Peterson and the legislature did, and I'm very proud of it," Thomson said. "It's one of the first—if not the first—current uses in the United States, and almost every state in one way or another has copied what we have done here."

Since the law's adoption, more than 42,000 farm and forest landowners have enrolled more than 3 million acres in the program.

"It gave relief to those people that had land but had no intention of developing it," Thomson said.

The American Forest Foundation has long supported grassroots advocacy efforts to create state and federal policies that explicitly conserve forest land, like the New Hampshire Current Use Law, in addition to collaborating with partners to deliver other programs that help landowners achieve their on-the-ground stewardship objectives and generate new revenue streams. In this vein, The Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP), which was developed by the American Forest Foundation and The Nature Conservancy, is coming to New Hampshire. The program enables family forest owners to access climate finance from carbon markets—empowering them to help address climate change while earning income from their land and actively managing their forests.

Sarah Hall, National Director of Forestry for FFCP, notes that forests across the U.S. currently reduce overall U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by roughly 12% each year.

"Studies show that this number could be more than doubled with the right actions," Hall said. "Seventy-five percent of New Hampshire's forests are privately owned, which makes forest landowners in New Hampshire essential partners in the fight against climate change."



Forest fall colors continue to be a driver of the state's recreation and tourism industries, thanks to the conservation of private working forest lands.

The program will be available to many of the same landowners in New Hampshire who are currently part of the state's current use program.

"The Family Forest Carbon Program brings a unique and credible approach to New Hampshire so that landowners with as little as 30 acres can earn income for implementing climate-smart forestry practices," Hall said. "The FFCP and its practices have many co-benefits too, such as forest management plan and technical assistance, improved water quality and wildlife habitat, and increased timber value in the long run."

Hall said the program has seen a great deal of interest in the places in the Northeast where it is already operational.

"We are excited to offer this new opportunity to New Hampshire landowners," Hall said.

The foresight of New Hampshire's Current Use Law helped to ensure that landowners still have forest to manage for multiple benefits, timber and carbon included, as well as tourism. Visitors flock to New Hampshire because of the abundance and access of its natural beauty, and the opportunities to enjoy it in a variety of ways—from hiking and camping to leaf-peeping and snowmobiling.

"Without everyone's hard work and successful efforts, we believe New Hampshire would look much different than it does today," Tom Thomson and Andy Peterson wrote in their article. "We have maintained our rural character by protecting our farm and forestland." 🌲

A Walk in the Woods

Family Forest Owner Perspectives

BY TOM GRESHAM

Melinda and Adam Anakalea

Melinda Anakalea's great-grandfather purchased 1,200 acres of pasture and timberland in Thompson Falls, Montana in 1919. Melinda's grandfather, Paul, eventually took over management of the land and a ranch on the property, doing some logging and managing sheep, and then a dairy and milk delivery business. In 1945, the Harlow Ranch became one of the first 50 properties in Montana to join the American Tree Farm System. Paul eventually retired, and his son, Arthur—Melinda's father—took over.

Melinda grew up in Spokane, Washington, about three hours away from Thompson Falls. She spent many weekends and summer days at Harlow Ranch. In 2019, 100 years after her grandfather had purchased the land, she and her husband, Adam, moved onto the property and took over its timber management. Both attended forest stewardship classes, and Adam earned his accreditation as a logger.

Melinda said it has been a thrill to live on the land she loved as a child and to help ensure its health.

"In the fall when the larch needles all turn yellow and they start dropping, you walk through the forest and it's almost like it's snowing," Melinda said. "Just being able to be a part of it and to be out in it and to breathe it all in, it's wonderful."

The property now consists of about 1,200 acres of timber and another 800 acres of pasture. The pasture previously was leased for cattle. After the lease ended, the Anakaleas started raising bison in 2020.

"Having the bison here adds another element to the ranch that we just love," Melinda said. "We've got elk and whitetail and those are majestic, and then we've got up to about 80 head of bison, and they're amazing, wild creatures."



Adam and Melinda Anakalea feel grateful for the opportunity to care for Harlow Ranch, which has been in Melinda's family for more than a century.

Melinda said the pasture and timber complement each other, though it is clear which is most prominent.

"The pine is starting to encroach on the pasture right now," Melinda said. "This is timberland for sure—it's not prairie or grasslands. We've got little seedlings popping up from the forest on the edges coming into the pasture. It's not our goal—we like the pasture—but it's good to see how resilient this forest is."

Fire safety is a chief area of focus for the Anakaleas today. A fire in 2021 and two lightning strikes this summer proved eye-opening and have helped steer the family's forest management plans, including increased thinning and plans to put in more firebreaks and roads.



Melinda and Adam Anakalea have raised bison at Harlow Ranch since 2020. Melinda said bison are “amazing” creatures at home in their Montana property.



Melinda and Adam Anakalea moved to Harlow Ranch in Thompson Falls, Montana in 2019 from Hawaii and immediately began to study forest management with the goal to follow best practices for the land.



Harlow Ranch was one of the first 50 properties in Montana to join the American Tree Farm System in 1945. The family has prioritized remaining in the system ever since.

“As things are getting hotter and drier, we want to be sure that we’re in a good place to protect our trees and to not cause problems for our neighbors,” Melinda said. “We want to keep our timber healthy, and luckily that goes hand in hand—a healthy forest is more fire safe than an unhealthy forest.”

The result is a multi-story forest with plenty of wildlife cover and more ways to drive or walk through the property, making it increasingly accessible both to enjoy and to potentially reach any fires that ignite. It is all part of an ongoing process of caring for the land for Melinda’s family that can be traced back more than a century.

“It’s really an honor to be able to carry on the legacy,” Melinda said. “My grandpa started this, and my dad really worked hard to keep it together and to keep it growing. And now we’re here to try to figure out how to preserve it for the next generation. It’s rewarding, and it’s just absolutely an honor to be in this position.”

Connie Slye

These days, Connie Slye is working hard to fix problems that were laid in her path more than 25 years ago. Slye and her son, Jason Reichard, own 289 acres in Roxbury, Pennsylvania. Trees were harvested on the property in the mid-1990s, but the process was managed without a strategic intent. In particular, the majority of the property’s large oaks were cut down, and the consequences of that began to unfurl in the years after, Slye said.

“When it was timbered improperly, it let a lot of sunlight in and when the sunlight came in so did the invasives,” Slye said. “It changed the whole outlook of the forest.”

Eventually, the invasive *Ailanthus*—commonly known as Tree of Heaven—began to take over, growing rapidly and shading everything, including seedlings trying to grow beneath them. The *Ailanthus* also is a host for the invasive spotted lantern fly that has moved into the area.

Today, Slye is working from a detailed forest management plan that is focused on eradicating the *Ailanthus* and other invasives and reforesting the property. She's grateful for the Family Forest Carbon Program, and the technical and financial support it is providing her in her efforts—from spraying invasives to planting new trees.

"Programs like FFCP help landowners get the help they need," Slye said. "It takes money, time and good planning to promote regrowth for a good, healthy forest, and the program is helping me with all that."

Slye estimates the family has planted approximately 550 new trees in recent years, often in five-foot tubes to protect them from foraging deer.

"When they clear cut, then all these invasives come in and it creates quite a mess, and then there's nothing for the next generation to benefit from," Slye said. "But with a land management plan, you can foster the right trees to grow. Then at some point, if you do have to harvest trees, you can do it the right way."

Slye's family has deep roots with the land. Her great-grandfather moved to the property in 1865, and her grandfather was born there in 1896. Although the land fell out of her family's ownership for years, they regained it in 1961 and it's been theirs ever since.



A thick collection of young *Ailanthus*, an invasive species that has proved challenging for Connie Slye's Pennsylvania property. Slye noted that the tree's suckering ability allows it to clone itself indefinitely, and it also is the top host for the destructive spotted lantern fly.



Connie Slye; her son, Jason Reichard; and her grandsons, Owen (red shirt) and Weston Reichard (yellow shirt), recently surveyed their property and replaced Posted signs that were missing.

Slye said Reichard is active in forest management efforts today and her grandsons, who are 11 and 12 years old, help with tree planting and maintenance.

"I think it's very important for our future generations to continue this on and preserve our forest, so they need to understand how to do that and what the best practices are and what the benefits are," Slye said. "My grandchildren love to come here. It gets them off their phones and electronic devices, and they have discovered that there are some pretty interesting things outdoors. One grandson catalogs turtles when he sees them, and they have learned the different species of trees—which ones we want to keep and which ones we don't. And they see the benefit of the trees that they plant."

The process is challenging but the reason for the effort is clear.

"We consider this a family property, and our plans are to keep this in the family forever," Slye said. "It's a lot of work and planning, but it's worth it. This is a beautiful mountain. It just needs some tender, loving care to get back the way it was." 🌲



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You Can Make an Even Greater Impact by Becoming A Monthly Donor Today!

"The American Forest Foundation came up as one of the organizations that is really proactive about protecting, maintaining and improving the quality of American forests." - Janis Buffham, a founding member of The Giving Tree, is a conservation and climate enthusiast who found the AFF through a Google search.

Years have passed since Janis first discovered AFF. Over time, she has gained a deeper understanding of the significant climate impact her monthly gifts contribute to, particularly supporting AFF's innovations. Janis expresses confidence in how AFF manages its funds. "AFF is being responsible with their money," she comments. "So I feel good about that... and I'm learning more about the amazing efforts that they put forward to protect and improve the quality of America's family forests. **Three years later, I still feel really good about contributing to this organization as a monthly donor.**"

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Joining is an easy and convenient way to ensure you are making an even bigger, sustaining impact on our work we're accomplishing! Visit <https://www.forestfoundation.org/givemonthly>

We are so grateful to the individuals who are currently making a sustaining monthly gift:

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If you have any questions, please contact Bethany Mueller, Senior Manager, Climate Donor Relations, at (202) 852-7520.

**Must make four consecutive monthly gifts of at least \$35 or at least one \$140 gift in order to qualify.*

Seedling Society Spotlight

“We know our gift will help AFF fulfill its mission into the future. AFF is a great organization dedicated to helping private forest landowners become better stewards of America’s woodlands.”



Scott and Marge Hayes

Scott and Marge have given their time, talent, and treasures to the American Forest Foundation (AFF). They have gained an appreciation for AFF’s mission, serving in various roles, including Scott serving on the AFF Board of Directors. When they heard about the Seedling Society, AFF’s planned giving society, the couple decided it was a good way to provide long-term support.

The Seedling Society is a community of individuals like Scott and Marge, who—like you—have a deep-seated commitment to the mission of the American Forest Foundation. By designating AFF in your estate plans, you will ensure a path for its future and enjoy the benefits such as:

- Learning about how your gift empowers family forest owners to take action on their land.
- Discover how your gift honors your stewardship values and supports your legacy planning process.
- Join a community of donors who share goals similar to yours in their estate planning through invitations to exclusive events.

“We know our gift will help AFF fulfill its mission into the future,” said Hayes. “AFF is a great organization dedicated to helping private forest landowners become better stewards of America’s woodlands.”

“Donating to the Seedling Society went smoothly,” said Scott. The Hayes’ gift reflects their commitment to forest management and the mission of the American Forest Foundation.

We’d love to hear from you!

If you want to discuss your giving options, please call **Beth Riley, Senior Director of Philanthropy, at (202) 765-3644**. If you have already included the American Forest Foundation in your estate plans, please let us know so we can thank you for your generous commitment to supporting family forest owners. You can enjoy the benefits of recognizing your gift and joining others like you in the Seedling Society.



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The Seedling Society