

Woodland

YOUR CONNECTION TO AMERICA'S FORESTS



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– Larry Beauregard, Brewer, Maine

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BY RITA HITE
PRESIDENT & CEO
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

With your support, America's family forests are a solution and a source of hope during this crucial time

In October, I had the opportunity to speak very vulnerably and candidly on the stage at the Women's Forest Congress—an initiative I have been very proud to serve on the Steering Committee of, over the past few years. You can read more about the overall event in an article on page 14 of this magazine, but I want to reiterate some of what I shared with the women there in Minneapolis during that typical Upper Midwestern autumnal brisk day.

We have made a lot of strides in the forestry sector, especially when it comes to innovation, positioning forests and forest products as the climate solution we are, and an increasingly diverse work force. However, there is so much more work to be done. Less than 20 percent of our sector are women and even fewer are people of color.

As I took on the role of CEO at the beginning of this year, I was feeling what many women feel in our sector, what many women landowners feel, especially as we take on leadership roles—imposter syndrome. I kept asking myself, do I really belong in this role. I found that if I didn't find strategies to overcome this, to realize that I am exactly where I am supposed to be, I won't be the leader AFF needs at this critical time for family-owned forests in our history.

Women—and woman landowners—have long had a critical influence on our forests. Whether we are on the deed or not, women have a vital role to play in the future of our family forests. That is why I am so excited for the Women's Forest Congress and the commitments we made at that conference to create an environment where more women, including women of color, can join and succeed in the forest sector.

If we don't find ways for women from all walks of life to be part of our work, to feel a sense of belonging that allows us to be our best selves, we're only working with half of the available talent, half of the available minds, hands, and hearts that are needed to help us care for our forests. And in today's world, where our forests, especially our family forests, are being called on to provide solutions to some of the most pressing societal challenges, from climate change to biodiversity losses, to rural economic prosperity, we need all the minds, hands, and hearts we can get!

In this edition of Woodland, we are so immensely proud to tell the stories of many victories which have recently been won as we unlock new resources for family forests while tackling climate change. On page 18 you can read about AFF and our partners with the Center for Heirs Property Preservation and others being awarded a record-

Continued On Next Page

breaking \$35 million Climate Smart grant from USDA. And notably, I had the opportunity to gather in Vermont with climate leaders across our sector and leaders within our staff for the first ever Family Forest Carbon Program Partner Retreat this fall, as we work to further expand the Program (see page 6). In our next edition of Woodland magazine, we will have exciting and full coverage of our recent announcement about our work to increase the credibility of carbon credits from family forests, which help ensure a viable carbon market and value for landowners enrolled in the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP).

Speaking of FFCP and Vermont, I hope you will take the opportunity to read the most delightful story of Peter and Julie Parker in this edition. The Parkers have been involved with AFF since they enrolled in the American Tree Farm System back in the 1950s. Then they became initial investors and helped connect us to a bunch of folks in Vermont with the Woods, Warblers and Wildlife Program 6-7 years ago. They always had a tremendous hope we would help landowners participate in carbon markets and when we did, they

were the among the first individuals to step up and make a significant investment. Julie and Peter's rationale was based upon their trusted relationships with us, a high honor and something we take very seriously at AFF. Each member of our staff wants to have that trusting relationship with you—whether you are a landowner considering enrolling in our FFCP or are a donor or an investor – the trusting relationship we have with you is something we highly value.


Thank you for everything you have made possible over the course of this past year and for believing in the future of America's family forests. Together we can make the planet better in partnership with America's family forest owners. Thank you for your financial support and all the ways you are helping AFF, and our partners tackle these challenges today and into the future we share together. Wishing you and yours a wonderful and healthy holiday season ahead. 🌲



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FORESTS & FAMILIES

Family Forest Carbon Program Partner Retreat

First-Ever Family Forest Carbon Program Partner Retreat Tackles Carbon Market Opportunity for Family Forests

BY CALVIN TRAN

While carbon markets are always evolving, there's one constant: the need for collective action. The work of the Family Forest Carbon Program is possible thanks to the efforts and support of our buyers, donors, and scientific partners. That's why the American Forest Foundation was excited to host the first-ever Family Forest Carbon Program Partner Retreat last week, bringing together climate leaders across sectors and industries.

Partners gathered in Shrewsbury, Vermont to see the impact of the Family Forest Carbon Program firsthand, meet one of the program's enrolled forest owners, and discuss opportunities for scaling the program to unlock the potential of thousands more forest owners in the years to come.

AFF President and CEO Rita Hite kicked off the event by sharing the excitement of being together in person and introducing Tim Stout, one of the initial enrollees in the Family Forest Carbon Program. "We'd like to thank our partners and incredible landowners like

Tim for this opportunity to be together," she said. "The carbon markets are new and we're all leaders in this ever-changing landscape. We're learning together, we'll make mistakes together, and we'll find solutions together."

During the retreat, attendees participated in a forestry tour of Tim Stout's 175-acre property, the



Tim Stout shares the history of his 175-acre property, the Jockey Hill Farm.



AFF staff and its partners pose for an image over a scenic fall overlook at Tim Stout's property.

Jockey Hill Farm, and heard from program leaders on carbon science and biodiversity. While walking Stout's land, attendees heard why the Family Forest Carbon Program's funding and resources are so vital to family forest owners and the climate.

Stout shared the challenges of keeping forests intact and retaining land tenure. As maintenance expenses accumulate and the cost of forest products such as timber fluctuates in the markets, landowners sometimes cut down additional trees or even sell parts of their land to make ends meet. Revenue from carbon markets can provide the income landowners need to keep their land and help it flourish with climate-smart forestry practices.

Family landowners own nearly 300 million acres of forest, but many are not taking advantage of the economic opportunities present in today's markets. There remains a significant need for landowner education about market opportunities. "Carbon markets are intimidating. But it's straightforward once you've had conversations about it," said Stout.

Discussions during the retreat revealed a significant opportunity for the Family Forest Carbon Program: scaling and improving communications to landowners. In a fireside chat with Rita Hite, REI's Senior Manager of Government and Community Affairs Taldi Harris emphasized the dire need for better science communication. "We want to help scale nature-based climate solutions," said Harris. "To do that, we need the right messengers to reach these landowners."

Clear communication from trusted sources convinced Stout to join the Family Forest

Carbon Program. "It's important to have an ally to rely on," he said. "The American Forest Foundation's personal touch helped me understand the opportunity in the carbon markets." Carbon markets' potential for family forests must be shared clearly with landowners, foresters, and other advocates.

Along with communication, scaling the science is also a crucial challenge. The Family Forest Carbon Program is advancing the market toward higher scientific integrity with its innovative methodology that uses a dynamic baseline. Still, these innovations and the co-benefits produced are not yet fully captured in the market. "[Carbon credit] differentiation is not easy, and the full value of a credit coming out of FFCP is currently not recognized in this market," said Madeline Wu, Mission Investing Officer at the David and Lucille Packard Foundation. For carbon markets to scale and succeed, they need to be built on a foundation of higher-integrity carbon accounting methodologies, like the one used in the Family Forest Carbon Program.

The first Family Forest Carbon Program Partner Retreat allowed AFF to convene partners and climate leaders to focus on these pressing challenges and opportunities collectively. Once brought to scale, carbon markets can transform family forest owners, rural communities, and the climate. "We're trying to achieve a mission outcome here: address a climate and forest crisis and help these landowners hold on to the lands they've come to love," said Jim Shallow, Director of Strategic Conservation Initiatives at The Nature Conservancy's Vermont chapter. "The Family Forest Carbon Program is uniquely positioned to do just that."

For more information about the Family Forest Carbon Program and how to partner with us on fighting climate change, visit familyforestcarbon.org. 🌲

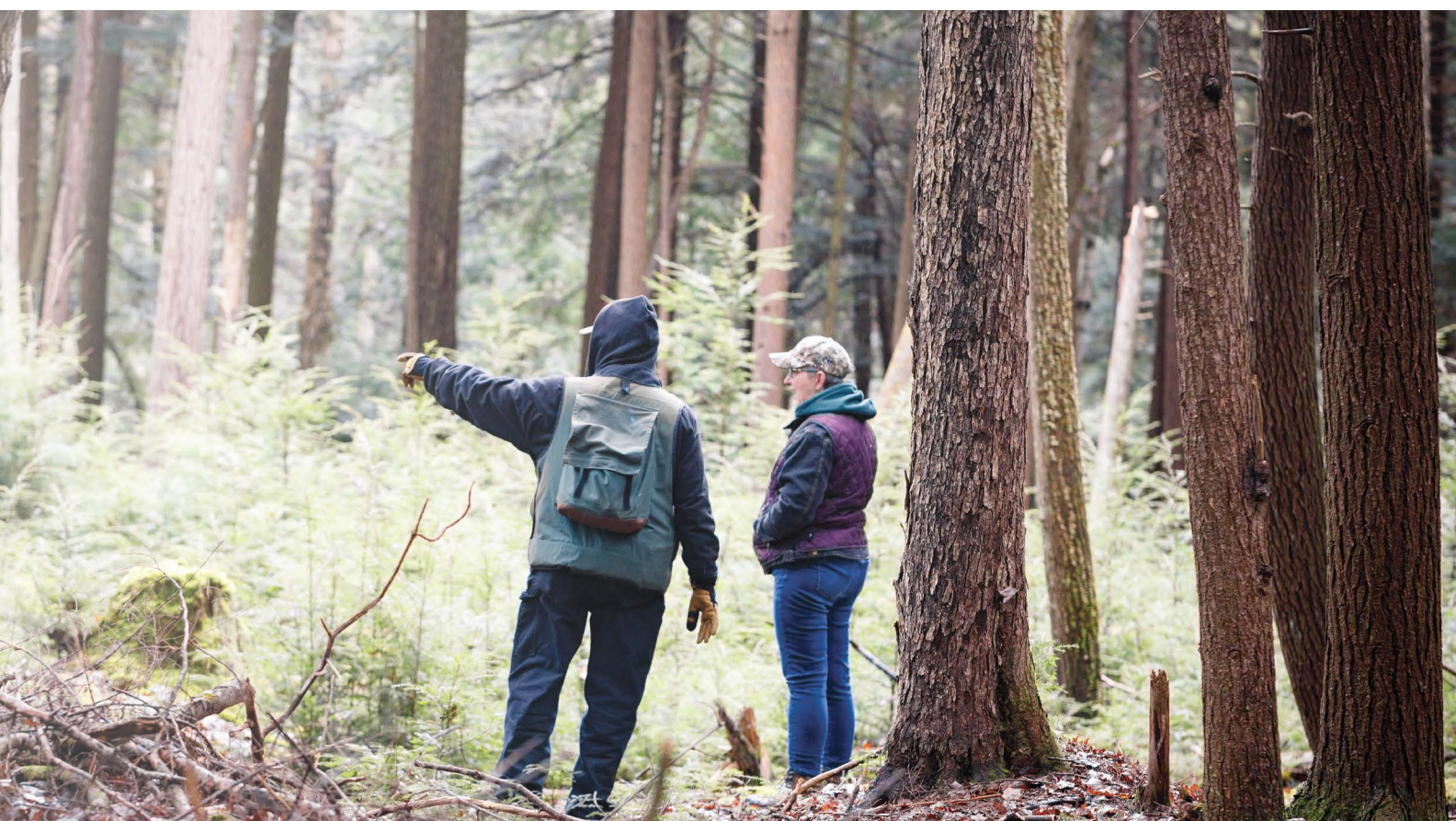
The Family Forest Carbon Program helps landowners **care for their woods while helping the planet.**

In addition to the habitat and quality water family forests provide, they also help the planet by sequestering and storing carbon. The Family Forest Carbon Program creates a marketplace for landowners by selling carbon credits to environmentally-conscious companies working to reduce their carbon footprint, so landowners can bring in income to help them 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, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Learn more at www.familyforestcarbon.org



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AFF Policy Team Update

BY JAMES MCKITRICK
SENIOR POLICY MANAGER,
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

A flurry of activity usually marks the end of the year in our nation's capital as Congressional agendas are up against the clock. Lawmakers scramble to get their work done before a new Congress is sworn in, and all legislative efforts must be reintroduced next year. No doubt the upcoming election will bring clarity on whether several issues, including the federal budget, will be decided before the District of Columbia's first snowfall. However, for AFF's Policy Team and family forest owners, groundbreaking victories have already been achieved!

Congress passed a skinny version of its Build Back Better legislation late this summer, which included a \$5 billion investment in America's forestlands. Retitled the "Inflation Reduction Act," an unprecedented \$450 million package dedicated to climate-smart forestry efforts will help fund small and underserved forest owners, unlocking the power in family-owned forests to tackle forest resiliency and climate change. The funds will provide a critical economic infusion into rural communities.

Despite our communities' critical role in caring for our forests and strong bipartisan support, family forest owners have historically been undervalued and under-resourced in relation to other agriculture producers. The passage of the "Inflation Reduction Act" is a truly momentous event. While it is not yet determined how the U.S. Forest Service will get these dollars to ground, it is clear that the investment could underwrite emerging private programs such as AFF's Family Forest Carbon Program.

AFF was selected in late September to receive \$35 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities to expand climate-smart forest products markets for family forest owners. In partnership with The Nature Conservancy, Purdue University, Center for Heirs Property Preservation and Women Owning Woodlands, AFF developed a partnership program, Engaging Family Forest to Improve Climate-Smart Commodities, that will in-part enroll over 1,500 landowners in the Family Forest Carbon Program across 13 states including Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The Family Forest Carbon Program initiative will direct nearly \$15 million to largely rural and underserved landowners, creating tremendous opportunity for family forest owners to access the value of their forests. This will include direct payments to landowners for utilizing climate-smart forestry practices, yielding an estimated 4.9 million tons of carbon stored or sequestered. This funding will be instrumental in catalyzing the impact of AFF's Family Forest Carbon Program to support and empower all landowners in the fight against climate change.

As we take the time this winter season to appreciate these significant wins, the AFF Policy Team wants to thank you for your ongoing advocacy that has been so instrumental in making them happen. May your holidays be full of warmth and cheer, and we look forward to bringing more great news for family forest owners in the next year. 🌲



IMPACT FEATURE

Peter and Julie Parker:

Good Stewardship Today Helps Secure Our Collective Future

BY MARY LOU JAY

Longtime AFF members Peter and Julie Parker own two very different forest properties, but their approach to managing these woodlands is the same, based on practices they learned through the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). “We go back many, many years with ATFS,” said Peter. “To be a certified Tree Farmer, you have to reach a level of sustainable, well-managed forests for habitat, for carbon sequestration, for clean water and for the production of wood products for the world.”

During the first two decades of their 68-year marriage, the Parkers did not have a property where they could put these principles into practice. While they often spent their vacations on relatives’ woodlands, by 1980, “We were ready to have our own piece of land,” said Julie. Although they lived in California, they spent summers in New England and had family ties there, so were delighted when they found a 187-acre wooded farm in Vermont.

“Peter went to high school there, and we met at Middlebury College, so it was a natural place to look for our own land. Vermont is in our blood,” said Julie.

Nine years later, with Peter’s sisters, they bought 2,500 acres of redwood forest in Mendocino County, California. To finance that purchase, the siblings sold the 3,000 acres of Mississippi forestland that their father had bought in the 1950s. The pines on the land had been clearcut for electric poles, so the price was only \$20 an acre. Over the next 30 years, Peter’s father and his children were able to increase both the price and the sustainability of that land by working with the ATFS to grow the pines again by responsible management.

Because of their outstanding stewardship of their forests in Vermont and California, the Parkers have been honored as Tree Farmers of the Year in both states. Their success, and their continuing advocacy for forests while working with AFF, has inspired many other family forest owners to adopt better forest management practices.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In the late 1980s, Peter served on the AFF Board and as chair of the membership committee. As he was trying to recruit new people to become members of AFF, “I realized how tough it is to



A view from the Parkers Tree Farm in Vermont.

convince landowners that they need to manage their forests in a sustainable way,” he said. So the Parkers made donations to AFF, supporting outreach programs like Woods, Wildlife and Warblers. This program provided forest owners in four southern Vermont counties with the knowledge, tools, and resources to better care for their woods and the wildlife that live in them.

Peter also went out and talked to his neighbors about the importance of sustainable forest management. Although the responses weren’t positive at first, Peter’s persistence, and repeated visits, eventually had neighbors asking for his advice on managing their land.

“Half of the success of that program was the local community networking aspect, which the AFF could not have achieved without assistance from Peter and other landowners,” said Ema Johnson, Senior Manager of Philanthropy at AFF.

The Parkers, who both celebrated their 90th birthdays in 2022, also understand the importance of educating the next generations about the need to maintain and protect forestland. They have talked with their family, which now spans four

generations, about their hopes for the future. “Our vision has included placing conservation easements on our two properties in California and Vermont, protecting both properties from development and encouraging the preservation of water, habitat, and carbon sequestration,” said Julie.

The Parkers have encouraged other family forest owners to do the same, but realize how complex succession planning can be. “Estate planning brings up the issue of how much more economically valuable forests are to housing development than to timber harvest. It is challenging to hold onto forests as forests. Even within our own family, we have had to listen and work to win people over on the greater vision, the terrific importance of climate change, and trying to hold onto forests rather than develop them,” said Julie.

Because of the Parkers’ careful land management, their three children and four grandchildren have had the opportunity to see how the land can bring economic benefits into the future. For example, with California no longer permitting any redwood harvesting on state

land, the demand for the Parkers' redwoods has grown exponentially. "With extremely careful stewardship, we're growing more timber that we are cutting," said Julie.

SUPPORTING CARBON PROGRAMS

Over the years, in working with AFF staff members like Nate Truitt (now AFF vice president), the Parkers have come to trust and respect the organization's leadership in promoting and protecting family forests. "I knew that my concerns were being heard and addressed by AFF staff, from the threat of land development to the lack of estate planning and generational land transfer," said Julie. "I felt valued in what we had to offer and that we were on the same wavelength. We have the same goals."

Because of that trust and their confidence in AFF, the Parkers were among the first donors in 2019 to support AFF's Family Forest Carbon Project. (See box.)

"Identifying a stream of income for landowners and enabling poorly-managed land to flourish in the FFCP program is a plus for the environment," said Peter. "Ownership can be maintained throughout generational change thanks to annual landowner payments. FFCP allows landowners access to previously unattainable markets and provides technical assistance with a sustained source of funding."



Peter Parker and long time AFF staff member, Nathan Truitt.

BUILDING AWARENESS

The Parkers are hopeful that the Family Forest Carbon Program will build a real community among forest owners and increase the awareness of how forests can benefit everyone. "People are so detached from the environment in cities that they don't understand the value of working forests," Peter said.

Beyond that, they see the need for increased local efforts to protect forests, which will have long-term implications on both national and global levels. "I realize that our efforts are tiny pieces of this puzzle, and we must get there on a national scale—your forest land, whether you're in California, Mississippi, or Arkansas, is valuable," said Peter. "Thinning trees prevents overcrowding, wildfires, and insect infestation."

The Parkers agree that the time for action is now, and it's urgent. "We are in a serious environmental situation. The most impactful way to get carbon out of the atmosphere is to have trees sequester it," said Peter. The couple recognizes that there are many environmental challenges that the country needs to address to save family forests as we know them.



Julie and Peter Parker at their property in Vermont with AFF Staff, Ema Johnson and Nathan Truitt in June 2019.



Peter Parker giving a tour of their Tree Farm in Vermont with AFF staff.



Peter Parker giving a tour of their Tree Farm in Vermont in October 2022.

The political situation has made this even more difficult. “Every country right now is divided, and most of us question whether our world is going to get through this,” said Julie. One reason that they have donated to the FFCP is that AFF is not involved in those controversies, but is respected by parties on all sides. “In the long run, that gets us farther,” said Julie.

People like the Parkers are crucial to AFF’s effort, said Nathan Truitt, AFF Vice President: “Peter and Julie are the embodiment of great land stewardship. Not only do they want to do what’s best on their own land and help connect their neighbors, but they want to make sure the land—and our world—is in good hands for future generations.

“From the moment I met them, I have just been so grateful for all I have learned from them and for all they have done for their family, their neighbors in California and Vermont and for all who are fortunate enough to know them,” he added. 🌲

Why You Should Support the Family Forest Carbon Project

The Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP) is uniquely designed to help owners of forests as small as 30 acres participate in carbon offset credit projects.

Traditionally, forest carbon projects have been created on properties of 5,000 acres or more, meaning owners of small forest properties have been kept out of 99% of forest carbon projects. This is due to the high upfront costs and complexity of launching these projects. Yet 61% of the climate mitigation potential in U.S. forests lies within these smaller, family-owned pieces of land.

The FFCP, thanks in part to its new methodology, removes market entry barriers for owners of small forest properties, allowing them to address climate change while earning income from their land.

Financial assistance from AFF members like the Parkers has been essential in helping the AFF get the Family Forest Carbon Program underway, said Beth Riley, Director of Philanthropy at AFF.

“I think it can be difficult for individual donors to understand why their contributions to the carbon program are so valuable. What we are trying to accomplish through the Family Forest Carbon Program is so much bigger and more audacious than anything else we have ever undertaken at AFF. We actually have our own foresters on the ground, rather than just relying on partner organizations. In addition, we are having to work so much more significantly on modeling everything out, and on landowner engagement, in order to reach the pace and scale needed to make a difference for this global effort,” she explained.

“So, while companies and investors will ultimately pay for these things down the road the initial costs are substantial. Donors like Peter and Julie make a tremendous difference!” she said.

Even a small contribution can make a big impact. “In the carbon program, you can leverage every dollar you donate up to thirty times,” added Bethany Mueller, Donor Relations Manager at AFF. “Every \$100 you contribute today could attract \$3,000 over time to support landowners and sustainable forest management.”

The Family Forest Carbon Program is currently enrolling landowners in Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont and West Virginia with plans to expand to additional regions next year. The program will hold its first measurement and verification cycle using the new methodology in early 2023, leading to the first transfer of verified carbon credits to buyers thereafter.

IMPACT FEATURE

Inaugural Women's Forest Congress Charts a Path for Women and the Broader Forest Sector

BY ELIZABETH WOODWORTH

The inaugural Women's Forest Congress (WFC) in Minneapolis, October 17-20, attracted almost 500 people in-person and virtually. People came from 10 different countries with strong representation from across North America. Attendees came together in a spirit of intense cooperation and collaboration to address today's and tomorrow's most pressing challenges for forests and women. (See sidebar: 10 WFC Resolutions.)

The themes discussed at the Congress included leadership for equity and inclusion, employment opportunities to increase recruitment, retention, and advancement of women in forestry, empowering women as catalysts for change, addressing today's most significant forest challenges, and supporting each other.

"It was inspiring to come together with so many women at the Congress. We all share a vision that forests represent hope for our future and that women should play a central role in the sector," says Rita Hite, President and CEO of the American Forest Foundation (AFF). Hite is also one of the founders of the WFC. "At the Congress, I encouraged women to 'do what makes you be you' and to 'support each other.' If we can support each other, there is no limit to what women can do to help transform the forest sector."

ELEVATING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FOREST SECTOR

The forest sector has less than 20 percent participation by women. Whether involved through land ownership, industry, conservation, public agency, or other roles, women in the forest sector are consistently and significantly underrepresented. This discrepancy is even more significant for women of color. The idea for the WFC germinated among women in the forest community who believe this low participation rate is leaving a void in the sector, limiting professional participation by more women

Vision

We envision a forest community where there is universal equity, inclusion, and a shared sense of belonging. All voices are heard, supported, and empowered. The influence and impact of all are manifest in our relationships with forests.

Mission

Our mission is to create community and cultivate change. Together we create safe spaces to connect, inspire, and act as catalysts for change for the benefit of forests and all who rely on them now and for the future.

Women's Forest Congress



Rita Hite, President and CEO of the American Forest Foundation shares her thoughts on leadership and Our Journey Until Now—Blazing a New Trail as a panelist at the inaugural congress.

and opportunities to think about forests in new ways.

“At the start of my career, because about half the students in my classes were women, I wasn’t seeing the obstacles,” Hite says. “Then, when my son was born about five years ago, I realized the conditions didn’t exist for me to succeed the way I wanted to. People asked me, as a mother, if I would have the time to be a leader. No one ever asked my husband that.”

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES AND SOLUTIONS FOR FORESTS BY WOMEN, FOR WOMEN

Two years after her son was born, the WFC launched its Steering Committee and approached Hite. “The timing was perfect,” she says. The Steering Committee proposed addressing the gender diversity gap to create room for innovative problem-solving to combat the forest sector’s most pressing challenges that connect us all.

Approved WFC Resolutions

The **2022 Women’s Forest Congress Declaration** was endorsed at the inaugural 2022 Women’s Forest Congress and is summarized by the concluding call to action in the document.

The Women’s Forest Congress challenges organizations in the forest and forest products sector to:

1. **FOSTER** workforce opportunities for all women through mentorship programs, professional development, and scholarships, with a particular focus on reaching out to those who need help or are asking for assistance in any part of their journey
2. **BROADEN** recruiting practices to include wider networks and build a pipeline of talent by connecting with and showcasing forests and the forest products sector to youth and students, creating job shadowing and internship opportunities.
3. **BUILD** workplace systems that support mental health coverage, and include training and programs promoting healthy lifestyles, such as family leave, flexible work schedules, generous vacation plans, social opportunities, and holistic wellness programs.
4. **PROMOTE** various working environments, encourage flexibility, and ensure all work environments are fully accessible.
5. **ENABLE** employees to prioritize mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health and model healthy behaviors for others.
6. **CREATE** a safe, inviting, and welcoming workspace for all resulting in greater wellness, increased retention, higher productivity, improved creativity, and heart-centered decision-making.
7. **ASSESS** compensation for women and promote paths to pay equity at all levels, including discrepancies in intersectional identities, communities, and demographics.
8. **INTENTIONALLY IDENTIFY** and support more women and those from underrepresented groups to achieve leadership positions.
9. **INCREASE** the use of storytelling in conferences, trainings, and workshops.
10. **APPLY** models and frameworks to generate and realize solutions to the greatest forest challenges that are built on women’s strengths, such as inclusive, collaborative, and multi-scale holistic thinking.

The participants of the 2022 Women’s Forest Congress, our supporters, and partners commit ourselves to advance these actions through our organizations, networks, partnerships, and spheres of influence.



Sophie Beckham, VP, Chief Sustainability Officer at International Paper added her voice to the critical conversations necessary to advance diversity and inclusion in the forest sector as a speaker on the Leadership Spotlight Stage.

Quick WFC Facts

- Founded in late 2019
- Steering Committee formed early 2020 (nine members)
- Advisory Committee (to advise Steering Committee) formed in Spring 2021.
- First gathering July 2020
- Virtual meetings every quarter beginning in 2021
- Average 100–200 attendees every meeting
- Almost 500 attendees at the inaugural Women's Forest Congress in October 2022
- More than 1,300 subscribers to monthly newsletter
- 25+ blogs
- >40 organizations supporting WFC (non-profit, for-profit, government, academic)

Among the attendees were family forest owners who could expand their network. “I was struck by the struggles women landowners often had when abruptly inheriting their forestlands after a husband or father passed away. My WFC experience has shown how relying on a community for support to continue engaging with the land is key to increasing the role of women,” says Danielle Atkins, the owner and founder of Land & Ladies and a WFC delegate. Based in Georgia, Atkins and her team equip women with the resources to tackle their landowner and forest management needs through programs, membership, and online resources.

Atkins and her WFC colleagues recognize that diversity benefits everyone. More women landowners and women working across the forest sector will only increase the opportunities to develop new and innovative approaches to traditional forest management.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION ARE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Forestry congresses have been around for a long time here in the US and worldwide. The first American Forest Congress was held in 1882. The WFC is part of this rich tradition of coming together to bring change through a congress. But it takes a contemporary approach that embeds diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), to support the voices of women and their allies in shaping the future of forests. With equity and activism among its fundamental founding principles, the WFC and its members have made a collective and individual commitment to DEI.

“When it comes to forestry, white Americans, mainly men, are in positions of the greatest influence. The Women's Forest Congress wants to change all that and make sure our forests benefit from the skills women bring,” says Ebonie Alexander, Executive Director of the Virginia-based Black Family Land Trust and a member of the WFC Advisory Council. “I want the Women's Forest Congress to build a future where a young Black woman can see herself working in the forest because she sees other people who look like her in those roles.”

FAMILIES ARE A KEY FOCUS

The Women's Forest Congress shares AFF's view that America's family-owned forests can help us reach our conservation goals, but their potential has largely been overlooked and undervalued. As we face growing threats from development to climate change, it's more important than ever for all family forest owners to actively steward their land.

Family forest owners own the most considerable portion—39 percent—of American forests. Across the United States,



Women's Forest Congress 2022 attendees celebrate the last day of the inaugural event.

21 million families and individuals manage 290 million acres of forestland. That's one in four rural Americans who play an active role in forest health.

"Our forests are under increasing stress, but we know family forest owners want to make a difference. They care about their land—and want to improve the health of their forests to ensure that they're around for future generations. I also know that the WFC can help us help families," Hite says.

A CONGRESS UNLIKE ANY OTHER

Many delegates said the Women's Forest Congress was unlike any conference they had ever attended because the focus was not exclusively on forestry knowledge, though the Congress offered a wealth of that. But the focus was on building connections and community so that we can address the world's greatest forest challenges together.

Breakout sessions were more like collaborative workshops than one-way presentations. Rooms were packed to overflowing with women asking good questions and providing input. Delegates also worked diligently to articulate declarations that would come out of the Congress and establish a shared vision for the future of women in forestry.

"My mind was blown by the 2022 Women's Forest Congress. It invited us to bring our whole selves, on equal footing with our colleagues, and with plenty to accomplish together," says Amanda Mahaffey, Director of the Forest Stewards Guild. "I know inside that I am changed by this experience. I am ready to inspire, train, and empower the women around me to be the change we want to see, to work together to steward our forests for the future."

Elizabeth Woodworth is CEO of Wood & Co. Consulting and one of the Women's Forest Congress founders. She also sits on the WFC Steering Committee. 🌲



WFC2022 attendees enjoy the respite of the Creativity Space.

Make your voice heard

The WFC continues to thrive on its momentum and engage across the forest community. Join the conversation and learn more at <https://womensforestcongress.org> and follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

Funding Will Catalyze Reach of Field-Tested Family Forest Carbon Program

BY KRISTEN VOORHEES

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

This September, the American Forest Foundation received \$35 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities to expand climate-smart forest products markets for family forest owners.

"The USDA's groundbreaking investment will help AFF unlock the potential of family forests to reach our nation's ambitious climate goals," said Rita Hite, president and CEO of the American Forest Foundation. "We are energized by the Administration's commitment to investing in rural America and advancing win-win solutions for people and our planet. This funding will catalyze the impact of AFF's Family Forest Carbon Program to support and empower all landowners in the fight against climate change."

The \$35 million grant will fund Engaging Family Forests to Improve Climate-Smart Commodities (EFFICACI), an initiative developed by AFF, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Purdue University, Center for Heirs Property Preservation, and Women Owning Woodlands.

This initiative will work with the Family Forest Carbon Program to expand and solidify the market for climate-smart timber commodities by engaging family forest owners across 13 states, including Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. It will also support minority landowners—particularly across the South through community outreach, resources, and legal education and services for historically underserved landowners.

Additionally, we will develop a first-of-its-kind tracking system where third-party verified climate benefits are associated with wood products that come from participating properties that flow into supply chains, along with combining the use of climate-smart technology. We will implement measuring, monitoring, reporting, and verifying (MMRV) techniques with systematic and innovative digital tools to streamline the landowner experience.

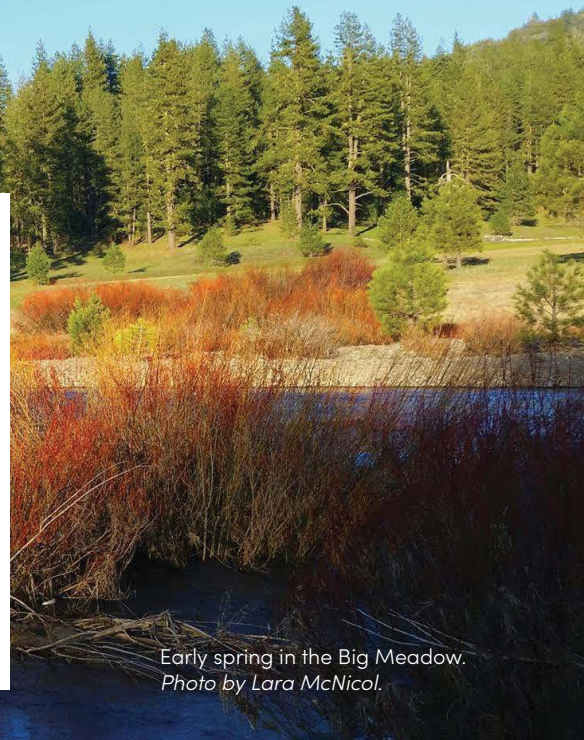
Through this, we seek to engage 1,600 landowners with an estimated 162,000 acres of family forests within a five-year period. As you may know, family forest owners care for the most substantial portion—39 percent—of our nation's forests and supply 50 percent of the wood fiber that flows into supply chains. Yet most of these owners are not actively engaged in sustainable or climate-smart forest practices, typically due to the historically high planning and implementation costs.

Less than 13 percent of landowners have met with a professional forester or have a long-term management plan, and less than 1 percent of the lands in carbon markets are small, family ownerships. The Family Forest Carbon Program is working with landowners to manage their forests in ways that meaningfully increase the amount of carbon sequestered and stored, and partners with businesses working to confront climate change and achieve vital social, economic, and environmental outcomes. ▲

A Walk in the Woods

Family Forest Owner Perspectives

BY TOM GRESHAM



Early spring in the Big Meadow.
Photo by Lara McNicol.

Jenny Matkin & Lara McNicol

The western slope of the Central Sierra Nevada Mountains in California is a rugged but beautiful place to manage a Tree Farm. Drought, bark beetles, and the perpetual risk of wildfire are among the most prominent challenges. Jenny Matkin is a fourth-generation owner of 600 acres in the area at an elevation of approximately 5,000 feet. She manages the land with her daughter, Lara McNicol, a trained forester who represents the fifth generation. The land has been in the family since the mid-1800s. "We're trying to keep it alive and beautiful," Jenny said. It's an arduous project, but more than that, it's a tremendous gift. We feel like we are duty-bound to do the best we can. It's a big, beautiful mess, and we're always working on it. We're not making money, but we're making our way. We look forward to intermittent harvesting for profit in future years."

The land is a mixed conifer forest with multiple species. Jenny said the emphasis for the property recently has been on fuel reduction and forest thinning through burning, mastication, and logging. That includes partnering with the AFF to masticate around a series of upland meadows to open them up and raise the water table to improve the forest's fire resilience.

"We practice sustained yield in a multiple age stand with multiple species components, and that's the overall strategy for the health of the forest," Jenny said. "If you can achieve a multiple species stand, it seems more resistant to devastating losses from bugs, drought, and fire."



Three generations of family members at Brownes Meadows on 1st generation hay baler. Photo by Jade Elhardt.
MySierraWoods Promo.

Early in Jenny's life, the property primarily was a place to visit in the summer, but she and her husband, Kirk Ford, built a house and moved onto the property about 35 years ago. Lara noted that the Central Sierra Me-Wuk, the Indigenous people who lived on the land before European settlement, used the area for seasonal camps and would move to lower elevations as the weather worsened.

Today, the farm hosts activities throughout the year, including foraging for wild mushrooms and berries in the fall, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing in the winter and spring, and picnics and gatherings with friends and family. Forestry students from the local community college, where Lara teaches, visit for training and to help the family experiment with their practices.

In an era of climate change, Lara said it's easy to feel helpless, but managing land can change that perspective.

"Having a piece of property that I can do my very best at—for my children and their children—is very helpful to me," Lara said. "I don't have to sit and watch areas I love burn. I can actively try to maintain and protect them. Working on this land brings me a lot of hope."

Lara said having an honest relationship with the land "changes your perspective on a lot of what's happening in the world."

"I teach my children about the different plant communities, we track and listen for wildlife, we hike and ride horses and swim," she said. "We watch the land and the way it changes. To watch the seasons change and the river rise is a wonderful thing."

Ramona & Quinton Schwengel

Ramona and Quinton Schwengel own and manage a 43-acre Tree Farm outside of the town of Dix in southern Illinois. However, they live in Rome, Georgia. It's a challenge, they said, but one that they embrace. The couple travels to Illinois four to five times a year, feeling fortunate for the opportunity to stay and work on the farm.

"We both like the outdoors, so it's a treat for us to get to work on the property," Ramona said. "It's hard work, and we're tired at the end of the day, but then we sleep very well."

Ramona and Quinton received the property, predominantly an oak-hickory forest, in 2017 from Quinton's mother. It was part of a larger 86-acre piece of land that had been in the family since 1977 when Quinton's stepfather purchased the property. Quinton's sister owns the other 43 acres.

Ramona and Quinton named the farm property Heritage Oaks Tree Farm because of its white oaks and because it is a generational Tree Farm. "We've got a lot of white oak regeneration," Quinton said. He sees their efforts with the land as an attempt to extend his family's legacy and build on the work already done by his mother and stepfather.

"We have inherited their project, and we're loving the chance to work on it," he said.

Unexpected discoveries have been a regular highlight of managing the land. For instance, they enjoy finding and identifying the varieties of flowers on the property, including a vibrant mix of milkweed types. They also found a rare purple-fringed orchid growing in the grassland area of the property. They have stopped mowing the grassland for much of the year to allow milkweeds and other native flowers



Ramona and Quinton Schwengel on their Tree Farm outside of Dix, Illinois.



The American Tree Farm Certification sign at the front of their property in Illinois.

to flourish, seeking to encourage monarch butterflies and bees. As part of the adjustment, they have seen wildlife, including turkey and quail, thrive in a way it had not in years.

"We try to keep the grassland areas as natural as we can around the wooded areas so we can attract additional wildlife," Quinton said.

As part of the effort to encourage wildlife, Quinton said he built a barn owl house to attract new residents. No luck yet, but it's all part of the process. Meanwhile, the family has done three burns in five years. One burn targeted an area with blackjack oaks, a second burn covered 36 acres (including the blackjack oak area), and the third was in a new growth area. However, the grass was too green and didn't burn well, so another attempt is planned this fall. The first two burns reduced an invasive problem and created healthier stands of blackjack oaks.

Quinton said the couple revels in trying to solve “the puzzle” of the property—one that can never be truly solved. They find it exciting to see progress and to discover “the potential of the land and the possibilities of what it can be,” he said.

“We enjoy the learning process—I think that’s the biggest thing,” Quinton said. “Every time we head to Illinois, we pull out our tree and flower books and get to work. We’re new at this, but there’s a lot of fun stuff to discover.”

Greg Shade

In the mid-2000s, Greg Shade and his wife, Karen, decided they wanted to find and buy a large, wooded property that was “raw and had some character.”

“I told realtors that I was looking for something with trees, streams, and boulders,” Greg said.

They found the perfect place, a 115-acre wooded property in Tennessee that backed up to Big South Fork Park, a 150,000-acre national recreation area. The site, which was 100 percent woodland, even had two waterfalls. They bought it in 2009.

Soon after, Greg met his neighbor, a veteran forester with a wealth of knowledge he was willing to share.

“I realized that even though what I had may have been a pretty forest, it wasn’t a very healthy one,” Greg said. “It had been clear cut probably 100 years ago and high graded every 15 or 20 years since then. So, it wasn’t in great shape from a forestry standpoint.”

His neighbor taught Greg about timber stand improvement, crop tree release, hack-and-squirt, “and all those other techniques that I never knew I wanted to know.” Greg learned new skills and worked on a forest management plan. Eventually, he certified the property as an American Tree Farm. Greg cleared three acres of the property and planted a wildlife meadow to attract animals, and he also dammed up a hollow and created a two-acre lake that is now stocked with fish. In addition, the property features three-and-a-half miles of trails that cut through timber to various notable spots, such as an old moonshine still, waterfalls, and some picturesque rock formations. Greg and his friends and family hike, fish, watch wildlife and build the occasional bonfire. They named the property

Bear Creek Woods because the land is bordered by Bear Creek and black bears are part of the local wildlife population.

Greg, who lives in Louisville, Kentucky and recently retired, also built a small cabin on the land that catches water off the roof and has solar panels and a wood-burning stove.

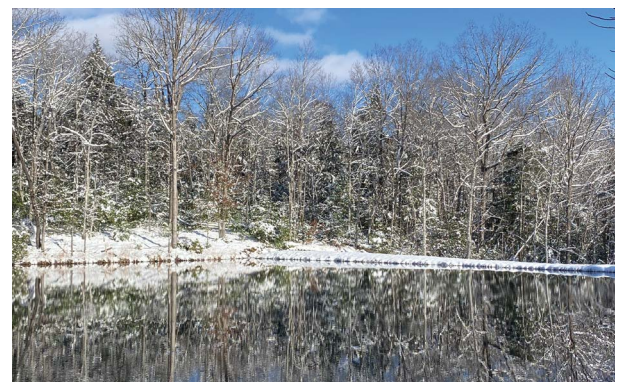
“It’s very simple and very comfortable,” he said. Most recently, Greg said, he’s been investigating carbon sequestration programs and how they might help offset the cost of improving the forest. Greg secured a conservation easement on the property to ensure that it will never be developed. “It’s a place to enjoy and bring family and friends together,” Greg said. “There’s something very cathartic about it for me. I’ve been in the high-tech business, a sort of esoteric industry where we build a bunch of stuff, but you don’t really see a lot of it. At the farm, though, I can put on my work clothes and go out in the woods and get hot and sweaty doing whatever task I’m doing, and it’s very fulfilling to me at the end of the day. You actually see stuff that you physically accomplished. I hope I can make my little postage stamp on the world a little bit better.”

Greg said his views on the property have shifted since he’s owned it.

“At first, I thought, ‘Hey, I want to own some property,’” Greg said. “Over the years, I’ve realized that this property owns me. I’m just the caretaker of it during my lifetime.”



Fishing with family.



Wintertime at the new lake.

Joanie & Randy Walker

Randy Walker's parents bought a farm in Central Massachusetts in 1957 when he was six years old. For years, the property served as his giant playground.

Today, Randy and his wife, Joanie, manage the property and reside on it, feeling just as fortunate and excited about the land and everything it offers as Randy did when he was young.

"We laugh because we say that our summer office is sitting underneath the apple tree and just watching everything," Randy said. "We're lucky."

The property features 370 acres of mixed pine-hardwood stands. The Walkers' forest stewardship plan calls for cutting about 30 acres of woods each year so that the cuts cycle through the property over an approximately 10-year period. The strategy for the cuts emphasizes removing old wood and leaving higher-quality wood to thrive in a more open environment. The focus is on "natural and sustainable," Joanie said.

Randy said they work hard to encourage more wildlife on the property, and the cutting boosts that effort.

"You walk through a grove of heavy-growth woods, and there's nothing in there—you can't hear anything," Randy said. "Then you do a cutting, and you go through and listen. The birds are back, and you can hear the rabbits and squirrels running around. So we've tried to open it up and allow more animals to come in."

Randy said opening up the woods has also helped bring in more wildflowers, including lady's slippers that had been disappearing on the property. In addition to the woods, the property includes 90 acres of pasture, which counts 70 Devon beef cows among its inhabitants.

Electric fencing extends into the woods that surround the pasture, allowing the cows to venture among the trees and graze on invasives and the lower sections of the trees and create fertilizer for the soil. The Walkers ensure the cows do not overgraze in the woods and compact the soil.

Joanie said all the trees in that area are trimmed up to six feet, and there is no poison ivy where the cows visit because "they eat it like candy." In addition, the cows have naturally created paths through the woods that wildlife follows.

"The foresters we work with are thrilled with what the cows do," Joanie said.

The cow dung attracts beetles and flies—which helps attract birds. It's part of a more considerable effort to create a hospitable environment for



Joanie and Randy Walker. Photo by Paul Shoul.



In addition to the woods, the property includes 90 acres of pasture, which counts 70 Devon beef cows among its inhabitants. Photo by Paul Shoul.

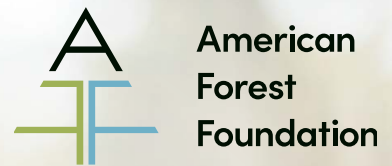
birds. The Walkers have had good luck, particularly with wood ducks, owls, bluebirds, kestrels, and bobolinks.

"For years, we did not have bobolinks, but now we probably have 300 nests of bobolinks," Joanie said. "The evolution of nature and how the farm changes over the years have been amazing."

The property is a historic one and includes a house built in 1763 and a barn with origins dating to 1780.

"It's great scenery here," Randy said. "We're on a semi-traveled winding country road in a valley. Right now, we're almost at full fall foliage, and this time of year, we'll have lines of people stopped on the side of the road taking pictures all day. It's a great place to be." 🌲

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"I support AFF with a monthly donation because the automated monthly process is convenient and a monthly deduction has much less impact on my cash flow. AFF's mission aligns with my values because it supports the small and private landowners who are safeguarding our children's future by providing a collective means of providing technical resources, public advocacy and moral support to many people who are geographically dispersed and otherwise would not easily achieve critical mass to be effective in managing the future of our environmental heritage."

- Charles Johnson, Jr., AFF Giving Tree Member, Sacramento, California

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"We worked hard, we saved our money, and invested wisely. Now we're thankful to be where we are. We're not going to live forever, but we want our forests to make a difference. We want to make a long-term investment in the planet. And we trust the staff at AFF. They are impeccable people. They're honest, innovative and intellectual."

**—Landowners Salem & Dianne Saloom,
Seedling Society Founding Members,
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