

# Woodland

YOUR CONNECTION TO AMERICA'S FORESTS



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**Contact Nate Meehan with any suggestions at [nmeehan@forestfoundation.org](mailto:nmeehan@forestfoundation.org).**

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BY RITA HITE  
PRESIDENT & CEO  
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

# Your Support Drives Impact

**W**ith Spring around the corner, I've been excited to get outside, walk the land, and continue our work together to create meaningful impact for our planet and people.

Earlier this winter, AFF was proud to have 3 staff representatives at the United Nations Climate Change Conference COP28 in Dubai. Our team reports back on key themes from this energizing space (page 8). One takeaway was the degree to which these global discussions were speaking to what we know to be true at AFF: we need to use all solutions, including natural climate solutions, and act now to address the climate crisis.

With this in mind, we reflect in this edition on what we've accomplished so far and what we're looking forward to in 2024 (page 18). 2023 marked the 3-year anniversary of the Family Forest Carbon Program, with many milestones to celebrate, including over 71,000 acres and almost 500 landowners enrolled. This has also been a period of key learning as we continue to work with our partners to grow our impact and increase access to the voluntary carbon market for family, small-acreage and underserved landowners and

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# “2023 marked the 3-year anniversary of the Family Forest Carbon Program, with many milestones to celebrate, including over 71,000 acres and almost 500 landowners enrolled.”

communities. We hear the perspective of FFCP participants Edward and Katie Fisher, who host accessible outdoor activities for wounded veterans on their family's land. You can read more about how FFCP's financial and technical assistance supports their goals of protecting their forest and ensuring that their family and veterans can continue to enjoy the woodland for years to come on page 21. Thanks to you, we can expand the reach of these offerings to support more families and communities than ever before.

In February, we had the privilege of convening with newly enrolled landowners and leaders from the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors in a field event in Georgia, with a focus on how we work together to scale our collective climate impact. This tour emphasized the key nature of our partnerships and was an opportunity to celebrate the launch of Field to Forest, the Family Forest Carbon Program's first afforestation initiative. This project leverages funding from the voluntary carbon market to support landowners in transitioning cropland and pastureland to managed pine forest and plans to plant more than 3.4 million trees in Georgia by the end of 2024.

The group got to see the on-the-ground work taking place in Georgia, including family land tours, learning and brainstorming sessions, and the inaugural planting of loblolly pine seedlings. Reflecting on this powerful shared time, what stood out to me most was how this work is possible because we work together, and that each of us has a role to play. By supporting our efforts, you play a critical role in making this all possible and are a key part of AFF's success.

While in Georgia, we honored the memory and impact of Michael J. Reed, a dear member of our AFF community who we lost in January. Michael served as AFF's vice president of policy and advocacy for nearly two years and was not only a member of our staff but also a friend, mentor and colleague to so many of us in the forest sector. Much of his storied career focused on Georgia agricultural producers and forest owners, and his deep expertise and perspective were essential in the formation of the Field to Forest project. We reflect further on Michael's legacy, and on the impact he had on all of us, on page 7.

As we continue to advocate for family forest owners and long-term health of our forests and planet, we are closely monitoring congressional action on key policies relevant to this work. An update from our Policy team (page 6) outlines our areas of attention amid ongoing government deliberations.

In this edition, we are happy to celebrate the 2023 National Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year, Heather Brasell of Alapaha, GA. Heather's story is one of deep commitment and passion for sustainable forestry and educational outreach. You can read about Heather's inspiring efforts on page 16.

I am so thankful that you choose to be on this exciting and critical journey with us. Your continued support and enthusiasm for this work is what keeps us going. Thank you for all the ways you are helping AFF and our partners drive this work forward. ▲



# AFF Policy Team Update

BY SARAH JEWELL  
POLICY MANAGER,  
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

As spring air fills with anticipation of blooming flowers, we also await Congressional action on key policies.

Although Congress passed another stopgap spending measure to fund the federal government in early January, the urgency is mounting as the March 1st deadline is fast approaching. Similar to the two-tier framework of the last temporary funding measure, this stopgap funds some agencies through March 1 and others through March 8.

Additionally, in January, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) reached a budget deal to fund the federal government at \$1.7 trillion through fiscal year 2024. As a result, Appropriation Committee leaders secured an agreement that divides the topline funding amount across the 12 appropriations subcommittees.

At the time of this writing, a fast-approaching deadline isn't the only obstacle that may cause a government shutdown. A group of House Republicans will most likely oppose a final spending deal in its current form. They want to insert policy riders (an amendment to an appropriation bill limiting funding) into federal spending bills on various issues—a move opposed by Democrats. Consequently, without policy riders, House Republicans will not have enough votes to pass a spending deal. As a result, House Speaker Johnson will have to seek Democrat support.

With 2024 federal spending negotiations continuing, so do talks around farm bill reauthorization. Unfortunately, at this time, the ongoing 2024 appropriations process has tangled the farm bill timeline. House Agriculture Committee lawmakers will most likely wait until the second March 8th appropriations deadline to move forward with constructive farm bill discussions. However, Secretary Vilsack publicly questioned if Congress could pass a farm bill in this legislative session. Many lawmakers foresee a farm bill passing in 2025.

One of the issues lawmakers are still sorting out is the role of the Inflation Reduction Funds (IRA) funds in the farm bill. Democrats are pushing to include the \$20 billion in climate-smart agriculture funding from the IRA into the farm bill baseline. Conversely, House Republicans are working to repurpose those climate funds for the farm safety net programs.

Regardless of what challenges Congress faces, the policy team continues to advocate for family forest owners. 🌲

# A TRIBUTE TO THE LATE Michael J. Reed

BY MAYA SOLOMON, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND ADVOCACY,  
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION



The fruit of someone's life can be discovered by their legacy. This was clear in a gathering of lifelong friends, former colleagues, mentees, family, and those who became family, all sharing stories of their experience of Michael Reed. They painted a picture

of a man who generously shared his wisdom, resources, and influence to improve the lives he encountered through his public service as a long-time staffer on Capitol Hill.

As I recount my memories of Michael, I vividly remember meeting him as a 2020 Brookings Institute Congressional Fellow. Michael's greatest legacy is reflected in the fellows, interns, former colleagues, and staff he mentored, sharing his sage wisdom and guiding them through the nuances of public policy and Capitol Hill politics. As Representative Sanford Bishop's Chief of Staff, he took an active role in choosing fellows to support the staff. I attended a Brookings Institute Fellows Job Fair and met an office's Chief of Staff, which was rare, but not for Michael, who handpicked each fellow.

As his former fellow and employee, I observed how he effortlessly commanded the appropriations process and utilized his network inside and outside Congress to pass critical legislation for the American people.

As one of the most knowledgeable in budgetary and legislative policy in Agricultural Appropriations, Michael was a champion for the agriculture and forestry sector with a particular affinity for Georgia agricultural producers and forest owners. Throughout his 20-year career on Capitol Hill, he played a significant role in shaping numerous funding bills. These bills facilitated federal aid that impacted the lives of every single American. One of his proudest achievements was ensuring forest owners received aid following Hurricane Michael's

devastation across the South. He championed Congressional disaster relief efforts for various natural disasters, including typhoons, volcanic eruptions, wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, droughts, and more, delivering unprecedented support to some of our nation's most vulnerable landowners.

During his tenure at the American Forest Foundation, Michael led our policy team to define and advance our public policy priorities by mobilizing grassroots networks, coalitions, and partnerships. He took the reins as the leader of the Forest in the Farm Bill Coalition, leading efforts to develop 2023 Farm Bill recommendations, gaining the support of over seventy organizations. He was instrumental in launching AFF's Field to Forest pilot project in Georgia, sharing his profound understanding of agricultural challenges and helping the team frame reforestation as a financial opportunity that was culturally aligned with the local farming community.

Michael was a true Renaissance man in his personal life, hosting gatherings at home with his wife Diane and Yorkshire Terrier, Alexandra. He showcased his beautiful garden and koi pond, shared his culinary creations, and expressed his divine taste in art and jazz music. These gatherings served as a bridge, connecting his personal circle with his professional community, attracting the "who's who" of Michael's world.

In all his essence, Michael left an indelible mark on this world. His wisdom, strategic acumen, heart for people, service, and distinctive style are deeply missed. The light he brought into our lives ensures they will remain forever brighter.

In loving memory of  
Michael J. Reed  
August 8, 1954-January 15, 2024 🌲

# Progress and Action:

## Key Takeaways from the World's Premier Climate Change Conference

BY MAYA SOLOMON, NATHAN TRUITT, AND CHRISTINE CADIGAN, AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

In December of 2023, experts from the American Forest Foundation attended COP28, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, held this year in the United Arab Emirates. This globally recognized summit serves as the quintessential platform for world leaders, non-governmental organizations, and businesses to discuss and partner on solutions to address climate change.

On the ground in Dubai, the majority of this year's attendees agreed: we've reached a point in the fight against climate change where *all solutions*—natural climate solutions, emissions reductions, technological advances, and more—must be maximized to keep our planet from warming more than 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2030.

Within these critical conversations, AFF provided abundant expertise around the topic of forests as natural climate solutions, which are actions that protect, better manage, or restore nature in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon storage in our environment. They can include things like forest conservation, forest restoration, and improved forest management strategies.

From our extensive work in these areas, we know many things. For one, natural climate solutions aren't being used enough. And secondly, the voluntary carbon market is the most viable mechanism for driving and funding natural climate solutions at scale.

### HIGH-RANKING SUPPORT FOR THE VOLUNTARY CARBON MARKET

The voluntary carbon market is an emerging market that gives organizations an opportunity to invest in environmental projects and purchase carbon credits to help mitigate or offset their carbon footprint. In doing so, participants contribute to carbon reduction efforts while also meeting their sustainability goals.



Elizabeth Vranas, Director of Business Analysis, Family Forest Carbon Program, stands at a podium to speak at COP28.

We are not the only ones who see the massive potential in this market. This year at COP28, Former U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry said, "I've become a firm believer; I wasn't always a firm believer but now have become a believer in the power of carbon markets to drive ambition and action."

Additionally, European Union President Ursula von der Leyen and United Nations Executive Secretary Simon Stiell made it clear that if we are to achieve our ambitious global climate goals, we must leverage carbon markets, especially the global voluntary carbon market.

### HOW CARBON CREDITS WORK

Through the voluntary carbon market, companies and other organizations purchase verified carbon credits, each denoting additional carbon sequestered and stored by environmental projects. A prime example is AFF's Family Forest Carbon Program, which provides landowners with financial and technical resources to enhance their land's health and value.



Crucially, the program's forest management practices not only bolster forest health but also maximize carbon absorption in trees and timber. These increments in carbon storage translate into carbon credits and, when sold, these credits provide pivotal funding for the program's continued success.

## THE MANY BENEFITS OF EXPANDING ACCESS

In the United States, 39% of forests are owned by individuals and families who therefore have a huge role to play in forest health and natural climate solutions. However, access to resources, tools, and market opportunities such as the voluntary carbon market has historically been elusive, often favoring forest owners who own several thousand acres or more.

The Family Forest Carbon Program is changing this, however, opening the door for family forest owners with properties as small as 30 acres of forested land.

Once enrolled, the program provides landowners with financial and technical resources to help improve forest health, increase the quality of their timber, improve wildlife habitat, increase the value of their land, and increase carbon sequestration and storage.

Some landowners enrolled in the program see more wildlife return to their land. Others use their payments to improve infrastructure on their property that was damaged from severe storms. Others put the funds toward forest management costs or property taxes.

## A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR INTEGRITY

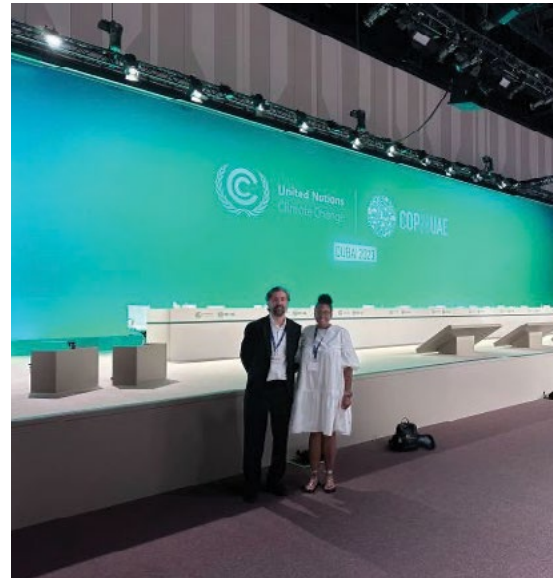
Despite the benefits of the voluntary carbon market as it relates to natural climate solutions, there has been some doubt regarding the integrity of the market and how it works. Thankfully, COP28 offered promising news for buyers and project developers wanting to take climate action confidently.

A coalition of the world's foremost carbon crediting programs—Verra, Gold Standard, ClimateAction Reserve, ACR at Winrock International, ART, and Global Carbon Council—announced the development of an “end-to-end integrity framework” that will provide consistent, needed guidance on corporate decarbonization and the role that high-quality carbon credits play in enhancing corporate climate ambition, integrity, transparency, and consistency across the market.

The time for excuses is long gone. We know the expectations concerning quality. From now on, we should all expect buyers and project developers to build and invest in projects that reflect those expectations.

## GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND RURAL AMERICA

At the end of the day, the question then becomes, can we really build a high-integrity, high-quality market that makes a real climate difference and works for our local communities?



AFF's Nathan Truitt, EVP, of Climate Funding, stands with Maya Solomon, Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy, at COP28 in Dubai.

To date, one of the key barriers has been a lack of investment. Private investors want to be in this market and are eager for sustainable outcomes. However, because the market is so new and the rules are still being set, many private investors are, understandably, still sitting on the sidelines.

Interestingly, another area of alignment among COP28 participants was that governments could and should work alongside private capital to scale the market.

We have seen the U.S. government provide this type of investment in other industries, like the renewable energy industry, which, at its start, needed substantial government funding. Subsidies and incentives, including federal tax credits, grants, and loan programs, have contributed substantially to the industry's continued growth.

We have also seen the U.S. government deliver similar investment in other countries. For example, USAID is currently working with developing countries to mobilize private investment in sustainable landscape programs, including performance-based “payment for ecosystem services” programs that leverage carbon markets.

Clearly, our government has valued supporting private markets both domestically and abroad, so why wouldn't they support increasing market access and scaling natural climate solutions for rural American communities?

If risk is the concern, the government can certainly help mitigate risk for private investors and landowners—akin to loan guarantees already available for traditional agriculture. In fact, there are a few strategies already in the pipeline.

For instance, the bipartisan Rural Forests Markets Act, if passed, could stimulate private revenue streams for family forest owners, fostering generational wealth and broadening economic prospects for rural communities. It proposes that the USDA provide loan and bond guarantees—without imposing costs on taxpayers—to facilitate family forest owners’ access to carbon markets. Moreover, the Act promotes the adoption of sustainable land management practices to enhance the value of forest commodities like carbon and water, complementing traditional forest products markets.

Ultimately, government investment is critical in the voluntary carbon market’s pursuit of deeper trust, credibility, and integrity among market participants. We must catalyze investment in the research and technology needed to support sustained high quality throughout the value chain—such as measurement, monitoring, reporting, and verification (MMRV) and greenhouse gas (GHG) quantification.

## **MARKET-WIDE TRANSPARENCY AND SCALE**

All of this is great news, but realizing the voluntary carbon market’s full climate impact depends on getting to scale. At COP28, two announcements offered vital steps toward integrating carbon markets into regulated financial markets, allowing for more investment.

**“At COP28, two announcements offered vital steps toward integrating carbon markets into regulated financial markets, allowing for more investment.”**

First, the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission published its voluntary carbon credit trading guidelines. The published guidelines are aligned with the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market’s Core Carbon Principles and raise a new bar in marketwide transparency.

Additionally, the International Organization of Securities Commissions issued twenty-one principles for financial market integrity, including sound market structures, sound and orderly trading, transparency, and data availability and accessibility.

The voluntary carbon market, like any market, needs rules and frameworks to increase the confidence of suppliers and buyers alike. COP28 showed that those frameworks are either already present or rapidly emerging.

## **MOVING FORWARD IN 2024: SHIFTING TO ACTION**

A lot of commentary following COP28 focused on what was not decided or not accomplished. While it’s undoubtedly true that more clarity could have been achieved about the role of markets overall, and the rules governing country-to-country trading were not finalized as well as we had hoped, there was progress made.

The various announcements and discussions throughout the conference raised the bar on integrity for the market, and progress at COP28 should reinvigorate everyone fighting climate change. There will now be more guidance on what a high-integrity carbon credit is, how to trade it, and how to integrate it into a climate mitigation hierarchy.

We must now shift to action. Action to preserve our forests and other carbon sinks. And action to improve the management of working lands by providing communities with the financial and technical assistance they need. Along the way, we can continue refining the structures, frameworks, and rules, but the debate over the viability of the market is over. Now we must put the market to work and strive for scale.

If 2023 was the year everyone waited to see who would act first, COP28 was when companies, standards agencies, governments, and communities all stepped up and worked together to bring greater integrity to natural climate solutions and the voluntary carbon market. As our planet inches closer to an unsustainable level of warming, there is increased urgency to act, and we must do so now. ▲

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

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

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

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

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



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Protecting nature. Preserving life.

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# Partnering to Protect the Planet

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BY NICOLE GOODMAN, SENIOR MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER,  
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

**B**oots on the ground, fresh air, the sun's warmth, and the wildlife's rustling. Unlike some organizations that reserve meaningful discussions for conference halls or board rooms, at AFF, many of our most productive meetings occur beneath the canopy of trees. This is why when partnering with organizations, we invite them out to meet the family forest owners we work with and demonstrate firsthand why we do this work.

The Field to Forest Tour in January 2024 was our most recent gathering designed to convene existing and potential funders from the public and private sectors, as well as key implementation partners to work together to scale our collective climate impact. It was also a chance to learn more about Field to Forest, the newest expansion of the Family Forest Carbon Program. Field to Forest is possible thanks to countless partners in Georgia and nationwide.

Field to Forest works with family landowners to transition their underutilized row crop and pastureland into loblolly pine forests, creating a new revenue stream for landowners and growing trees to help mitigate climate change. The project was first piloted in Georgia in 2023 and is now officially launching this year with plans to expand across the Southeast.

Public and private partnerships will be the key to scaling the project to its full potential. While the project aims to enroll 5,000 acres by

2025, we anticipate, 65 million acres of crop and pastureland can be activated in the fight against climate change. Rita Hite, President and CEO of AFF explained, "This potential does not get realized without partners—landowners who are willing to partner with us; public and private actors who are



Landowner Alisha Logue talks with Rita Hite, President and CEO of AFF



**“Once enrolled, the project provides landowners with a contracted forester who will work with them to develop a planting and forest management plan that fits their goals and their land needs.”**

Loblolly pine seedlings being planted

willing to roll up their sleeves and work alongside us, to build trust, to improve credibility and integrity of our credits; public and private actors who are willing to invest, whether it’s through philanthropy, grants, or purchase of carbon credits.” So, AFF invited existing and potential funders from the public and private sectors, as well as initial pilot partners to see the on-the-ground work happening in Georgia.

Private corporations keen on investing in reforestation projects, such as Field to Forest, wanted to understand the work they’d be supporting, including who the landowners were, the enrollment challenges, and the science of the project. Public agency leadership and staff wanted to get up to speed on the voluntary carbon market as combating climate change became central to their work. Both public and private funders want to understand the whole ecosystem and how each stakeholder can play a role in scaling the carbon market. “We know that public-private partnerships are critical to scaling natural climate solutions. We are excited to have these partners with us on the ground floor as we build these efforts.” Sr. Director of Philanthropy, Beth Riley said.

More than 70 attendees and AFF staff hit the ground in Georgia to meet the landowners and learn more about Field to Forest. The tour introduced three landowners, Mitch Cliett, Wade Rabun, and Alisha Logue, part of the project’s first cohort. Our stop on the tour was was Cliett’s property. Hunting this land with his father was a highlight of Cliett’s childhood. Years later, Cliett enrolled in Field to Forest to conserve the land’s natural beauty and continue its legacy.

AFF’s Field to Forest is designed to be a one-stop shop for landowners like Cliett. Cliett said, “AFF made it easy for me as the landowner. There wasn’t much for me to do. That was a selling point.” Once enrolled, the project provides landowners

with a contracted forester who will work with them to develop a planting and forest management plan that fits their goals and their land needs. The project also pays for and coordinates the entirety of the preparation, planting, and forest management plan development.

During our visit to Cliett’s property, participants witnessed the inaugural planting of Field to Forest. Over 19,000 loblolly pine seedlings were planted on Cliett’s land, the first of more than 300,000 trees across the cohort. Hite marked the occasion alongside AFF’s partners, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Georgia Forestry Commission, Arbor Day Foundation, US Forest Service, NRCS, and the Southwest Georgia Project. Together, these partners were integral in getting Field to Forest to this moment. “Whether you are a landowner, a government employee, a not-for-profit professional, or a corporate change maker, despite our different roles, I know with absolute certainty that I have a role to play, and you have a role to play, too.” After remarks, partners grabbed their shovels and planted the first saplings of a soon-to-be forest. “We’re not just planting seeds here today; we’re planting a forest that Mitch will care for and steward. Mitch is one of tens of thousands of folks across the state of Georgia and millions across the country who are stewarding and caring for their land.” Said Hite.

Partners learned more about the forestry behind Field to Forest and the motivations of the landowners who enroll at the next property. Here, Wade Rabun raised cattle and grew crops for decades. Five years ago, Rabun retired and began looking for more manageable ways to support his property and set up the next generation for success. “The reason I enrolled in this program is that I’m 73 years old and I’m not going to do any more farming. I did this for my youngins. If I’m not going to farm it, I need to do something to maintain the land to keep it from growing up.”



Field to Forest field tour attendees beginning their tour in Warren County, Georgia

Since 2020, the Family Forest Carbon Program has worked with landowners like Rabun to activate their lands in the fight against climate change. The program does this by removing barriers, like high costs and bureaucratic complexity, that have long prevented landowners from accessing the benefits of the voluntary carbon market. So far, though, the program has exclusively worked with family forest owners to manage their existing forests. Now, with Field to Forest, the program plans to create new forests, planting trees where there haven't been any for many years. And in turn, the project is developing new forest owners. "We're not just planting trees in the ground. We're welcoming landowners into a community of forest owners," said Aimee Tomcho, Senior Forester at AFF, to attendees.

Building trust was integral to introducing landowners like Cliett and Rabun to forestry. "I think many folks were skeptical of this program because when things are too good to be true, people don't believe they are true. But this is true. While more people like me are enrolling and benefiting from the program, more people will see that it's true," said Rabun. Many of retreat attendees represented government agencies that will share opportunities like Field to Forest with the landowners they serve. They used this field tour as an opportunity to learn about the project's benefits. Thankfully, a lunch hosted by local partners, the Georgia Cattlemen's Association, was next on the agenda.

Georgia Cattlemen's Association (GCA) showed the meaning of Southern hospitality with a lunch of freshly grilled steaks, a host of piping hot sides, and, of course, the southern

classic, pimento cheese. GCA's Tammy Cheely also shared how she was initially dubious of the project but was convinced when she saw the financial opportunities for her community. Cattle and farming were a way of making money and a way of life, and landowners feared losing that. Fortunately, Field to Forest offers landowners multiple income streams, allowing them to continue raising cattle and growing crops while adding forestry to their land's portfolio. "We have great land, great pine trees, and we're cattle country. When one is down, another is up," explained Cheely.

To close the day, attendees headed to Alisha Logue's property. Despite lacking land management expertise, Logue took on the responsibility of managing her family's land when her uncle was ready to pass it down. For Logue, it's about her family's legacy, "I want something to pass down to my grandbabies."

After learning about landowners and forestry at the previous properties, AFF's Lynn Riley shared the science behind the program. The project needed to enroll landowners and grow healthy trees, but most importantly, it needed to remove carbon from the atmosphere. An ongoing challenge attendees discussed was identifying the difference between high and low-quality credits. This distinction was integral to ensuring a true climate impact and building trust in the voluntary carbon market. To ensure the integrity of their credits, AFF relies on a dynamic baseline methodology that compares enrolled properties to a control group of similar unenrolled properties. This dynamic baseline helps AFF isolate the project's interventions as

the reason carbon is sequestered and stored.

Beyond the dynamic baseline, the key to AFF's rigorous science is constantly questioning assumptions. And AFF was comfortable sharing where it had been incorrect and was now making changes. Learning out loud philosophy was central to the whole Field to Forest Tour. AFF is still refining Field to Forest and needs partners to help build the solution.

After a day of learning in the field, partners gathered to brainstorm their roles in scaling the voluntary carbon market and projects like Field to Forest. Partners explored how to enroll more landowners, ensure the integrity of credits, and build increased public-private partnerships. They identified the vital need for better communication and outreach to landowners, stronger legislation and resources to catalyze positive change, and more investment to fund the recruitment and stewardship of family lands and the research and tools to ensure a true climate impact and high-integrity carbon credits.

Throughout the site tour, it became clear that Field to Forest has tremendous potential to create new income opportunities for forest owners and capture more carbon to mitigate our changing climate. It also became clear that the key to unlocking that potential would be philanthropy, government, corporations, and landowners all partnering together. The tour was an exciting opportunity for AFF to convene public and private sector funders to build that collaboration. But it is just the beginning. AFF is excited to continue working with landowners and public and private sectors to enable more opportunities for the voluntary carbon market to thrive, and funders to invest so that projects like Field to Forest scale to their full potential.

Interested in partnering with AFF? We look forward to learning more about how we can work together to advance Field to Forest, an innovative solution designed to help landowners tap into the power of carbon markets. 🌲



## FIELD TO FOREST - ENROLLING NOW!

### FIELD TO FOREST

Field to Forest works with family landowners—**like you**—in transitioning underutilized row crop and pasture land into loblolly pine forest. Our goal is to help Georgia landowners create sustainable income opportunities for their land.

### BENEFITS OF ENROLLING

- Site preparation, seedlings & planting costs covered
- Additional annual payment of \$30 per acre planted
- Optional thinning & harvest; keep your profits
- Technical guidance from local consulting foresters

### ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Privately-owned land in Georgia
- At least 40 plantable acres
- Land has not been forested for at least 10 years

**CONTACT US TODAY TO LEARN MORE:**



229-231-3818



fieldtoforest@forestfoundation.org



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# National Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year: Heather Brasell

BY TOM GRESHAM

When Heather Brasell assumed management of a 2,300-acre Georgia Tree Farm in 2009 following the death of her husband, Murray Gaskins, she admits she was slow to embrace the role.

"I wasn't looking forward to it," said Brasell, who has a professional background in forest ecology in Australia and in science education in the U.S. "I was getting ready to retire. I wanted to travel and have fun in the world. And suddenly I had to look after all this property, and yes, I could do it, but I didn't feel very inspired."

Then Brasell connected with Jamie Kent, a forester with the Georgia Forestry Commission. She walked on the Berrien County property with him, and he seemed absorbed in every detail of the land, which has been in Gaskins family since 1826. Brasell's perspective shifted.

"He kept stopping and looking at the understory and he stopped, and took photos of a gopher tortoise, and listened to the birds," Brasell said. "And he made me realize that being a landowner is about being a steward. It's not about just growing timber. Seeing it as stewardship aroused my sense of passion and my love of ecology and conservation."



Heather Brasell, 2023 National Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year, Alapaha, Georgia

In the years since, Brasell has embraced her role as land caretaker, demonstrating a deep-rooted commitment to sustainable forestry and educational outreach that has made her the AFF's National Outstanding Tree Farmer of the Year. She believes that her recognition is a recognition of the host of people who have helped her along the way.





Heather Brasell is dedicated to fostering connection between people in her community and the forest. This group harvested beauty berries for making jelly, which Heather describes as having a, "gorgeous purple color and pleasant flavor."

"It's about collaboration," Brasell said. "You need to work with other people, you need to respect them, you need to listen to them. When I do my educational outreach, I help other people in other places just as much as they come and help me. It's about working together as a team."

As the manager of the Gaskins property, which is owned by the Murray H. Gaskins Sr. Marital Trust, Heather Brasell has a lot of ground to cover, but she revels in taking a hands-on approach to her responsibilities with a particular focus on thinning and burning and on controlling invasive species.

"My big focus is on trying to work on the entire ecosystem rather than just the trees," Brasell said.

Brasell said she finds satisfaction in the day-to-day labor of walking the property and improving it. Through her thinning and burning, for instance, what could be a thick, unwieldy and impassable forest instead consists of "the most beautiful herbaceous understory," she said.

"I like being on the ground with a drip torch in my hand and a backpack with herbicide on my back rather than on ATVs and tractors," Brasell said. "That way I get to see the flowers and the phenology and just see all these things happening. The transformation is what is particularly rewarding."

While overseeing the property, Brasell took courses at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, eventually earning a forestry degree there. She also asked lots of questions of forestry professionals and attended many short courses, field days and conferences.

Mark McClellan, program manager for the Georgia Forestry Commission, said he has long been impressed by Brasell's work ethic and her ability to think outside the box.

"She's always wanting to experiment—always wanting to do something different and always wanting to reach out to the public and share that knowledge as well," McClellan said. "I just love going out there on the property and looking at all the work that they've done."

**“Brasell is proud of the diversity of ecosystems contained within the property. ‘I think we’ve got about a dozen different habitats,’ she said.”**

The Gaskins Estate Tree Farm is a mix of planted pines, natural pines and hardwood bottoms along the Alapaha River. Brasell is proud of the diversity of the property’s ecosystems. “I think we’ve got about a dozen different habitats,” she said.

Education and outreach are significant points of emphasis for Brasell, and she has dedicated about 200 acres of the property to the Gaskins Forest Education Center, which frequently hosts visitors ranging from middle schoolers on a nature walk to professional botanists doing a taxonomy workshop. Among her many outreach efforts, she hosts “A Day in the Woods” each spring, inviting the community to the farm to learn about forestry and wildlife.

“I’ve developed an arboretum, a demonstration garden of grasses for understory workshops, a pollinator garden, a bog garden, a fernery, an ephemeral pond, a permanent pond and a Cypress pond across the road,” Brasell said. “And by focusing a lot of things in that one place, you get a lot of different kinds of usage for people of all ages and experience levels.”

The outreach is a natural result of Brasell’s desire to share her passion for sustainable forestry with others and to help them appreciate it the way she does.

“I love everything I do,” Brasell said. “I just say working in the woods keeps my mind, body and soul in good shape.” ▲



Heather takes a hands-on approach to integrated pest management and other stewardship activities.

# Family Forest Carbon Program 2023 Annual Report



## Letter From Christine Cadigan, EVP, Carbon Origination

### I am taking away so many critical reflections from 2023.

Last year, the global confidence in the voluntary carbon market was put to the test. The year started with several haunting exposés and the release of skepticism-inducing academic journal articles. The market responded with stalled credit sales and price slumps. No doubt, it's important to have a critical eye when evaluating these projects so we avoid "greenwashing" and have a truly meaningful climate impact. Yet, despite what many say was one of the more tumultuous years for carbon markets, we ended the year with a confidence boost. At the 28th UNFCCC Conference of Parties in Dubai (COP28), there was no mistaking the role voluntary carbon markets, and natural climate solutions in particular, must play to achieve our global climate mitigation goals. Leaders from across the world sang a coordinated response from various pulpits throughout those two weeks (read more about my COP28 reflections on our blog). Yes, there may be some issues; yes this work is challenging; but we absolutely must keep trying. All along, the American Forest Foundation and its implementation partner, the Family Forest Impact Foundation, has been betting on producing high quality

carbon credits through the Family Forest Carbon Program. Given the robustness of our claims and the important investment in America's rural economy, we have not seen a slump in demand or price for our offering. And we see the voluntary carbon market soon requiring the production of these high quality credits in the future. Within our own program, we had a robust enrollment of nearly 30,000 acres in 2023 for cumulative all-time enrollment of nearly 500 landowners and more than 70,000 acres. The impact produced from these acres over the lifetime of their contracts is enough to offset the average emissions of 4,500 individual American citizens. That is real, meaningful impact. And as I look out over everything we have in store for 2024, I can tell you, we're just getting started.



## Growing the Family Forest Carbon Program

In 2023, we marked the three-year anniversary of the Family Forest Carbon Program. What started in 2020 as a small pilot program across 16 counties in Pennsylvania has now expanded into a scalable, fully operational climate-smart forestry program operating in 11 states with a foundation to expand further this year.



**71,100**

Acres Enrolled\*



**500**

Individual Contracts\*



**485**

Landowners\*

\* Total numbers as of January 1, 2024



**28,122**

Acres Enrolled  
in 2023



**204**

Landowners  
Enrolled in 2023



**142**

Acres Average  
Project Size



**\$1.2M**

Paid to Family  
Forest Landowners



**\$12.6M**

Additional Paid Over  
The Next 20 Years

Learn more about our work at [forestfoundation.org](https://forestfoundation.org) and [familyforestcarbon.org](https://familyforestcarbon.org).



# Family Forest Carbon Program 2023 Annual Report

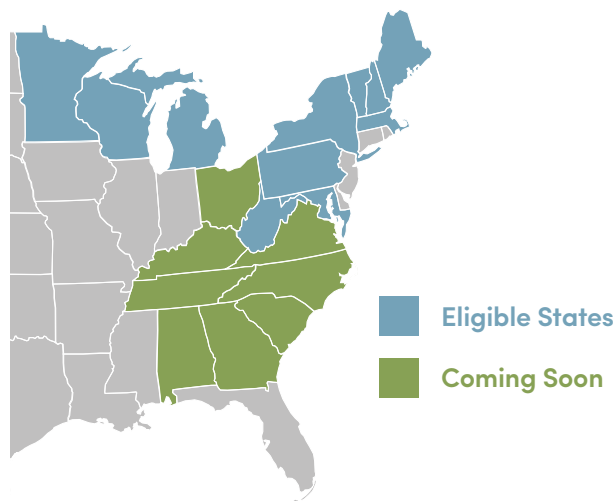


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## Looking Ahead to 2024

Since it was created, the Family Forest Carbon Program has grown every year — 2024 will be no different.

- **Expand into eight additional states** in central and southern United States, including Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.
- **Further increase access to the voluntary carbon market for small, underserved landowners** through a test program designed for those with fewer than 30 acres of wooded land (15–29 acres) in our most active program regions.
- Add to our Improved Forest Management practices, we piloted our first reforestation practice — Field to Forest. Working alongside several partners in Georgia, **we recruited over 600 acres into the program in its inaugural year.** We will continue to grow this practice in 2024.
- In collaboration with The Nature Conservancy, **we will also complete the design and financing of a second Reforestation pilot in Arkansas** to help owners of frequently flooded agricultural land reestablish forests as a means of reducing flooding and enhancing other ecosystem services. The goal? To open enrollment to a wider array of landowners.



Learn more about our work at [forestfoundation.org](https://forestfoundation.org) and [familyforestcarbon.org](https://familyforestcarbon.org).



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# Pennsylvania Family Forest Owner Gives Back to Veterans

BY TOM GRESHAM

## Edward and Katie Fisher

When Edward Fisher and his wife, Katie, searched for a woodland property to buy in Pennsylvania, they intended to find a place to enjoy for themselves and their family. They didn't know that the property one day would someday serve as a powerful place of healing for others.

The Fishers' initial purchase of 130 acres in 2004 near Oswayo, Pennsylvania has grown over the years to 400 acres through the subsequent acquisition of contiguous properties. Approximately 30 to 40 acres of the land are fields, while the rest are woodlands. Fisher said the land represents a goal that can be traced to his childhood.

"I grew up dirt poor," Fisher said. "My mom and dad worked hard, but we were definitely in the lower class financially. It was always my dream to buy a piece of property where my family could come and enjoy enjoy it—hunting, fishing, that type of thing. We finally made that happen, and have offered it out to our family members to come and enjoy, too. We're very blessed to have this property."

It's not just the Fishers' family who have come to appreciate the property. In addition, the Fishers founded a nonprofit organization, the LEEK Hunting and Mountain Preserve, which hosts handicapped-accessible camping, hunting, fishing and outdoor activities for wounded veterans.

"Opening up to our veterans has doubled my expectations of what I thought this property would do for us," said Fisher, an Army veteran. "It has given back tenfold what I have put into it. I get so much reward out of it, just knowing that the property is being used in a very positive way."

**"Approximately 30 to 40 acres of the land are fields, while the rest are woodlands. Fisher said the land represents a goal that can be traced to his childhood."**

Fisher said taxes on the property represents his toughest challenge to managing it, so he was appreciative of the opportunity that the Family Forest Carbon Program offered. The program, which was developed by the American Forest Foundation and The Nature Conservancy, pays small forest holders upfront to implement climate-smart forestry practices and provides professional expertise to help ensure long-term, sustainable management of their land.

Fisher emphasized that the program's goals of preserving the woodland aligned with his desire to protect it and ensure it remains a place that his family and wounded veterans can continue to enjoy into the future. FFCP foresters helped him with a 46-page management plan that has minimal impact on the land and helps preserve its long-term health. That included harvesting timber.



The Fishers provide access to hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation activities for disabled veterans through their non-profit, the LEEK Hunting and Mountain Preserve.

“They showed me that if I didn’t cut some of my trees, then I was going to lose a lot of my forest,” Fisher said.

With the guidance of foresters, Fisher selectively harvested timber from his land to open up the forest canopy and let other trees grow. He estimates that he harvested approximately 20% of a 250-acre forested parcel of land—“just enough to maintain good forest growth,” he said.

“It was absolutely a great experience, and I got just what I wanted out of it,” Fisher said. “They came in, cut and did great job, and helped me to manage my land as best as possible while being in accordance with the Family Forest Carbon Program.”

Not only did the commercial harvest fall within the parameters of his carbon program participation, but he also made additional revenue off his forest products. Fisher said it is important to him that the program provides guidance rather than micromanaging his land, showing respect for his perspective as a property owner.

“I appreciate the carbon program coming in and helping out and enabling me to do a little more with my property,” Fisher said. “I’ve really benefited from their management practices and the forester they assigned to me. I’m very glad that I joined the carbon program, not only for myself, but for my forest. We’ve put a lot into this piece of property, and it’s nice when the land gets back to you. I’ve been able to do that with the carbon program.”

After two decades of land ownership of his land, Fisher said the experience has simply been “amazing.” The family has built a house with a deck on it, and he revels in the view of the valley that his family owns, manages, protects—and shares.

“Being able to share this with others has been really satisfying, and I’m excited we can continue to do that,” he said. “That’s what really gives me the most enjoyment.” 🌲

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

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

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

Join **the Giving Tree**, our monthly giving group, today! With your monthly gift, you join a group dedicated to overcoming our most pressing conservation challenges. Members of the Giving Tree are critical to creating a steady, reliable source of funds that allows us to undertake the most crucial parts of our mission.

## With your generous recurring donation, you will receive benefits\* such as:

- Curated and customized communications.
- Member-only phone line for personal inquiries, concerns, or questions.
- Annual choice of American Forest Foundation gear such as hats, coffee mugs and more.

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

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

Clark Beebe	Andres Echeverry	Charles Johnson Jr	Jonathan Roberts
Robert Bousquet	Steven Eichten	Gary & Treva Kingston	Casey Rush
Marcus Bradley	Ruth Hinson	Mike & Christine Mallon	Joshua Traube
Kyle Brown	David Hofer	Will Martin	Nathan Truitt
Janis Buffham	David Hughes	David Mazariegos	Anonymous
Scott Deitz	Lacy Hunt	Vincent Nadalie	Anonymous
Steve Dosh	Matt Jagnow	Patrick O’Reilly	Anonymous

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

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

# Seedling Society Spotlight

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



**Scott and Marge Hayes**

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

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

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

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

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

## **We’d love to hear from you!**

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



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Foundation**



The Seedling Society