

# Woodland

YOUR CONNECTION TO AMERICA'S FORESTS



A Publication of the



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The Townsends' thirteen management units feature many different age classes and occasional harvest. Dave and Carl, pictured here, are two of four brothers who play an active role in caring for the Tree Farm.



Nate Meehan checking in to the COP29 conference with colleagues Kyle Brown and Calvin Tran.

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BY RITA HITE  
PRESIDENT & CEO  
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

# The Resilience of Family Forests

**A**s we welcome the spring season, I am reminded of the incredible resilience of our forests and the family landowners who care for them. The stewardship and sustainable management of these forests creates a healthier planet, stronger communities, and legacies that bridge generations. In this edition of Woodland, we explore critical challenges, inspiring solutions, and the impact we are making together to sustain our forests and all the benefits they offer.

In “Branching Across the Aisle” (page 8), Maya Solomon and Ema Johnson remind us that protecting forests transcends political boundaries, and that bipartisan support for natural climate

solutions bridges the political divide. Through the voluntary carbon market and programs like FFCP, family landowners are proving that sustainable forestry can support multiple needs, including mitigating climate change and providing economic opportunities for rural communities. On page 6, Sarah Jewell delves deeper into recent legislative changes accompanying the new Congress and explores the potential implications for family forest owners, from tax policies to the Farm Bill reauthorization.

*Continued On Next Page*

**“At the American Forest Foundation, we remain committed to creating meaningful impact by empowering family forest owners. Your support helps to ensure that our woodlands continue to provide vital environmental, economic, and cultural benefits, and I thank you for being an essential part of this work.”**

In a changing climate, we are seeing natural disasters increasing in frequency and intensity, with growing destructive impact on our nation’s forests. At the same time, healthy forests play a vital role in disaster resilience. In Resilience & Recovery (page 14), Kris Voorhees and Sarah Jewell describe how forests play a powerful role in preventing and reducing damage caused by natural disasters. This piece reviews the key assistance included in the 2024 disaster relief package, and shares information about actions Congress can take to provide family forest landowners with necessary tools for long-term recovery from natural disasters.

On the metrics front (page 7), AFF’s achievements stand as a testament to your support, collaboration, and commitment: over 125,000 acres enrolled in our Family Forest Carbon Program to date, the impact of which would equate to taking around 530,000 gas-powered cars off the road for a year! Thanks to you, we are able to continue advancing and growing our mission impact to greater heights than ever before.

This past November, members of the AFF team represented our organization at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan. Dubbed the “Financing COP,” this global conference emphasized the critical role of financial investments in scaling climate solutions. On page 12, Nate Meehan and Bethany Mueller

discuss their reflections on the experience and highlight the importance of fostering public-private partnerships to empower family forest owners and deliver meaningful climate impacts.

This edition’s “A Walk in the Woods” profiles (page 18) focus on multi-generational commitments to sustaining family forests. Learn about the Townsend family in Washington, whose dedication earned them this year’s recognition as National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year, and about how Renee Williams of Tennessee carries forward the profound legacy of her ancestors through her management of the Moore Family Farm. These stories exemplify the power of intentional forest management, community engagement, and enduring commitments to leaving the land healthier for future generations.

As you explore this issue, I hope you’ll find inspiration in the stories of resilience, innovation, and collaboration that define our shared mission. At the American Forest Foundation, we remain committed to creating meaningful impact by empowering family forest owners. Your support helps to ensure that our woodlands continue to provide vital environmental, economic, and cultural benefits, and I thank you for being an essential part of this work. Together, we are creating a healthier future for forests and families alike. ▲



# Spring 2025 Update

BY SARAH JEWELL  
POLICY MANAGER,  
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

As the winter snow melts and the cherry blossoms in the nation's capital begins to bloom, the 119th Congress takes into effect and lawmakers begin a new legislative session.

What does it mean to have a new Congress?

The House of Representatives reorganizes itself every two years. At the beginning of each new Congress, the new Members of the House of Representatives are sworn into office and the Speaker of the House is elected. The newly assembled lower chamber reelected Congressman Mike Johnson from Louisiana to be its leader and serve as Speaker of the House.

Similarly, new Senators are also sworn in at the beginning of the new Congress. However, unlike the lower chamber, the Senate's reelection cycle is every 6 years and elect their majority leader shortly after the election in mid-November. For this legislative session, the Senate elected South Dakota Senator John Thune to serve as majority leader.

## **A NEW ADMINISTRATION, A REPUBLICAN TRIFECTA, WHAT'S NEXT:**

Since January 20th, 2025, Republicans have control of the White House, Senate, and House of Representatives. This trifecta (when a single political party controls government) presents an opportunity to enact laws without bipartisan support. However, margins in Congress are

slim, therefore, Republican leadership in both chambers will most likely need Democrat support on certain bills. In addition to the trifecta, the 119th Congress has 60 new House Members and 10 new Senators.

Although it is hard to predict any legislative action, we should see a couple of legislative decisions in the 119th Congress. For the next couple of months, in addition to holding agency nomination hearings and beginning the confirmation process, Congress will be negotiating federal spending bills and Farm Bill reauthorization. Moreover, one of the most significant pieces of legislation to potentially impact small-family forest owners besides appropriations and Farm Bill is tax policy. Major provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act expire at the end of 2025 So we can expect lengthy discussions and negotiations on tax policy in the new year. Specifically, tax provisions that are relevant to small-family forest owners, including tax deductions for regular forest management expenses and deductions for and amortization of reforestation expenses. Ensuring ordinary business expenses and reforestation deductions are maintained as tax deductions will help small-family forest landowners manage their forests. Moreover, negotiations over tax policy present lawmakers with an opportunity to introduce new tax policy that will aid private forest owners, including the Disaster Reforestation Act. ▲

# Program Metrics\* All Time

**125,240** Acres enrolled



**915** Contracts enrolled



**\$31.6M** Committed to pay landowners over the next 20 years



**2.3M** Expected Verified Carbon Units (VCUs) generated over the next 20 years by enrolled acreage



Let's put this into context: this would equate to taking **529,000** gas-powered cars off the road for one year, or **473,000** homes' electricity use for one year!



# Branching Across the Aisle:

## How the Voluntary Carbon Market Bridges the Political Divide

BY MAYA SOLOMON, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF POLICY & ADVOCACY  
EMA JOHNSON, DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY

As the United States enters a new presidential administration, questions about the future of our forests and the family landowners who manage them have been raised. Despite political polarization, one issue unites Americans on both sides of the aisle: the importance of protecting our nation's forests. Forests are critical to all aspects of our lives: the air we breathe, the water we drink, the biodiversity that balances our food and fiber systems, the forest products that every one of us uses daily, and so much more. Family forest owners, who own the largest portion of woodlands in the country, need support to manage these essential lands effectively.

Extreme weather events such as hurricanes, wildfires, floods, and droughts continue to harm both the health of our forests and the livelihoods of the people who steward them. Family landowners often struggle with the high costs of recovery from these disasters, and many are unable to meet the

financial demands of maintaining healthy forests, especially as forest product markets fluctuate. For many small, rural landowners, the burden of forest management has become too large to handle alone.

Despite these challenges and the political uncertainties surrounding election cycles, there is a growing opportunity for rural landowners: the voluntary carbon market. This market offers new financial opportunities for forest owners to help fund forest conservation and climate mitigation. Programs like the Family Forest Carbon Program, a partnership of the American Forest Foundation (AFF) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), are helping landowners gain access to this emerging market, enhancing both the resilience and productivity of their forests.

In a time when political divisions are at an all-time high, the voluntary carbon market offers a way to bridge the gap to achieve our collective





conservation goals. A June 2024 survey conducted by U.S. Nature4Climate (USN4C) showed overwhelming bipartisan support for natural climate solutions, such as those offered through the voluntary carbon market. One thousand registered voters were asked for their opinion about natural climate solutions and unlike other issues, the respondents were largely unified on the topic. For example, when participants were asked whether they would be willing to support practices that reduce emissions and increase carbon storage in forests, farms, grasslands, and wetlands, an overwhelming 94% majority agreed. There isn't much that 94% of Americans can agree on these days.

The voluntary carbon market offers a concrete solution to the environmental challenges we face. As landowners adopt practices that capture more carbon from the atmosphere, they not only contribute to mitigating climate change

but also receive compensation for their efforts. The market enables these landowners to gain financial benefits, creating an additional revenue stream while also improving forest health and resilience.

This market is unique because it allows landowners to voluntarily participate in climate solutions without government mandates. Landowners have the freedom to make decisions that best suit their properties. Although government support can make a difference—like passing legislation that unlocks access to the market for rural landowners—the voluntary carbon market has demonstrated growth even without significant government intervention. This is largely because it is driven by private sector demand.

Corporations, facing pressure to meet their own climate goals, are eager to purchase carbon credits from forest projects. These credits represent the carbon captured and stored by forest lands, helping businesses reduce their carbon footprints.



**“By participating in this market, landowners can help address multiple issues: improving the health of forests, reducing carbon emissions, and supporting rural economies.”**

As climate change becomes an increasing risk to businesses, purchasing carbon credits has become a viable strategy for companies to meet sustainability commitments. The voluntary carbon market is mutually beneficial: landowners receive financial compensation for adopting climate-smart practices, while corporations fulfill their climate goals.

By participating in this market, landowners can help address multiple issues: improving the health of forests, reducing carbon emissions, and supporting rural economies. Scaling the market could create even more economic opportunity for rural communities, protecting forests from development pressures and ensuring that these lands remain in the hands of family landowners rather than large developers.

The benefits of the voluntary carbon market extend beyond environmental improvements. The market can also support sustainable timber production, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and the preservation of family-owned lands. By connecting landowners to the voluntary carbon market, we can help rural economies thrive while also addressing the global climate crisis. By forging this path forward, landowners are conserving open space and providing opportunity for future generations.

This market presents a critical opportunity to address the interconnected challenges of climate change, forest health, and rural economic stability. Whether or not political leaders agree on every issue, it is clear that the shared commitment to improving forest management and tackling climate change can unite us.

AFF will continue to advocate with the new President and new Congress, and with the bipartisan coalitions and partnerships we’ve always pursued, for the support family forest owners need to improve the health, resilience, and productivity of their lands for this and future generations. With over 80 years of history working with family landowners from all walks of life to create meaningful conservation impact, we’re no stranger to navigating political change and what it means for our forests.

In times like these, when political divisions seem to prevent progress on many issues, the common ground is clear: we all want a healthy planet and a sustainable future. Supporting the voluntary carbon market is one way to make significant strides in both environmental and economic sustainability. By embracing the market, we can invest in the long-term health of our forests, improve rural economies, and take meaningful action to mitigate climate change. ▲

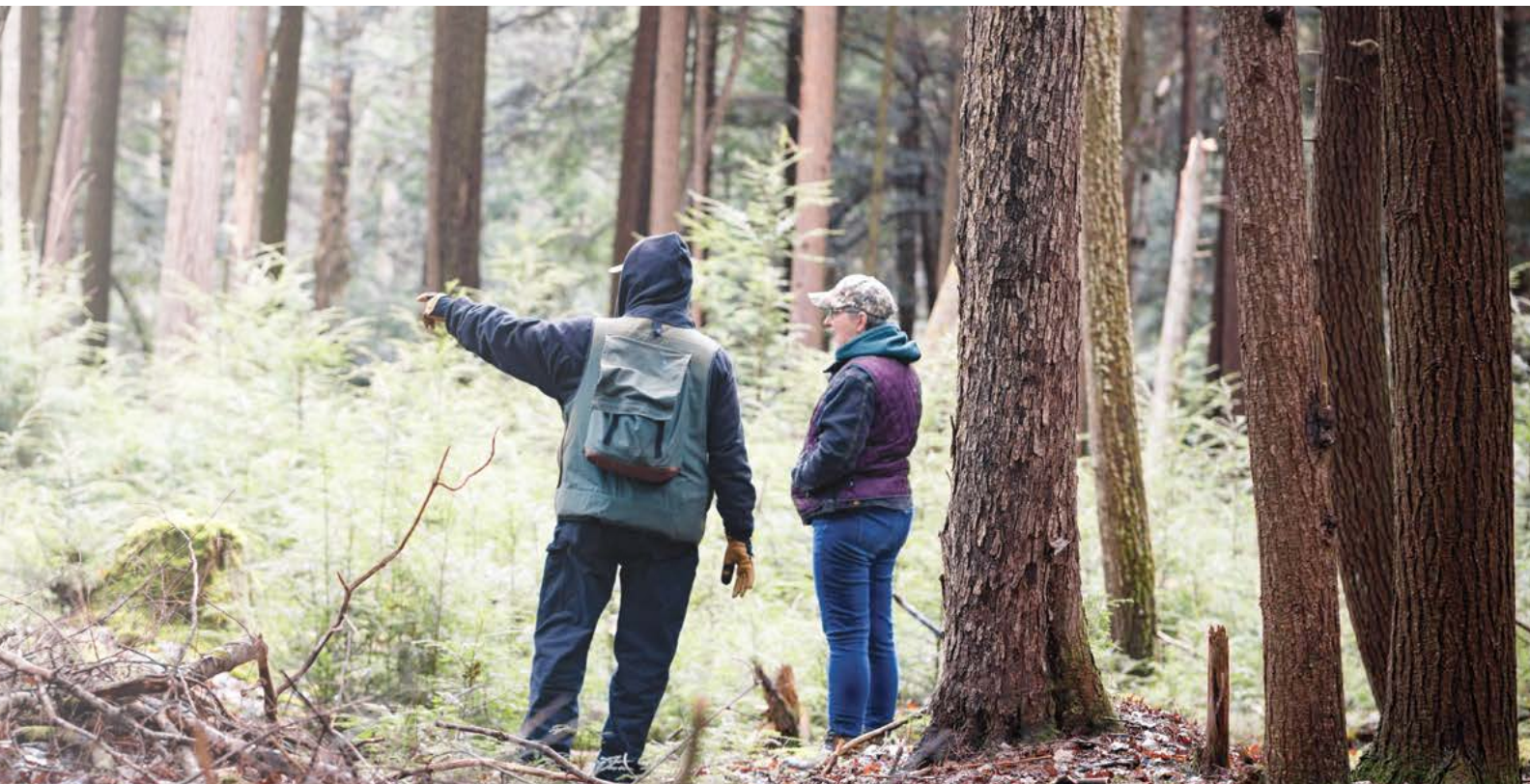
# The Family Forest Carbon Program helps landowners care for their woods while helping the planet.

Family forests provide many 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 land goals.

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 Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.**

Learn more at [www.familyforestcarbon.org](http://www.familyforestcarbon.org)



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# COP29

## Overview

BY NATE MEEHAN, SENIOR MANAGER OF PUBLIC FUNDING AND STEWARDSHIP

The 29th United Nations Climate Change Conference of Parties (or COP29) took place in Baku, Azerbaijan from November 11th-22nd. This annual conference brings together leaders from around the world to push forward international climate solutions. My colleague Bethany and I were both honored to be part of the team representing the American Forest Foundation at COP29. We are excited to share our reflections and learnings from this global gathering of climate leaders with the Woodland community.

If you have ever wondered what it is like to attend a COP, I will sum up the experience in one word: “surreal.” The most recent conference occurred in a windowless plywood structure temporarily erected in the parking lot of a soccer stadium on the shore of the Caspian Sea (which is actually a lake). On the other hand, I would also use the term “inspiring” to describe the experience. Tens of thousands of passionate environmental professionals representing a tremendous diversity of languages, attire, ages, and cultures flocked to that parking lot to tackle global environmental issues together.

COP29’s focus was climate finance, focusing on scaling up resources for developing countries to address climate impacts and transition to low-carbon economies. Bethany and I have done our best to reflect on our experience within the theme of climate finance below.

**Q: COP 29 was billed as the “financing COP.” From your perspective, what are the most significant financial barriers to achieving our national and global climate goals?**

**Bethany:** During COP29, the Independent High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance highlighted that our annual climate financing target may need rise to at least \$1.3 trillion by 2035 if countries fail to act now. COP29 President Mukhtar Babayev further illustrated this during the conference’s opening event: “These numbers sound big, but they are nothing compared to inaction; there is a big payoff.”

Yet, from my view, the greatest challenge is forging effective cross-sector partnerships and building authentic, trusted relationships. One of the most valuable aspects of COP29 was the chance to meet face-to-face with people from various sectors to share ideas, learnings, and collaboration opportunities.

At the American Forest Foundation, my work focuses on leveraging public and philanthropic funds to integrate fully with the private sector. We see the most progress when we bring these three sectors together—often in the field with forest landowners. Building trust across sectors and creating strong public-private collaborations are critical to generating financial solutions we all need.

**Note:** One of the most significant financial barriers to achieving climate goals is that climate issues impact a public good, our planet. Although we all engage in greenhouse gas-emitting activities to different degrees, we do not bear the consequences proportionately. As Senator Markey stated in COP29 panel, “25% of CO2 is red, white, and blue,” yet island nations and people in the global south will endure a disproportionate share of climate change’s negative impacts. At AFF, we see how shifting weather patterns, worsening natural disasters, and encroaching invasive species disproportionately impact family forest owners even though their work serves to ameliorate global climate challenges, rather than causing them. Part of AFF’s mission is to bridge that gap bringing financial and technical resources to family forest owners who make vital climate impacts.



Nate Meehan checking in to the conference with colleagues Kyle Brown and Calvin Tran.



Bethany Mueller entering the conference gates with AFF’s Nate Truitt and Haleigh Green.

### **Q: How can philanthropy play a role in scaling natural climate solutions?**

**Bethany:** We have already seen the role that public funding plays in catalyzing investments in sectors like clean energy and de-risking markets for natural climate solutions. For example, as a recipient of the USDA Climate Smart Commodities and Forest Landowner Support grants, AFF is building the infrastructure to scale the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP). This approach enables us to establish partnerships that attract additional financial resources.

As Ali Zaidi, Assistant to the President and National Climate Advisor, pointed out in his interview with the Financial Times at COP29, 80,000 landowners have signed up for climate-smart agricultural practices over the past four years. However, we will need the private sector, philanthropic investors, financial lenders, and others to mobilize capital. This will ensure family forest owners enrolled in FFCP—and small-acreage landowners globally—can create lasting climate impacts.

**Note:** As Bethany illustrated, the public sector is particularly well-positioned to unlocking solutions. However, it cannot solve the climate crisis alone, given its scale. At COP29, experts noted that while nature-based solutions could account for 30% of the global climate solution they currently receive just 3% of climate funding. This statistic is especially concerning given the numerous valuable co-benefits that nature-based solutions provide. For example, FFCP landowners’ stewardship actions benefit everyone with cleaner air and water, improved biodiversity, and increased wildlife habitat. 🌲

# Resilience & Recovery:

## THE ROLE OF FAMILY FORESTS WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

BY KRIS VOORHEES, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS  
SARAH JEWELL, POLICY MANAGER

**W**ildfires. Hurricanes. Drought. Invasive species. Disease. Floods. With a changing climate, natural disasters are becoming increasingly more destructive to our nation's forests—and more costly to those stewarding them. Family forest owners, the largest ownership group of American woodlands, already struggle to access support to maintain healthy forests outside of these major disruptions. And far too often, it's underserved and underrepresented communities who are hit first and worst by extreme weather events.

**“But how can we support family forest owners growing and maintaining forests that are resilient to a changing climate?”**

At the same time, forests play a critical role in keeping our lands more resilient when disaster strikes, which can lessen negative impacts on local communities, infrastructure, and economies. This makes it essential to protect the health and wellbeing of this natural resource before natural disasters.

But how can we support family forest owners growing and maintaining forests that are resilient to a changing climate? First let's dig into how forests create stronger ecosystems and more climate resiliency. Then we'll look at how U.S. policies can help landowners access resources to improve their forests' recovery after a natural disaster.

### **HOW DO FORESTS CONTRIBUTE TO DISASTER RESILIENCE?**

Every part of a healthy forest contributes to disaster prevention and recovery: the roots, the trees, the soil, the water, and even the air in between.

Healthier soil absorbs more water, reducing the amount of run off on the surface. This reduces the amount of flooding and the intensity of flooding that occurs within that area. Healthy soil also means thoroughly binded root systems, which reduces the amount of soil erosion and prevents landslides.



**“When a forest ecosystem remains healthy, it captures and stores carbon more efficiently,**

**helping to mitigate the overall impact of climate change.**

**In turn this reduces the frequency of extreme weather events and the intensity of their destruction.”**

A well-developed forest is comprised of trees and plants that serve as a natural windbreak, protecting structures and the surrounding landscape when disaster strikes.

This biodiverse ecosystem also plays an integral role in temperature reduction and moderation, maintaining the health of its atmosphere. When a forest ecosystem remains healthy, it captures and stores carbon more efficiently, helping to mitigate climate change. In turn this reduces the frequency of extreme weather events and the intensity of their destruction.

But all these benefits are not a given—we must provide landowners the tools they need to care for the health and well-being of their woodlands. Carbon projects like AFF’s Family Forest Carbon Program provides small-acreage landowners with the technical and financial support needed to sustainably manage their forests for healthier air, soil, and water, improved biodiversity, and increased disaster resilience.

## **DISASTER RELIEF: HOW FOREST LANDOWNERS CAN GET HELP NOW**

Effective disaster recovery policies ensure that landowners can continue maintaining healthy working forests that provide critical environmental and economic benefits. In December 2024, Congress passed a robust package that greenlit funding to support those affected by recent natural disasters. This included billions of dollars that will play a critical role in restoring landscapes, rebuilding livelihoods, and strengthening rural communities devastated by natural disasters.

### ***What does the bill include for landowners?***

**Emergency funds:** The disaster relief package included \$100 billion in supplemental emergency funds to aid states affected by recent natural disasters, particularly for those impacted by 2024’s Hurricanes Helene and Milton.

**Economic assistance:** The bill also included \$10 billion in economic assistance to farmers dealing with crop loss, overregulation, and market forces outside of their control.

**Block grants for timber losses:** Finally, and most importantly for family forest owners, are two avenues of funding that will help landowners recoup their timber value losses from natural disasters in 2023 and 2024. \$30.78 billion was passed for assistance to farmers, ranchers, and producers to aid in commodities losses, which may be awarded through block grants to eligible states and may include payments to landowners. An additional \$220 million was included specifically for block grants for states related to timber and crop commodity losses.

For all these opportunities, landowners should contact their state service forester, since state forestry, natural resources, or agricultural agencies will be the implementing bodies for funding allocation.

## **LONG-TERM RECOVERY: WHAT'S NEXT**

While the 2024 relief package is an important step in bipartisan collaboration to support family forest owners recovering from disasters, there are still actions Congress can take to provide long-term recovery support for these invaluable stewards of America's woodlands. Here are two pieces of legislation that Congress could pass to building more safeguards for landowners when disaster strikes.

### ***The Disaster Reforestation Act***

Amending current tax policy is an effective way the government can help landowners recover from natural disasters in the long term. Currently, forest landowners do not receive tax relief from loss of their timber. Since many producers depend upon their timber for their annual income, when their timber is lost due to a natural disaster, they must wait 25 to 40 years before their crop is ready to sell again on the market. As a result, they are seriously financially impacted for a long period of time. Moreover, during this time, the producer must pay annual expenses without the timber crop income while they wait for their timber to mature.

The Disaster Reforestation Act aims to fix this by amending the tax code to allow forest owners to deduct the market value of their timber destroyed by natural disasters. This alteration would provide private landowners with the financial tools they need to recover and create tax certainty for landowners after a natural disaster.

**“As our climate continues to change it is imperative to provide long-term recovery support for family forest owners, who steward the largest portion of our country's woodlands.”**

### ***The Emergency Conservation Program Improvement Act***

Improving the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) is another way the government can assist private landowners in long-term recovery. Administered through USDA, the EFRP provides financial assistance to private forest landowners to restore forestland damaged by natural disasters. However, as disasters become more frequent and severe, landowners experience increased costs restoring their forests, resulting in longer recovery periods. Currently, the EFRP is not equipped to handle this uptick in natural disasters' occurrence and intensity. As a result, many forest landowners have difficulty accessing adequate and timely funding.

The Emergency Conservation Program Improvement Act proposes necessary alterations to enhance the effectiveness of the EFRP and improve disaster recovery outcomes for private forest landowners. The legislation strengthens the EFRP's ability to respond to evolving climate challenges. Key improvements include enhancing the application process, which would accelerate funding disbursements and in turn minimize the economic and environmental impact of delayed restoration; and expanding the list of eligible natural disasters and restoration practices to reflect the increasing diversity of natural threats facing forests.

As our climate continues to change it is imperative to provide long-term recovery support for family forest owners, who steward the largest portion of our country's woodlands. But equally as important is providing the tools to improve forest resilience. Sustainable forest management practices, like those provided through the Family Forest Carbon Program, can help increase forests' resilience to natural disasters while also promoting essential benefits like cleaner air and water, more biodiversity, and more valuable forest products. Together, and with the right tools, we can empower family forest owners to grow more resilient forests and help recover more quickly from the impacts of a changing climate. 🌲



# Forests and Flowers

BY SARAH CONNOR, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

A hidden wildflower field, butterflies dancing among the ironweed, and beavers hard at work building their new home. Pennsylvania landowner Kathy McClure's property is full of small surprises that come together to create a magical place for her family.

Jon and Kathy McClure acquired their Beaver County property in 1983, while seeking a "place with space" to raise their two sons. The property had been a working farm since the 1850's, with many of the fields being pastured and tilled. After purchasing the land, Kathy slowly realized that they would need to address the damage done to those pieces of land.

That's when they discovered a program designed to help family forest owners like them. They first heard about the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP) when driving past a billboard on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. "I think the key words were 'family forest' that resonated with me," Kathy recalls. "I thought, okay I'm a family forest maybe this would work for me."

As the only improved forest management program that caters to small landowners, FFCP gave the McClure's a new opportunity for forestry support they would not have had otherwise.

"We didn't know of any programs then. I didn't think we qualified for any of them," Kathy explained. "It's very hard for us private landowners to get into the game because it's expensive."

The McClures took their time with the enrollment process, making sure to read the fine print so they felt certain and comfortable about their decision. "They treated us with respect, even though we were small," Kathy said.

Kathy has "a lot of little projects" she is working on throughout her property that FFCP can aid in through financial and technical support. A few years after moving in, she stumbled upon a hidden field of trillium wildflowers, which has since become one of her favorite places as she works to preserve the delicate ecosystem.



Kathy McClure on her Pennsylvania forestland.

There is a hay field on the property that was cut a few times a year, until it was retired recently and had transformed into a purple field of ironweed that was full of monarch chrysalis and butterflies by August.

When their forester, Emma, first visited, she was able to identify more invasive species than they originally thought. "We've been here for over 30 years now, almost 40 years and if we had tackled this 30 years ago it would have been so much easier," Kathy shared of the upsetting news. "I'm excited that we're starting."

The property is dealing with invasives like tree of heaven, Japanese honeysuckle, multiflora rose, and burning bush. They also discovered that some invasives are getting dangerously close to the ephemeral woodlands that Kathy is working to protect.

"I'm excited to work with professional foresters because I know that it's going to take hard work," Kathy said. When asked what she would say to landowners who are on the fence about enrolling Kathy answered to do your research, take your time, and then, "I would almost say, 'Why not?'" 🌲



## A WALK IN THE WOODS

# Steve, Dave, Carl & Keith Townsend

National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year

BY TOM GRESHAM

**T**his year's National Tree Farmers of the Year were born into sustainable forestry.

Tree farming is a way of life for Steve, Dave, Carl, and Keith Townsend. The family property in Pierce County, Washington, which their grandfather, Robert Wise, purchased in 1954, has been like another member of the family, a home away from home that required their regular care and attention—and that always gets it.

"All of us grew up on the property," Dave said. "I didn't know that vacations were anything different than going up to the Tree Farm until I was 14—vacations and weekends were always at the Tree Farm. Initially, it was Steve and I—we're the oldest—there with Grandpa. We always had a mission, and he always gave us jobs that we could do."

Wise was born and raised in Iowa with few large trees in sight. When he moved to Seattle, Washington in 1920, he instantly fell in love with the tall trees. When he purchased 160 acres in the foothills of Mt. Rainier in 1954—adding another 120 adjacent acres the following year—he was

determined that it would be an inter-generational family legacy of growing big, tall trees.

His grandsons and their families have worked hard to continue that legacy, and their decades-long dedication to the Coburg Tree Farm, which was certified as a Tree Farm by the American Tree Farm Systems in 1955, has earned them this year's recognition as National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year. Steve said the brothers have simply understood from the time they were kids that it was critical to respect the land and prioritize its well-being.

"It's always been an important part of life," Steve said. "It gets into your blood. After a while, you begin to realize that you don't own this property—you work for it."

After Wise died, the Townsend brothers' parents, Ivan and Lane, took over and soon implemented additional active forest management practices. They built a cabin and logging roads, and all four brothers have been engaged as forest management efforts grew more extensive and sophisticated.



The Townsends' thirteen management units feature many various age classes and occasional harvests. Dave and Carl, pictured here, are two of four brothers who play an active role in caring for the Tree Farm.

The Townsends' parents, who were honored as Tree Farmers of the Year in both Washington and the Western Region in 1977, made sure their sons not only worked on the property but that they understood the reasons for the work.

"They instilled in us everything that we needed to be doing for tree farming, for growing trees, for protecting the trees," Keith said.

Carl remembered that a forester helped the family put together a more detailed management plan in the 1970s, giving their efforts a strategic framework.

"After that, we had a lot of areas that we set up for thinning," Carl said. "We had our first clear-cut area. It was a small number of very large trees, Douglas fir, on 16 acres. We did the clear cut there. They rooted out all the vine maple that was there, and then we planted the trees by hand ourselves. That was the first big tree planting that we did. Those trees are now big, and many of them have been thinned out and harvested."

The Townsends do most of the work on the property themselves on weekends or for longer

spells in the summer, but major management practices like harvests and planting are now contracted out. Consequently, projects can take a while to complete, but the brothers and their families revel in the hands-on nature of the work. They also find satisfaction in the progress the forest has seen, even appreciating the inherently slow nature of it.

"It's fun to watch the different plantations grow over time and become a forest," Keith said. "There's something special about looking at these trees and thinking I planted these trees and I've harvested some, and now it's a beautiful forest."

Community engagement is an important component of the Townsends' management of the land. For instance, the Boy Scouts hike and camp on the land and sometimes help with Douglas fir pruning and alder slashing. The Townsends look for ways to use their resources to contribute in a variety of ways, such as the year they donated 100 Christmas trees to a local food bank so they could be shared with families in need.



Photos taken over the decades are a testament to the multi-generational stewardship of Coburg Tree Farm.

The Townsends' parents were active with the Pierce County Chapter of the Washington Farm Forestry. Dave served as president for ten years, and Steve currently serves as treasurer of the organization. Keith and his wife, Yvonne, are active with the Washington Tree Farm program and today serve as co-vice chairs for the group.

"It's been gratifying to be a part of those organizations and to host other foresters, such as for field days, and to share our stories, our successes and our failures," Keith said. "We can help others, and we can learn a lot, too."

The Townsend brothers' respective families grew up on the farm just as they did, and their children and grandchildren continue to visit it. Over the years, they have bicycled on the gravel logging roads, held scavenger hunts, played in the creek and participated in extensive work parties. "They all have their own favorite places and favorite things to do," Keith said. "And that's great."

Over the years, the key to the Townsends' forestry plan has been setting up 13 separate management zones, allowing them to have different, graduated ages of their stands. It leads to manageable harvests and plantations, as well as an occasional but sustainable yield, to help financially support the property.

"Sustainable forestry goes hand in hand with the family legacy," Carl said. "Sustainable forestry means a sustainable family legacy."

Dave remembered when he was young asking his father how not to get lost on the property, and his father told him to look for the pruned trees. Dave realized then that there was a distinctive quality to the property that marked its boundaries—its trees were diligently cared for. And there remains a distinctive quality today.

"We had a very distinctive footprint early on in our management activities and then going through the various harvests, and now each one of the harvest areas and plantation areas have a very distinctive age range of the trees," Dave said. "It's like we have 13 different pieces of property, each of which has its own character. There's a lot of similarities to them, because most of it is Douglas fir, but you've got trees that still either have their nets, or areas where the nets are gone and none of them have been pruned, and then other areas that have basically become a canopy forest. Then we go through and we prune it, and then it's opened up again—and then the branches grow back together again. You can walk through the property at any one time and see that cycle repeating itself. Over the decades, each particular plantation goes through this cycle of its growth and development, and we get to witness it. That's special."

## Building on a profound legacy with the Family Forest Carbon Program

The Moore Family Farm in Benton County, Tennessee was founded in 1870 by John and Harriet Strayhorn Barksdale Moore, who were freed from slavery just five years earlier. During slavery, Moore worked as a shoemaker and was allowed to keep his earnings. Those savings helped the couple fund the purchase of approximately 218.5 acres in the Flatwoods community that included both cultivated land and timber.

In those early days, the Moores raised a variety of livestock, including horses, mules, cows, sheep, hogs, cattle, and chickens. They sold soap, herbs, grain, meat, peas, potatoes, butter, and sorghum molasses, among other products. From the timber, they sold wood for railroad ties to the railroad company and firewood to steamboat operators on the nearby Tennessee River.

“They took advantage of every opportunity available to their working farm,” said Renee Moore-Williams, a sixth-generation member of the Moore family who today serves as the property’s farm manager.

John and Harriet both had children when they met, and when they married had more children after settling on the homestead. Ultimately, they raised 21 children on their new property, starting a large, blended family, whose many descendants today still revere the farm where it all began for their lineage.

Moore-Williams grew up spending a lot of time on the farm as a child, often visiting on holidays, in the summers and for family homecoming events. She remembers not only playing on the property—including with the farm’s many animals—but working, too, doing everything from planting crops to picking greens and canning fruit.

Moore-Williams inherited the farm manager title from her mother, the late Shirley Moore Williams. She is humbled and proud to carry the responsibilities of the position on her shoulders.

“The stories of our land and family inspires me every day,” she said. “For my ancestors to purchase land in the 1800s under those circumstances and for our family to still own it today, is an honor and a privilege to participate in this legacy. I’m going to do everything in my power to make sure the legacy continues.”



Renee Moore-Williams with Shawn Posey, Area Forester, Tennessee Division of Forestry, Department of Agriculture.

Today, Moore-Williams said the property is an interpretive working farm with approximately 70 acres of row crops and 130 acres of timber. As a historical landmark in the state of Tennessee, the property features a museum, historical and recreational trails, with old and restored buildings such as a church, school, farmhouse and cemetery whose oldest headstone dates to 1885.

Moore-Williams said the majority of the property’s timber is white oak with some pine, cedar, maple, and hickory in the mix. The family engages in active thinning and are planning a harvest. Moore-Williams said they are considering possible new markets for their timber. The forest is leased for recreation, and “we personally enjoy walking and hiking in the forest,” Moore-Williams said.

“The forest has a lot of interesting terrain,” she said. “A creek that runs through it, as well as hills, and valleys, so it’s an adventure to move through the woods. I catch glimpses of the sun through the trees. The mixture of the shadows and the rays of sun warm my heart. I always feel refreshed and renewed when I walk through and come out on the other side of the forest. Visitors and relatives express the words peace, tranquility, and serenity when they visit the timberlands.”



The nine generations of descendants from John and Harriet Moore gather at one entry to their family forest in Benton County, Tennessee

Community is a critical component of the farm's legacy, Williams said, as her ancestors set aside land for the cemetery, church, and school for use by the broader community. A recent homecoming event on the farm attracted a large group of neighbors and kinfolds which featured food, live music, ancestor tributes, history lessons, and a full military honor guard for the 17 known veterans, past and present, in the family tree and in attendance. Family and friends tended to the upkeep of the cemetery as part of the event.

Williams said an important component of the farm's legacy is encouraging people of color to experience the power of forested areas. She said there is "an ancestral memory around trees and the forest that can generate a hesitancy in some African Americans and Black people."

"The forest was how some ancestors of black people escaped from slavery," Williams said. "The tree was used to tie up your foremother. A tree may have been used to lynch your forefather. That's a challenging memory we address every day as we use the forest and the farm as a backdrop for the stories of resistance, resiliency, and celebration to reconnect people to the land. The land is healing and a good tree will soothe your heart, soul, and mind. We tell the stories of our struggle with the land, forest and with trees, but there's also a beauty and best practices we can embrace as we build and manifest our vision."

Williams said a common thread throughout the land's story has been how to maintain financial stability for the property and maintain the flow of income necessary to keep it alive.

"Looking back on our story, our ancestors practiced a frugal lifestyle to make sure the land stayed in our family," Williams said.

In that light, Williams said the Family Forest Carbon Program, which was developed by the American Forest Foundation (AFF) and The Nature Conservancy, has been an excellent fit for the aspirations of the Moore Family Farm. The program helps family forest owners access climate finance from carbon markets, empowering them to help address climate change while earning income from their land. It also comes with free professional forest management support.

Members of the AFF and the Tennessee Forestry Association visited the farm, walked in the forest and spoke with Williams about her challenges and goals for the property. Williams said the program has not only provided helpful financial support to keep the property viable but also invaluable expertise and new ideas to help the family do the best possible job in managing the timber.

"I fell in love with the American Forest Foundation team," Williams said. "They have been a joy to work with and provided sound advice to move us forward with our woodland legacy." 🌲

# Can You Commit to a Recurring Gift?



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"The American Forest Foundation came up as one of the organizations that is proactive about protecting, maintaining, and improving the quality of American forests," said Janis Buffham, a recurring donor and conservation enthusiast.

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Anonymous

# Seedling Society Spotlight

**“We don’t have millions of dollars, but we can combine what we have with a group like AFF. It’s a way to give back to something that’s given us so much.”**



**Dave McNamara and  
Lois Kaufman**

Dave and Lois have given their time, talent, and treasures to the American Forest Foundation (AFF), but wanted to provide an enduring gift for the future by joining the Seedling Society

**The Seedling Society** is a community of individuals like Dave and Lois, 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 don’t know what path our family will take in life,” Lois says. “But we do have the peace of mind that something we have will live on in the forestry community through our gift to AFF. It might not be the land, but it is one way we can pay it forward”.

“AFF has a great track record of learning from history. They don’t live in the past—they learn from it, apply those lessons, and look to the future”.

## **We’d love to hear from you!**

If you want to discuss your giving options, please call or email **Daniel Leathers at (202) 765-3710 or [dleathers@forestfoundation.org](mailto:dleathers@forestfoundation.org)**.

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.



**American  
Forest  
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The Seedling Society