

Woodland

YOUR CONNECTION TO AMERICA'S FORESTS



A Publication of the



American
Forest
Foundation

AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION CARBON AUCTION

Tackling our most pressing climate challenges requires a collaborative approach by all participants in the Voluntary Carbon Market—a critical tool in our collective fight against climate change, and in companies' journey to Net Zero.

For the market to succeed, however, we need better solutions for realizing the impact of carbon projects, which includes new mechanisms for how high-quality credits are bought and sold.

Do you work for a company on a Net Zero journey? We have an innovative approach to buy carbon credits.

In the coming months, American Forest Foundation will host its first auction of carbon credits from its Family Forest Carbon Program giving companies a more transparent and streamlined way to purchase carbon credits and advance their climate mitigation journey.

We believe the market requires adaptation, innovation, and improvement now more than ever before. Our auction allows for a more streamlined process and transparency in pricing and volume availability into the future. Buyers will have the opportunity to evaluate all the detailed information about the Family Forest Carbon Program's four active carbon projects, assess the terms of FFCP's offtake contracts, and bid on key terms to secure FFCP credits below future forecasted market prices.

Join American Forest Foundation's Auction

If your company is on a journey to Net Zero, we invite you to experience a new way to buy carbon credits, a new way to assure your critical stakeholders that your business is resilient in the face of climate change, and a new way to finance the actions we all must take to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change.

Join us as we work together to improve the voluntary carbon market to drive measurable positive impact for our planet.



To learn more about how your company can participate, visit www.affaction.org

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BY RITA HITE
PRESIDENT & CEO
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

Because of YOU we're Celebrating a Family Forest Milestone

As 2024 draws to a close, I am reflecting on and celebrating the significant strides we've made in advancing our mission this year. **With your support, we've reached new heights in engaging family forest owners, driving investment to rural communities, and unlocking the power of family forests in mitigating climate change.**

In October, we officially crossed the threshold of over 100,000 acres enrolled in the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP) across 19 states! This incredible milestone reflects the efforts of hundreds of family and individual landowners, made possible by your continued support and engagement with this critical work. In "Small Landowners Equal Big Impact" (p. 16), you can

read about how landowners like David Funk in Ohio, Tim Stout in Vermont, and Wade Rabun, Alisha Logue, and Mitch Cliett in Georgia are creating lasting forest legacies with FFCP. These trailblazing landowners are essential drivers of a collective effort to improve forest health, sequester carbon, and provide ecosystem benefits across the nation.

To achieve the scale of our conservation and climate goals, we've learned that we have to think outside the box and build on traditional non-profit funding. EVP of Climate Funding Nathan Truitt shares what we have learned in our experience

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“At a pivotal moment, AFF emerged as a recognized leader in promoting integrity in voluntary carbon markets, advocating for policies that support small landowners while ensuring scientific rigor.”

administering FFCP. He describes how we are taking an innovative approach to funding this work, combining donor and grant funding with private investment through the voluntary carbon market to meet this moment. The “Catalyzing Blended Finance” profile on p. 8 takes a deep dive into how we are leveraging this combined finance opportunity to drive unprecedented investments for healthier forests and opportunities for landowners to engage in climate resilience.

In this edition’s policy update (p. 6), we hear from Policy Manager Sarah Jewell about the implications of key legislation underway in Congress, including an extension on the federal funding package and delays to the Farm Bill. Amid these negotiations, AFF continues to advocate for policies like the Rural Forest Markets Act, which would unlock private investment in America’s rural landowners and help to address the global climate crisis. Your support in outreach around these vital programs is key to ensuring investments in the long-term health of our forests and communities.

At New York Climate Week this year, we had the privilege of sending 10 AFF staff members to join in dialogue and partnership around key climate action topics. Our team represented the Family Forest Carbon Program’s progress

across a number of discussions and panels, promoting integrity in the voluntary carbon market and advocating for policies that support small landowners while ensuring scientific rigor. Members of AFF’s Science and Climate Funding teams share their key takeaways from the event and the signals we are seeing on p. 12.

For many family forest owners, a deep connection to the land and all that it offers is what drives their stewardship. In this edition, we highlight some examples of how forest owners experience this connection and live their commitment to their forests (p. 19). From rich family legacies rooted in sustainable forestry, to the challenges and triumphs of turning a barren property into a thriving tree farm, these stories underscore the power of individual and family commitments to sustainable forest management and showcase the lasting impact of their stewardship.

These stories illustrate how land stewardship and climate action go hand-in-hand—and thanks to your support of AFF, you are an essential part of making this all possible. Your commitment to this work strengthens the foundation for our sustainable future. Together, we can ensure a vibrant future for our forests, planet and communities—a true legacy for generations to come. 🌲



Winter 2024 Update

BY SARAH JEWELL
POLICY MANAGER,
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

As the winter and fall seasons are underway in the Nation's capital, so is the election season, and two must-pass pieces of legislation, the Farm Bill and federal funding package.

Just two months before November 5th and a week before the fiscal year deadline, Congress passed a stopgap funding bill. This Continuing Resolution includes current funding budgets for federal agencies through December. Consequently, the stopgap excludes the Biden Administration's request for funding increases for veterans' benefits, other agencies reporting shortfalls, and supplemental disaster, including FEMA's disaster relief fund, already in a deficit from rebuilding Maui after last summer's wildfires, which will be in \$3 billion deficit by February. Additionally, the funding bill does not include the billions the Biden Administration requested to purchase for more submarines.

The funding extension allows elected officials to focus on campaigning for the Election. However, after November 5th, during the lame-duck session, Congress must swiftly shift its focus to reaching a new funding agreement for military and non-defense spending before the December deadline. With the Senate expected to retain a slim majority, the federal spending package will likely require a bipartisan compromise.

Although Congress was able to pass a spending bill before the fiscal year deadline, Farm Bill discussions are still at a standstill. Agriculture Committee leaders in both chambers

requested appropriation leaders to exclude the Farm Bill extension from the Continuing Resolution. They stated that this omission would allow them to draft a new farm bill or pass an extension during the lame-duck session.

If Congress does not manage to finalize a spending package or Farm Bill during the lame-duck session, these two bills will collide with two other must-pass bills, the 2025 tax package (2017 tax cuts will expire at the end of December), and the debt limit (currently waived until January). Thus, negotiations on a federal spending package and Farm Bill will be more difficult, especially with the new Congress and Administration. As a result, January may not only bring cold weather, but chaos as well.

With the Farm Bill and FY25 Appropriations negotiations pushed back to after the Election to the lame-duck session, advocacy around the Rural Forest Markets Act (RFMA) is still ongoing. Several of our legislative targets ((Senator Collins (R-ME), Senator Tuberville (R-AL), Representative Molinaro (NY-R), and Representative LaMalfa (R-CA)), have expressed interest in cosponsoring RFMA. However, they have yet to officially sign on. RFMA is a federal program that will impact landowners across the United States. Thus, even if landowners do not reside in these states or districts, landowners can still reach out to these Congressional offices to express their support for RFMA. If you are interested in helping us convince these elected officials to sign on to RFMA, please contact Sarah Jewell at sjewell@forestfoundation.org. ▲

Catalyzing Blended Finance

BY NATHAN TRUITT, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF
CLIMATE FUNDING AT AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

Since 2017, the American Forest Foundation has been working to improve the access of family and individual forest landowners to the voluntary carbon market (or VCM). AFF believes the VCM can provide important assistance to landowners by helping them shift to longer-term management improving the quality of their timber, the health of their forests, and the value of their property for future generations. If we can construct a program which truly connects America's forest landowners with the VCM, it will bring billions of dollars of funding to rural America, help establish healthier, more resilient, and more productive forests on millions of acres, and reduce, by tens or possibly hundreds of millions of tonnes, the amount of planet-warming carbon dioxide in our atmosphere.

As a non-profit organization, the American Forest Foundation has had to navigate a significant shift in operations to forge this connection with the VCM. A traditional non-profit solicits grants and donations and uses the funds it raises to implement its programs. Those grantors and donors give funds up front based on the activities the non-profit commits to doing. Like a traditional non-profit, AFF's work would not have been possible over the past decades without the committed support of individuals, companies, private foundations and state and federal agencies who believe in AFF's mission and programs. Unfortunately, the scale of funding available through traditional philanthropy and grants alone is insufficient to truly address the challenges and opportunities of the present moment. Based on

our experience administering the Family Forest Carbon Program, we estimate that providing landowners with the necessary technical support and financial assistance to transition to longer-term forest management costs approximately one billion dollars for every million acres enrolled in the program. It costs about a billion dollars per million acres of enrollment. Enrolling fifty million acres of family owned land in programs like FFCP, and providing long term support for these landowners would require approximately \$50 billion. This amount far exceeds the funding available through philanthropy and grants.

This is why the voluntary carbon market is so important. Shareholders, investors, employees and customers increasingly expect companies to address their residual carbon dioxide emissions ("residual" meaning emissions they have not yet been able to reduce or eliminate) by purchasing high-quality carbon credits. When companies do this, they demonstrate to those shareholders, investors, employees and customers that their company can continue to thrive as the cost of emitting carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases continues to rise. Over the past decade, the percentage of global carbon emissions globally covered by policies such as cap and trade or carbon taxes has increased from 9.84% to 23%, while the global weighted cost of emitting carbon dioxide has increased from \$9.50 to \$23.20 per tonne.¹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change suggests that the cost of emitting CO₂ must rise to \$170 per tonne by 2030 to limit warming to the target of 1.5 degrees. Companies

¹ <https://systemschangelab.org/finance/price-greenhouse-gas-emissions-and-other-environmental-harms#indicator-90>



To launch AFF's Fields and Forests in Georgia, AFF and its partners from a cross-section of the public and private sector convened for a ceremonial tree planting during a field tour in Georgia." From Left to Right: Chris Tointon, Arbor Day Foundation, Terrance Rudolph, State Conservationist, Georgia NRCS, Ken Arney, US Forest Service, Tim Lowrimore, Georgia Forestry Commission, Rita Hite, President & CEO of American Forest Foundation, Sean Babbington, US Department of Agriculture, Felicia Burke, Southwest Georgia Project, and landowner, Mitch Cliett.

with large amounts of unabated emissions face the risk that, should the cost of carbon emissions rise suddenly and steeply, their businesses could fail. When companies voluntarily buy and retire carbon credits to offset the unabated emissions, companies "simulate" a future with higher emissions cost, emissions, and demonstrating to shareholders, investors, employees and customers that their business can remain resilient.

Companies around the world are increasingly committing to the purchase of large volumes of credits. The VCM is projected to grow significantly by 2030, from its current size of around \$1 billion annually to anywhere from \$10 to \$250 billion by 2030, and to as much as \$1 trillion by 2050. If the VCM grows in this way, it is quite possible that it could be the source of the funding needed to help America's forest landowners learn about and implement the best silvicultural practices across the country.

So, with the VCM arriving on the scene, programs like FFCP and organizations like AFF no longer need funds from donors and grantors, right?

Absolutely not! If anything, the importance of donations, grants and philanthropic investments has increased dramatically, as have the opportunities for donors and grantmakers to make an impact through their gifts and grants. To understand why, we need to talk more about what a carbon credit is and how it is produced.

HOW DOES THIS ALL GET MONETIZED?

Carbon credits are created through ex-post verification by third-party standards and auditors. This means a credit cannot be generated and sold on the voluntary market until the project's outcomes are thoroughly reviewed. A carbon credit is only issued when all parties agree that as a result of the project, there is one less tonne of CO₂ in the atmosphere.

For forestry projects, the process can take a long time. Before a single credit is generated, the FFCP must market to landowners, follow-up with interested families on the ground, assess properties for enrollment, create and negotiate contracts, develop management plans to help landowners implement the project, install monitoring systems, report and verify plots, and pay landowners annual incentives to support the shift to improved management. Even after completing these steps, we must wait for the project to generate carbon benefits. This takes time, because forests must grow and the impact of better management needs to be measured. In the best case scenario, it takes about three years after a landowner is enrolled to produce a carbon credit.

So on the one hand, we have companies willing to buy carbon credits once they are produced, and on the other, we have all the resources we need

today to create them. Businesses that face this kind of dynamic borrow money to produce their goods and then pay the lenders back once they've made and sold their products. Will that work for carbon credits?

Currently, it doesn't, for two reasons. The first we've already talked about, the length of time that passes between spending money to make a carbon project and being able to sell a credit. Let's say we borrow \$1 at a 20% interest rate. If we pay that dollar back next year, we owe \$1.20. But, thanks to the magic of compounding interest, if we have to wait until year five, we owe \$2.48.

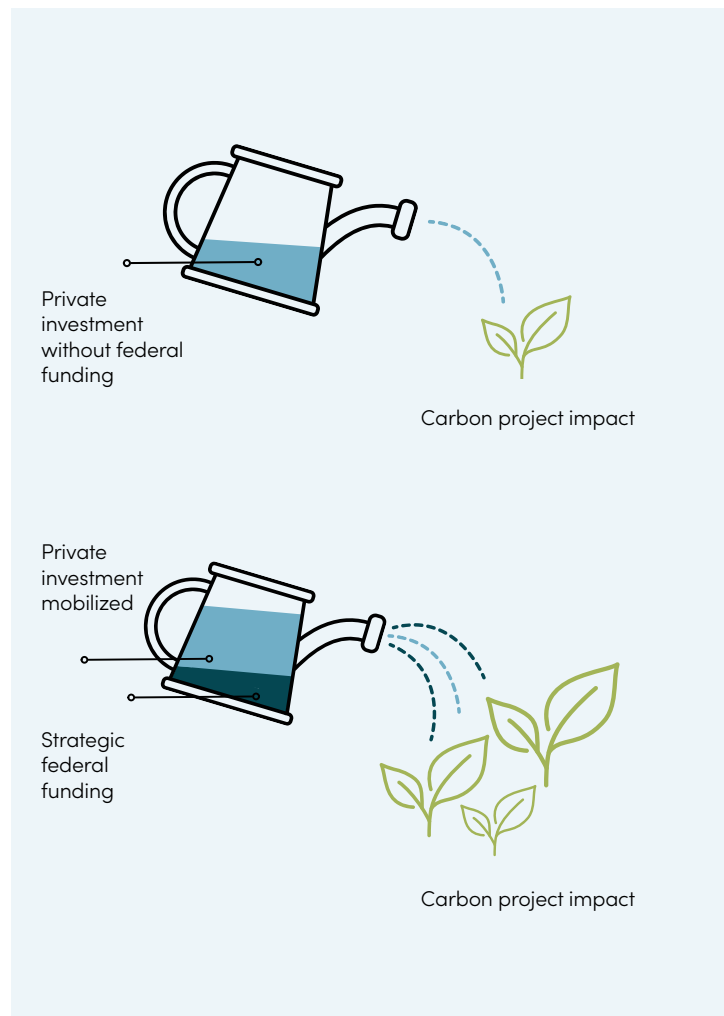
The second challenge is the risk inherent in the current VCM. Earlier we shared a variety of estimates of how big the market could grow. On the low end, the market was projected to grow to \$10 billion by 2030. And on the high end \$250 billion! That's a big difference, demonstrating how uncertain and volatile the VCM is currently. We know it will grow, but we don't know how much. Also, the rules around creating high-quality credit are getting tighter, after many media and scholarly articles pointed out projects issuing credits that did not represent tangible impact on the atmosphere. Finally, some projects—like the FFCP—are taking entirely new and innovative approaches to developing carbon projects—by aggregating large amounts of smaller landowners, rather than creating projects solely on large, industrial ownerships. This innovation is great, but it also has a lot of unknowns: how difficult will it be to recruit landowners? How much time will it take? How much will it cost?

If you walk into a bank to talk about a business loan, and you talk to the lenders about uncertainty and volatility—and then talk about how long it will take to pay your loan back— you will not have much luck obtaining a loan at a reasonable rate. Indeed, in the VCM today, we see a number of investors who have an appetite to take risks but are expecting extremely high rates of return for their investments: 20% or more annually.

Very few—if any—nature-based carbon projects will be able to meet those return expectations, because we are constrained by photosynthesis, and trees only grow so fast.

THE ROLE OF BLENDED FINANCE

This is where philanthropy and grants come to the rescue through what is commonly referred to as “blended finance” approaches. In blended finance, you mix capital with very high costs (like



the investment with the 20% returns) with capital with low or no costs (like donations and grants) to achieve a “blended” rate that a project can bear. Blended finance approaches have been very successful in catalyzing projects across the world. However, we at AFF don't like the vanilla blended finance approach for two reasons: first, it doesn't scale. For each project, you have to assemble, usually from scratch, a complex arrangement of donors, grantors and investors, which takes an enormous amount of time and energy. Second, and equally importantly, you effectively channel donations and grant funds to investors in a blended finance approach. Now, you are doing to achieve impact, but nonetheless, the investor is the party that is capturing the value of contributions and grants. We believe we can and should do better for our donors and contributors.

Instead of using donations and grants, not to make up the difference between what investors want and what a project can produce, but to change the project such that it can attract different investors—investors who are willing to offer much lower interest rates for their capital? This would



In 2024, the American Forest Foundation planted its first cohort of trees for Fields and Forest in Georgia. This was made possible by a combination of federal and private philanthropy, as well as advanced market commitments through the voluntary carbon market.

allow donors and grantmakers to support projects and attract capital from the private sector, while keeping a larger share of those funds in the project itself; paying landowner incentives, or assisting with management plans, or providing ongoing support to enrolled landowners on their forest management journey.

As mentioned earlier, FFCP and other carbon projects that engage small landowners are breaking new ground by aggregating landowners, a process that poses risks for investors. What if enrollment falls short? What if the costs of enrollment are higher than expected? To mitigate this risk, FFCP focuses donor and grant funds on outreach to landowners, providing technical assistance, enrolling them in the program, installing the appropriate monitoring, reporting and verification infrastructure, and offering initial incentives.

With the landowners enrolled and the project fully operational, we can approach lenders and investors with a significantly less risky proposition. This allows us to engage a different type of investor, one with a lower risk tolerance willing to provide much lower-cost capital. We can borrow from these lenders to fund the project over its 20 to 30 year life cycle. As our projects grow,

we will eventually be able to borrow against future credit sales to cover an increasing share of landowner enrollment costs.

This is not theoretical. This fall and winter we will engage with buyers who will effectively lend FFCP money at very reasonable rates, in exchange for some of the credits FFCP landowners will produce. This is made possible by the more than 100,000 acres we've already enrolled in the program, which can reliably deliver future credits.

By using donor and grant funds in this way, we maximize the amount of funding that stays "on the ground," and we create a scalable model that can grow with the need. We provide the opportunity to our donors and grantors to catalyze the growth of programs like FFCP. However, none of it works without the commitment and contributions of donors like you, or through companies like Amazon or International Paper, or foundations like RK Mellon, or federal agencies like the US Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA).

FOR EVERY \$1,000 CONTRIBUTED TO FFCP:

- **Nearly \$7,000 of private investment in the program is catalyzed**
- **130 tonnes of CO2 will be kept out of the atmosphere—roughly the amount of CO2 emitted annually by 17 households in the U.S.**
- **Approximately six acres will be enrolled in long-term management projects that produce many other benefits besides carbon—improved wildlife habitat, increased water quality, and enhanced timber value, to name a few.**

Your contributions are helping us build a strong network of forest landowners committed to long-term forest management. This approach will yield more and higher quality wood products for our growing society, sequester and store more carbon dioxide, enhance wildlife habitats, and increase the value of the land for future generations. 🌲

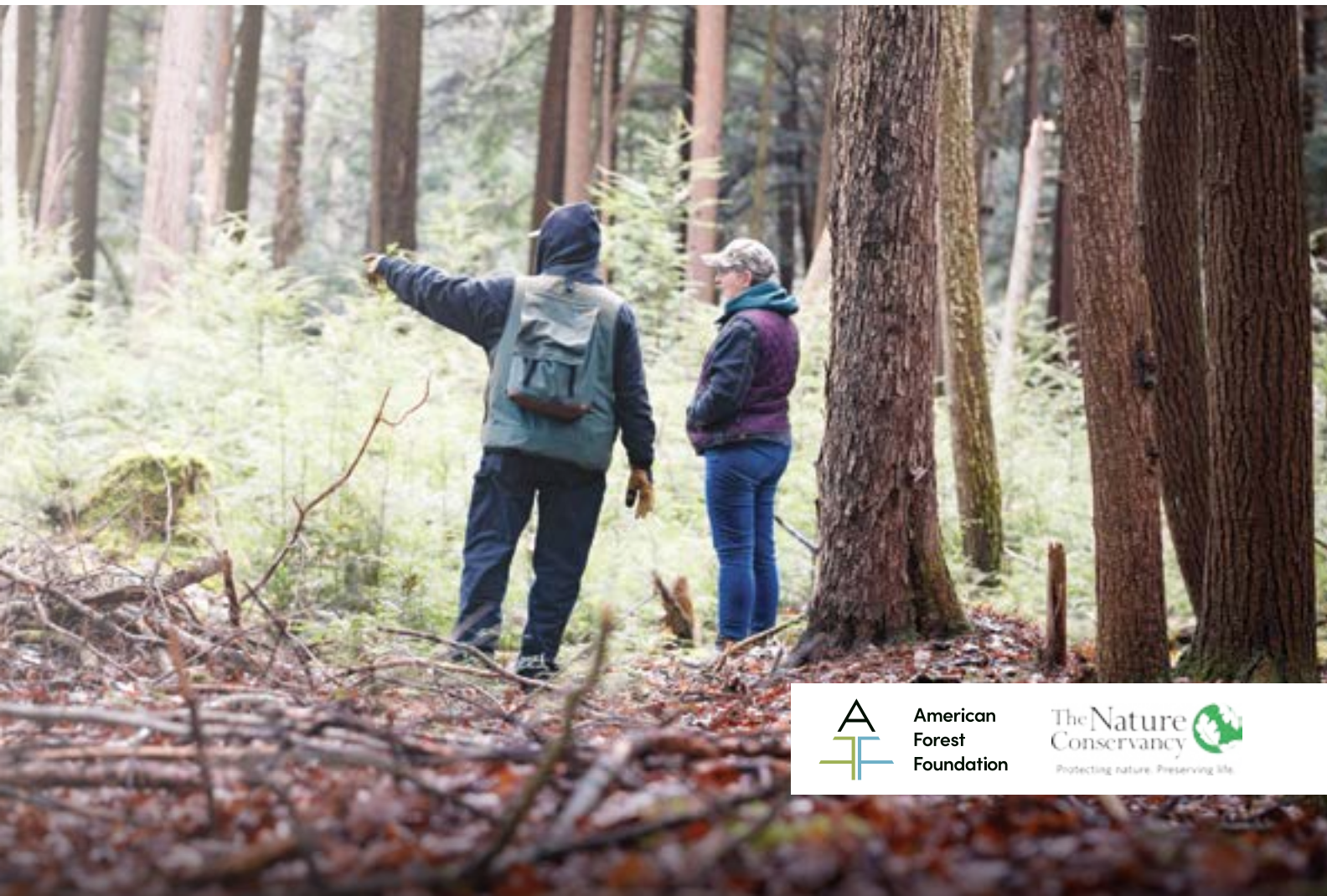
The Family Forest Carbon Program helps landowners **care for their woods while helping the planet.**

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



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Protecting nature. Preserving life.

IMPACT FEATURE

New York Climate Week in Review

BY NATHAN TRUITT, LYNN RILEY, EMA JOHNSON AND CALVIN TRAN
AFF CLIMATE FUNDING TEAM

New York Climate Week (NYCW) is an annual event that brings together leaders from around the world to discuss climate action and showcase climate solutions. The event takes place in New York City in September. The Climate Group hosts it in partnership with the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations, and the City of New York. This year, The American Forest Foundation had a cohort of 10 staff members in attendance, representing a variety of expertise. AFF staff across Climate Funding, Science, Policy and Communications teams were present, alongside our CEO Rita Hite to represent the work of the Family Forest Carbon Program on stage for several panel discussions, amplifying AFF's mission to deliver meaningful conservation impact through the empowerment of family forest owners. Where we were a smaller voice in rooms just a year ago, we found ourselves in the center of larger rooms this year, with more people aware of AFF than in the past—a testament to AFF's efforts leading the voluntary carbon market (VCM) toward higher scientific integrity and inclusion for more landowners. We are pleased to share our experiences with you.

Lynn Riley, Lead Scientist

- **Dynamic baselines are becoming more widely adopted and preferential.** This is a positive advance, given the enhanced scientific integrity offered by dynamic baselines. Not only that, but a reminder that dynamic baselines are an incredible tool not only for demonstrating additionality, but also for continuous improvement. When we create new carbon capture practices using previous models, but don't compare the results to a matched, non-predictive dynamic baseline, we rob ourselves of learning which practices make the most significant impact and tweak our work accordingly.



■ **The science shows us that we need both CO2 removal and emission reductions.**

However, due to the current claims guidance, the value proposition for reductions isn't clear enough to incentivize carbon credit buyers. We now see that "beyond value chain" mitigation can play a role here.

- **The risk of inaction far outweighs the risk of action.** We must take bold steps to build market trust, whether it's developing a project with a dynamic baseline knowing that reflects real-time, socio-economic system dynamics despite inherent risks; advancing climate and biodiversity science that we know to be true even if markets don't fully recognize its value yet; or making a difficult decision as a policy-maker or market leader to prioritize integrity (social and environmental).

Nathan Truitt, Executive Vice President of Climate Funding

■ **We all win together, or we all lose together.**

This year, NYCW facilitated more collaborative conversations between different parts of the climate community. There was more dialogue than ever about how every climate solution or policy is just one piece of the puzzle, and needs to be part of a broader solution. To guide these collaborative discussions into the future, two key points should be considered:

- **Critique other climate solutions as you want your climate solution to be critiqued.** This doesn't mean people shouldn't offer constructive criticism of what others in the space are working on. Such criticism is vital in helping us learn quickly and innovate at the pace required. This means they should do so only to the extent that they also welcome feedback and collaboration.



"It has been crucial for AFF to participate in Climate Week, to build awareness of the Family Forest Carbon Program among the private sector."

- Demand change from other organizations and sectors only to the extent that your organization and sector are willing to change.** We must stop viewing climate change as something "they" are doing. To keep us to 1.5 degrees (or even close), EVERY organization and sector will have to change how it does business substantially. Not just fossil fuels, not just policymakers, not just companies—but non profits, carbon project developers, media outlets—everyone involved in the sector.

Calvin Tran, Manager of Environmental Markets

- An evolving recognition of risk.** Buyers and investors today are more sophisticated in their analysis of carbon projects and their risks, responding in earnest by conducting deeper due diligence into projects. Included in these risks are pricing risk, reputational risk, delivery risk, and policy risk, among others. With more knowledge of the current landscape of carbon credit offerings, the developing landscape of VCM policies, and more tools to conduct pricing and carbon analyses, buyers are taking a more nuanced approach to the carbon credits they purchase and invest in.
- We're transitioning to "VCM 2.0."** Throughout New York, we've heard this phrase being referred to as building the "next generation" of the VCM. This includes the next generation of carbon credit supply and carbon credit demand. Collaborative efforts are underway across bodies like the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM) and the Voluntary Carbon Markets Integrity Initiative

(VCM) to develop guidance on both the supply and demand sides, and the effort involves deep thought leadership from organizations like AFF to produce a consensus for the appropriate uses of carbon credits. Collaborative bodies like the Science-Based Targets initiative (SBTi) and Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHGP) are collecting industry feedback to develop this guidance, and the industry is urgently demanding clarity, or we risk losing precious time debating challenges instead of implementing solutions.

- Tomorrow's climate funding is needed today.** Buyers and investors are realizing that financing climate solutions in a low-integrity manner leads to low-integrity outcomes. In this vein, they recognize that producing high-integrity outcomes requires more time and upfront investment. Throughout Climate Week, AFF staff participated in roundtables and workshop discussions with corporations, foundations, and governmental representatives to brainstorm innovative ways and means to obtain funding earlier in the project development cycle, providing project developers with the upfront resources needed to produce higher-integrity outcomes and carbon credits.
- Local leadership needed to address the risk of policy uncertainty for the VCM.** As political power shifts, more localized leadership is required to step up and ensure continuity in the progress and development of the VCM. This leadership role isn't gatekept to just national political leaders—to be a truly robust and interconnected market, the VCM needs leaders in business, capital providers, science, academia, standards setters, and project developers. AFF is positioning itself a leader to ensure the VCM functions well in the United States, and that the VCM rules are inclusive toward family forest owners' participation and benefit. 🌲

AFF's Field Tour with Landowners in Pennsylvania

At the end of October, our American Forest Foundation team and The Nature Conservancy partners, had the privilege of gathering with many of our other partners across the public and private sectors in Pennsylvania, where we originally piloted the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP). This was a tremendous opportunity to discuss the future of the program, the real-world impacts of the voluntary carbon markets on landowners, communities and our planet. The highlight for the group was touring a couple of FFCP-enrolled properties alongside those forest owners and learning their motivations for enrolling in the program, their journey to enrollment and goals for their properties. **We are so grateful for national and regional partners who gathered together with us and to all of the stakeholders who continue to roll up their sleeves and join us in fully unlocking the potential of family forests.**



If you are a landowner who is enrolled in FFCP and would like to host a future partner gathering like this, or you are a philanthropic partner who is interested in taking part in a future event, please email **Nate Meehan from our Climate Funding Team at nmeehan@forestfoundation.org**.



Small Landowners Equal Big Impact:

What's Behind 100,000 Acres and Counting

BY BETH RILEY, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY,
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

In 2024, the American Forest Foundation (AFF), in partnership with the Nature Conservancy (TNC), expanded the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP) to a record 19 states across the eastern U.S. Additionally, we launched a new afforestation initiative, Fields and Forests, with the support of donors and volunteers like never before. We hit a milestone in October with 100,000 acres enrolled in FFCP. While this not seem like a huge achievement with large landowners, it represents nearly 750 small landowners banding together to help us reach this landmark.

David Funk was Ohio's first landowner to enroll in FFCP when it opened earlier this year. He said, "Our family's participation in FFCP is a formal recognition that Southeastern Ohio's woods are to be treasured."

84% of Ohio's forests are privately owned, and nearly half are owned in parcels of 50 acres or less, making family forest owners a critical partner in stewarding the long-term health and wellbeing of the state's natural resources. FFCP's expansion into Ohio has expanded access to improved forest management practices on 1.8 million acres of eligible land.

"Ohio's family landowners play a crucial role in caring for the health and resilience of the majority of the state's forests," said Ian Forte, Senior Forestry Manager for the Family Forest Carbon Program

at AFF. "But the high costs and technical know-how needed for sustainable forest management practices often stop these landowners from implementing them. The expansion of FFCP into the state helps put the power of conservation into the hands of these family forest owners."

FFCP issues annual payments to help landowners implement forest management practices that are scientifically proven to improve forest health, provide additional financial and ecological benefits for rural communities, and enhance carbon capture and storage. The program also includes access to professional foresters who help landowners write a forest management plan tailored to their specific property.

"It is inspiring that through this program we are bringing the next generation, and even the grandchildren, into the process around woodland conservation, the link between healthy forests and the climate, and their role," David Funk, said proudly.

Forest carbon projects like FFCP help landowners diversify their revenue streams from their property and increase the long-term value of their forest and forest products. Without access to every conservation solution available, Ohio's forests and the industries that rely on them face a steady decline that will affect communities and wildlife alike.



The Funk Family met with Tristan Kinnison, an AFF Forester, and TNC staff on their forest in Ohio during their enrollment process.

“So many woodland owners just want to do what’s right,” said Tom Rooney, Sustainable Forestry Director at The Nature Conservancy in Ohio. “This program is designed to provide the funding and technical expertise to help keep their forests healthy for years to come.”

Landowners in Georgia who were not previously family forest owners shared a similar interest in preserving a family legacy. Alisha Logue, a school teacher in busy Atlanta Georgia, wants to maintain her family’s rural property by planting trees and maintaining the property for her children and grandchildren. At the same time, her older relatives can continue living on the previously farmed property. For Logue, it’s about her family’s legacy, “I want something to pass down to my grandbabies.”

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.

“I enrolled in this program because 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.”

Fields and Forest works 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 Fields and 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.

Building trust was essential to introducing landowners like Cliett and Rabun to forestry. “I think many people were skeptical of this program because when something seems too good to be true, they don’t believe it,” said Rabun. “But this program is real. As more people like me enroll and benefit from it, others will see that it’s genuine,” said Rabun.

Tim Stout, a family forest owner in Vermont, says being part of FFCP has reshaped how he thinks about his forest. Passed down from his great-grandmother, Jockey Hill Farm has long been an important and beloved part of his family and their legacy. Now he sees his forest as a tool to help mitigate climate change and himself as a crucial partner in the global fight to protect nature and the planet.

He said, "When I became a grandfather to Abe and Faye, I began looking into what we could do with this land to protect it for future generations and adapt to the effects of climate change we were seeing all around us. Recurring droughts, heavy rainfalls and erosion had all damaged my woodlands. Also changing weather patterns brought in new species, causing diseases and infestations that drove native species out."

This led him to FFCP, where he gained technical and financial resources needed, as well as annual payments to help cover the ongoing ownership costs. Tim is active in many landowner groups and Tree Farm, like many in the incredible volunteer network AFF has and now serves as a member of AFF's Board of Trustees. Today, tree planting, regeneration, and the removal of invasive plants all play an integral role in protecting his forest, which enhances the forest's ability to sequester and store carbon.

He says, "There are many other landowners like me. I can tell people with pride that I participate in FFCP along with 700 other family forest owners nationwide. Our combined 100,000+ acres are expected to sequester more than 2 million tonnes of carbon over the next 20 years. My carbon sink is small but even my small forest in Burlington, Vermont is an important piece of a larger puzzle. FFCP landowners from the woodlands of the Northeast to the pasturelands of Georgia are making an impact. Together, every tree we nurture makes a difference for climate change."

Tim along with David Funk, Mitch Cliett, Alicia Logue, and so many other of our engaged landowners don't stop there. They all see themselves now as actively stewarding piece of the puzzle. Tim has a challenge for us all, though.

"While I am proud to be among the more than 700 landowners who first enrolled in FFCP, that is only the first step. There are 21 million acres of family and individually owned forests across the U.S. to activate in this—they just need avenues to do so," he said.

"AFF has already done work to bridge this gap. Historically, forest carbon programs were only tenable for the most prominent landowners with more than 5,000 acres. Now, landowners with just 30 acres or more of forest or open land can enroll in the FFCP, and benefit from the same technical and financial resources I received."



Tim Stout, one of the first landowners to enroll in the Northeast, has been a vocal advocate for the FFCP, and has recently joined AFF's Board of Directors



Fields and Forests provides legacy planning tools to landowners new to forest ownership. In Georgia, this means landowners like Alicia, a schoolteacher in a metropolitan area, can maintain her family's land while providing opportunities for the next generation.

We need more opportunities like FFCP to enable more landowners to protect their forests. "This will require increased government and private investment to fund more foresters like the ones who guided me, additional payments to support active forest management, and expanded outreach and practice development. In this way we can offer landowners from all walks of life the resources they need.

Most landowners truly love their trees and are proud stewards of their land. Like me, they look at their forests and see the aesthetic benefits, wildlife habitat, clean air and water, wood products and other attributes. Now, through programs like FFCP, they can look at their forests and recognize they are pioneers in generating another value: sequestering carbon from the atmosphere.

Decades from now, I hope Jockey Hill Farm is a resilient forest that my family continues to enjoy. I hope it is one of millions of thriving forests across the country. Landowners like me are ready to do our part. We need policymakers and companies to join us in this fight." 🌲

A Walk in the Woods

Family Forest Owner Perspectives

BY TOM GRESHAM

Tim and Krystal Paulson

Tim and Krystal Paulson own 88 acres of forest in southeastern South Dakota. Most Tree Farms in the state are located in the Black Hills and comprise pine and spruce, while the Paulsons live in a region populated with row crop land and few forests—and they grow hardwoods.

The 88 acres are the last of the original Paulson homestead settled in 1881. Tim, Krystal and their children live on the property, just as generations before them did. Tim said his great-great-grandfather who first settled on the land was a carpenter from Denmark who understood the value of forestry, and the family planted the walnuts and oaks they knew from back home.

“There was already an established stand of timber here at that time, but they wanted it to be available for future generations, and that tradition has been passed down from generation to generation,” Tim said. “And the love of forestry and working with the wood and the timber also remains with us today. It’s a unique heritage to have that ongoing lineage of the land and the chance to take care of it, be stewards of it and continue to improve it for future generations. I can still see my work as a teenager here.”

Tim’s parents joined the American Tree Farm System in the early 1980s, and the family has followed a forest stewardship management plan ever since. Eldean, Tim’s father, was South Dakota Tree Farmer of the Year in 1985. Tim has overseen the land management since his father died in the 1990s.

“Although the Tree Farm doesn’t bring in enough revenue to cover expenses, we continue to invest and work the land because we see the value of maintaining and improving it for future generations,” Tim said.



The Paulson homestead originated in 1881, and multiple generations continue to care for the property today.



The Paulsons’ 88-acres property is unusual in southeastern South Dakota, where hardwood forests are rare.

Tim said the rarity of Tree Farms in the area frequently leads to confusion. “You say you have a Tree Farm, and people will say, ‘What’s that? Do you grow Christmas trees?’” he said. The farm’s relative uniqueness in the region can make it challenging to purchase and maintain equipment and to market their trees.

Tim said the family still spends much of its time on the land working and managing the trees, but there also are miles of trails—many named by the Paulsons’ children—perfect for hiking, hayrides, sledding and ATV rides.

The Paulsons' current focus is a six-year eastern red cedar thinning project. Tim said the eastern cedars have "taken over" about 25 acres so that "you can't even walk or see through them."

"We'd like to return the original balance found on our land," Tim said.

On a recent weekend, Tim's mother, Delight, who is almost 81, joined the family at work.

"There were three generations out there working together to bring in the firewood and get it ready," Krystal said. "It was just a special time."

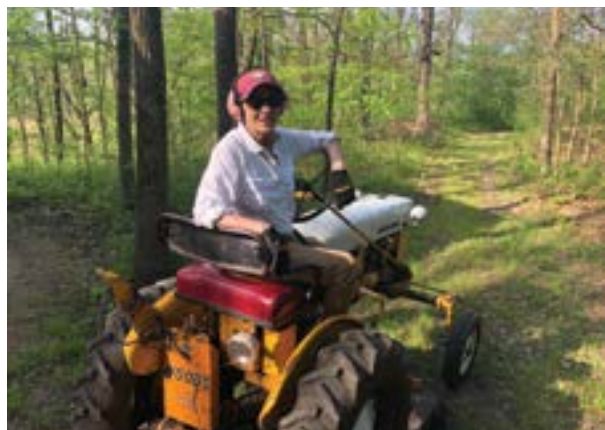
Krystal said one of the land's chief joys is its connection to previous generations.

"There's a real sense of tradition that you can recognize as you walk through the land," Krystal said. "You can imagine what life was like when they started. Tim said to me at one point, 'There are so many memories here.'"

Pence Revington

In 1970, Pence Revington's father purchased a mostly treeless 68-acre property near Lafayette, Indiana, with plans to transform it into a thriving tree farm. From the start, Revington worked with her father on the land, which required extensive cleanup, including clearing debris such as paint cans, refrigerators, auto parts, old fences, metal scraps, and chicken carcasses.

Revington said she and her father—"a Renaissance man," were close, and she was glad to join him on the adventure that he had embarked upon. When he died in 1978, Revington felt it was her calling to pick up where he had left off.



Pence Revington relies on a tractor and three chainsaws at her Tree Farm in Indiana. She said her father told her, "Treat your equipment like your best friend."

"I had no idea what I was getting into, but I took from him that perseverance, inspiration and patience the I needed," she said. "I knew that I couldn't walk away from it."

Over the decades of working on Mootscreek Farm, Revington has much to be proud of, including the black walnut tree stands her family planted.

"I have 12 different stands, and they are thriving," she said. "There's still work to be done. I need to thin them, I see some really nice walnuts there when I look at them. It feels great to be able to say that."

She is also proud of her work fighting an ongoing war "one battle at a time" against invasive species such as honeysuckle, seeing the results in the form of the saplings that have risen in the understory.

"You will make mistakes, and some of them will stick with you, and others will just be a marker of your effort," Revington said. "My name is still 'written' on many trees where I hit them with the tractor plate while I was learning to drive the tractor. That's just a reminder of me trying something."

She said forestry is "hopeful work, and the mindset has to be long range, one step at a time, or else you just quit and say, 'There's no way. It's ridiculous.'"

"I'm only one generation on that property, but I can see the difference that my 50 years have made," Revington said.

Revington said "personal connections have kept me going and sustained me" in her work on the land. These connections began with her father and now include her two daughters and some grandchildren and friends, including a neighbor she has known since childhood who helps with wildlife management. She also credits a range of forestry professionals who have shared their knowledge and advice.

Revington said she is inspired by others who are as "nerdy" as she is about forest stewardship.

"It's really good when people find something that makes them a little bit crazy," Revington said. "And this has done that for me."

Even today in her 70s, Revington said the hard work of tree farming is as satisfying as ever.

"After I put in maybe 10 hours in the field and it's sweaty and the saw won't start and there's a flat tire on the tractor, I'll come in and have a beer and throw some water over my head—I don't have electricity or running water there—and get all cleaned up, and then I go right back out again at 8 o'clock for the last hour of daylight, and go after it some more," Revington said. "The rewards might look small to others, but are huge to me. I walk around and celebrate them."

Dean Scherwinski

Dean Scherwinski manages a Tree Farm in northern Wisconsin that originally started as a family hunting spot. His father purchased the first 80-acre parcel in the mid-1980s for deer hunting with family. Over the next decade, the Scherwinskis acquired more land, and the property now spans 585 acres of northern hardwoods.

Since 1993, an LLC owned by Scherwinski and his brothers has held title to the land, which they actively manage for both trees and wildlife. Scherwinski noted that the land constantly evolves. "Depending on the wildlife status, the trees, and the weather, there's always a project to work on. It gives me purpose and I like that."

He added "I see the value of the trees and the property beyond the sportsman's aspect. It's a gorgeous piece of land ever evolving and changing. It's nice to be the current custodian and have something to take care of."

Located far enough north within Lake Superior's southern snowbelt, the property features a major snowmobile trail that runs through it for about a mile and a half, connecting the towns of Mercer and Butternut.

"The property is remote and beautiful," Scherwinski said, adding that one could walk 15 to 20 miles north without encountering a town or county road. "It's a great place just to go and escape from everything."

Over the years, various challenges have emerged.

"The sportsman activities have deteriorated over the years, like many of Wisconsin's northern counties, and this is directly related to the status of the forest," Scherwinski said. "Acts of God like fire or wind are also concerning as you never know when these things might happen."

A particularly striking event occurred in 2010 when a wind shear decimated trees on about one fifth of the property. Fortunately, a logging project was set to begin within weeks allowing resources to be quickly mobilized to harvest the downed wood and clean up the area. "The result was that we had to start from scratch managing the hardest-hit area, and we also needed to readjust the management plan and cutting schedule for many other parts of the property," Scherwinski said.

The property has been a registered Tree Farm since the late 1990s, and recently joined the Family Forest Carbon Program, a collaboration between the American Forest Foundation and the Nature



Dean Scherwinski moves a deer hunting blind using a backhoe with the forest behind him in full summer green.

Conservancy that allows landowners to contribute to carbon sequestration while receiving financial support and expert guidance. Additionally the land is part of Wisconsin's Managed Forest Law program, which incentivizes private landowners to practice sustainable forestry and also is a USDA registered farm.

"You can still actively manage a forest, have forest plans that include cutting, and be part of carbon programs that are designed for the future," Scherwinski said. "It's an important balancing act within the ecosystem. It's about optimizing opportunities and keeping the forest moving forward."

Scherwinski understands that effective land management requires readiness for any challenges and openness to opportunities.

"This property has been here for hundreds of thousands of years, and it will remain long after I'm gone," he said. "I'm just a speck in time as the property moves through it, and as the current custodian I want to do the best I can for it."

Barbara Volk

Barbara Volk has lived on a 200-acre parcel of land in Lewis County in north central West Virginia for over 20 years, but she admired it for years before that. She lived in the area and used to drive past the property routinely.

"I would drive down the road past it and say to myself, 'That's really where I want to live,'" Volk said.

The two decades since that fantasy became a reality have been "far beyond what I even dreamed of," she said.

Volk said she bought the property to protect it. Today, the land is 99% forested, and she favors a hands-off approach to land management.

"I'm just letting nature take its course," Volk said. "I am not forcing anything on this place. I'm just allowing nature to take over and heal in its own way."

Of particular interest and pride to her is the rich variety of wildlife that lives there. Volk said the property features black bears, coyotes, otters, hawks, a variety of weasels, foxes, lots of deer, bobcats, at least one rare red wolf and a mountain lion with a large territory that overlaps with her land, among many other creatures. She hopes to introduce beavers, too.

"It is a great wildlife habitat," Volk said. "I've got so much wildlife here that it's amazing."

Volk said bears frequently pass near her house and two horses, but they never pause to bother anyone.

"I feel like I'm just a part of their lives, that we all just live here together, and I love it so much," she added.

In addition, Volk is an herbalist with over 45 years of experience working with herbal medicine. She is passionate about helping people understand the benefits of readily available plants, including various weeds. Volk occasionally hosts people at her property



Common milkweed attracts a variety of pollinators. How many can you count?



Left: Chantrelles and black trumpets are two varieties mushrooms growing in Barbara Volk's woods.

Right: Elder flower and rose petal champagne in the making. Barbara is an herbalist who says that many flowers have natural yeast and can be used to make bubbly champagne and wine.

to teach them to identify various weeds they can harvest for food and medicine.

Volk has favorite trees that she visited over the years, including a hollow poplar tree she could step inside of. A derecho in 2020 knocked it down. "I miss that tree," she said. "I spent a lot of time there and my daughter used to camp there when she was little."

Volk's two horses—she has had as many as six at a time—have about 20 acres to roam enjoying land that is both woods and pasture and features a creek.

Volk said she revels in the feeling of just passing through her surroundings—of inhabiting it alongside its myriad plants and animals rather than imposing her will on them.

"I just feel like I'm part of it," Volk said. "I don't feel like I'm this separate entity that uses it." 🌲



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 proactive about protecting, maintaining, and improving the quality of American forests," said Janis Buffham, a founding member of The Giving Tree and a conservation and climate enthusiast who discovered 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 contributions have, particularly supporting AFF's innovations. Janis expresses confidence in how AFF manages its funds. "AFF is being responsible with their money," she says. "So I feel good about that... and I'm learning more about their amazing efforts 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 become a part of a dedicated group working to overcome our most pressing conservation challenges. Members of the Giving Tree are critical in creating a steady, reliable source of funds that enables us to undertake the most crucial parts of our mission.

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

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

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Robert Bousquet	David Hofer	Will Martin	Nathan Truitt
Marcus Bradley	David Hughes	David Mazariegos	Anonymous
Janis Buffham	Lacy Hunt	Vincent Nadalie	Anonymous
Scott Deitz	Matt Jagnow	Patrick O'Reilly	Anonymous
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If you have any questions, please contact Bethany Mueller, Senior Manager, Climate Donor Relations, at (202) 852-7520.

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

Seedling Society Spotlight

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



Scott and Marge Hayes

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

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

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

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

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

We’d love to hear from you!

If you want to discuss your giving options, please call or email **Daniel Leathers at (202) 765-3710 or 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.



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