



Forest Service
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NATIONAL
ACTIVE FOREST
MANAGEMENT
STRATEGY







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Introduction

Established in 1905, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service manages 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of these public lands to meet the needs of present and future generations. As the agency enters a new era, it faces urgent challenges such as meeting domestic lumber demand, reducing wildfire risk, and revitalizing rural economies. To address these challenges, recent policy, including Executive Order 14225 (“Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production”), directs the Forest Service to expand timber production, streamline regulations, and modernize forest management to support national well-being.

The National Active Forest Management Strategy fulfills direction from Executive Order 14225, Secretarial Memo 1078-006, and the Forest Service Associate Chief’s letter on implementation of Secretarial Memo 1078-006. The strategy describes priority actions that the agency can take to support active forest management under four main subject areas: Capacity Building and Streamlining Implementation; Environmental Compliance; Shared Stewardship, Partnerships, Contracting, and Markets; and Salvage and Reforestation.



Strategic Goals



By focusing on priority actions that support active forest management, the Forest Service seeks to accomplish the following goals.

Support Rural Economies and the Forest Product Industry

Achieve land management goals and strengthen rural economies by increasing the annual timber volume offered by 25 percent over the fiscal year (FY) 2020 through FY 2024 average, with a goal of selling 4 billion board feet by FY 2028.

Reduce the Risk of Destructive Wildfire

Create and sustain healthy and resilient forests and watersheds by doing the right treatments in the right places and locations and ensuring the agency's fuels and timber programs coordinate efforts to accomplish priority work.

Build Capacity Through Workforce Alignment and Partnerships

Expand workforce skills; leverage partnerships with States, Tribes, and industry; and modernize systems for more efficient project delivery.

High-Level Strategic Actions



The following are high-level actions that the agency can take immediately to support active forest management.

Implement Forest Plans

Forest and regional timber programs will focus on implementing land management plans, including the timber volumes and acres identified therein. These plans have been developed through public involvement; in many cases, the agency is not implementing them as intended. Outdated plans or parts of plans will be revised or amended.

Use Long-Term Contracts

The Forest Service will provide a greater certainty for industry to make investments that support active forest management efforts by using long-term contracts. By placing an emphasis on long-term contracts, including 10+ year conventional timber contracts, Integrated Resource Service Contracts, Integrated Resource Timber Contracts, Good Neighbor Authority, and A to Z and G to Z contracts, the agency will facilitate a consistent and increasing supply of wood products.

Integrate Programs

The Forest Service will align and integrate the current forest management and fuels programs and associated funding to maximize efficiency and outcomes. Increased integration will lead to better outcomes on the landscape and promote effective fuels treatments while delivering timber volume.

Maximize Authorities

The agency will maximize use of all tools and authorities that have previously not been used to the extent possible, as well as implementing new tools that can be used to facilitate active forest management, including current and future emergency authorities.

Streamline Processes

From the Washington Office to the field, the agency will reduce burdensome requirements, including supplements, certifications, and any practices not in statute. Many of these practices have been phased in over time and are no longer needed to meet the agency's mission.

Provide Training

Due to workforce reshaping, the agency will increase the skills of employees in timber program delivery. Courses and refreshers will be updated and streamlined, including timber-related line officer training, to reflect new processes and expectations.

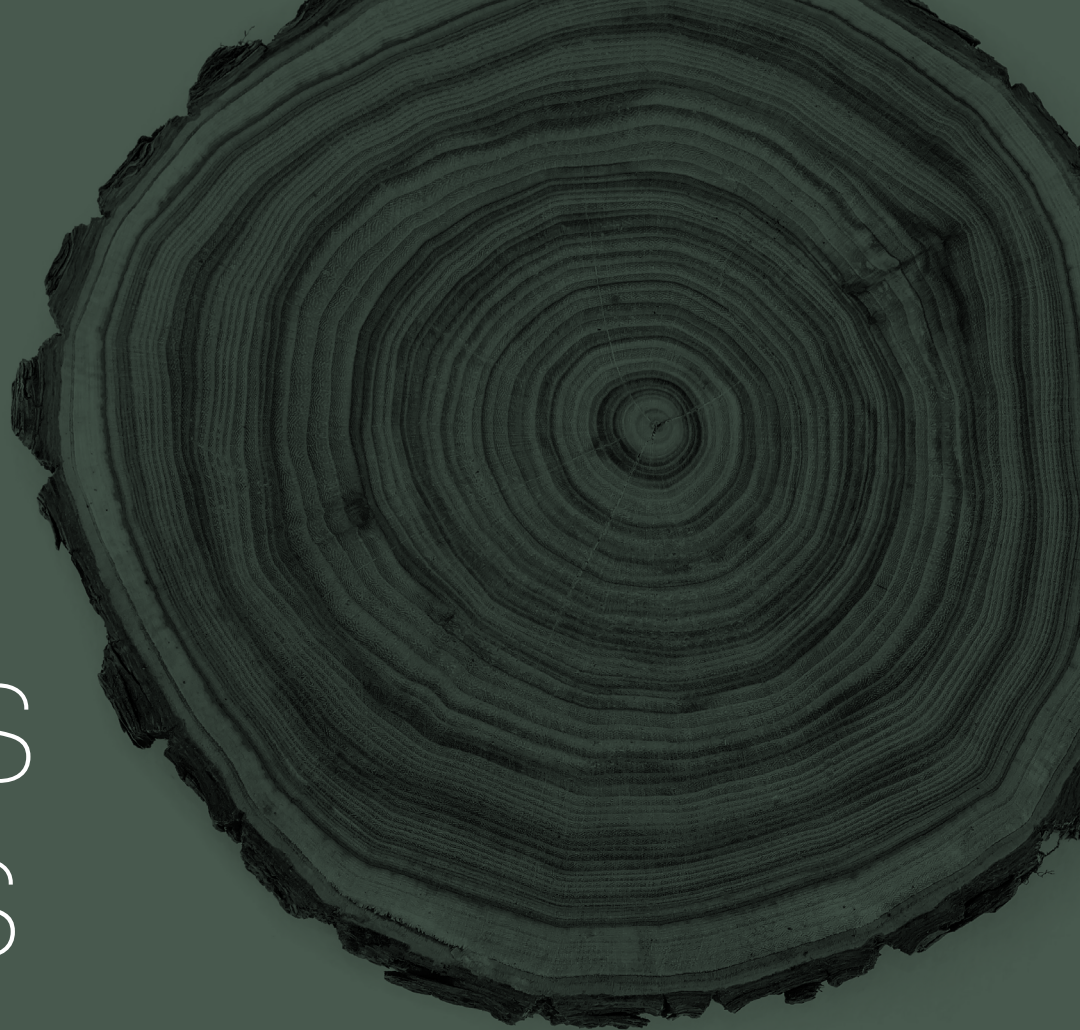
Ensure Leadership Alignment

All line officers will focus on increasing program delivery through understanding local markets, developing partnerships with industry, and prioritizing projects that provide for a reliable, consistent, and increased supply of timber. Regular meetings with line officers will track progress and provide feedback.

Increase Accountability

To ensure alignment, line officers will have increased accountability in performance plans. In addition, supervisors will incorporate timber production and management goals into performance plans for relevant staff.

Focus Areas



Loggers across the Nation, such as those pictured here in the Pacific Northwest, follow strict standards for protecting the environment when harvesting timber. USDA Forest Service photo by Preston Keres.

Focus Area 1

Capacity Building and Streamlining Implementation

Outdated processes, limited staff, and cumbersome certification processes create challenges for implementing active forest management.

Streamline training and certification requirements

Update and streamline certifications for silviculture, timber sale administration, cruising, and engineering roles. This includes the development of certification exemption processes for candidates with professional or educational experience (September 2025).

Make existing authorities more usable and standard

Provide desk guides and updated handbooks on existing authorities, such as Designation by Prescription, Designation by Description, Virtual Boundaries, and wood product appraisal processes (September 2025).

Adopt new technologies

Monitor studies on the use of unmanned aircraft, artificial intelligence, and digital tools for timber sale preparation, monitoring, and boundary management. Guide the agency on employing these tools broadly (ongoing).

Effectively use funding

Develop timber receipts guidance to increase the efficiency and utilization of timber receipts (September 2025).

Increase operating periods for implementation

Simplify mitigation measures to provide for the longest possible operating periods for partners (September 2025).

New technologies and innovative tools are helping build efficiency and capacity in the workforce. USDA Forest Service photo by Preston Keres.



Focus Area 2

Environmental Compliance

Various statutes require environmental compliance to authorize forest management activities; however, there are opportunities to streamline compliance actions.

Streamline regulatory processes

Create a schedule and complete programmatic agreements and emergency authorizations to expedite National Historic Preservation Act, Endangered Species Act, and Clean Water Act reviews (September 2026). Reduce survey and consultation burdens and explore options to complete compliance requirements without consultation with other State and Federal agencies (September 2025).

Remove barriers

Change or eliminate restrictive policies and regulations. Conduct a nationwide analysis of land management plans to identify and remove obstacles to timber harvest (March 2026).

Accelerate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews

Mandate use of categorical exclusions and emergency authorities, including the Fuels and Forest Health Emergency Situation Determination recently established by the Secretary of Agriculture (ongoing).

Eliminate scope expansion

Focus the scope of project activities on active management and do not include unrelated actions in the project area (ongoing).

Peeper scope view of red-cockaded woodpecker nestlings on the Angelina National Forest. USDA Forest Service photo by Hannah Dunagan.



Focus Area 3

Shared Stewardship, Partnerships, Contracting, and Markets

Shared stewardship, partnerships, contracting, and markets are critical to successfully meeting the agency's goals of increasing active management to improve forest health and reduce threats of wildfire, insects, and disease.

Strengthen partnerships

Create a national team focused on expanding the use of shared stewardship, partner agreements, and Good Neighbor Authority to increase the capacity of States, Tribes, and partners as well as to better respond to their needs. Develop a uniform, streamlined approach to all aspects of agreement implementation. Solicit feedback from partners in this effort to reform processes (August 2025).

Implement Good Neighbor Authority modifications

Allow States, Tribes, and counties to assist in project implementation and retain revenue. Issue a solicitation for Good Neighbor Authority projects to fund maintenance and reconstruction of roads and bridges and award funds in FY 2025 (ongoing).

Support markets and facilities

Develop long-term supply assurances such as 10+ year contracts and agreements, sustained yield units, and A to Z contracts. Invest in wood products innovation to maintain existing processing facilities and attract new processing facilities to ensure stable demand for timber, including lower value biomass (ongoing). Establish regional teams to assess the needs of facilities within 250 miles of national forests to inform the development of programs at nearby forests (September 2025).

Menominee Tribal Enterprises has used the Wood Products Infrastructure Assistance program to improve manufacturing efficiencies at their Tribally managed sawmill. Investments like these have enabled Wisconsin's Tribal communities to remain competitive in the solid sawn lumber market and ensure healthy forests through active forest management. USDA Forest Service photo by Preston Keres.



Focus Area 4

Salvage and Reforestation

To accelerate the pace and scale of post-wildfire recovery and reestablish healthy and resilient forests, the agency must plan and execute salvage and reforestation projects as disturbances happen.

Provide for large-scale salvage

Develop and complete an agencywide programmatic effort to authorize site-specific salvage harvest, hazard tree removal, and reforestation actions (September 2026).

Mobilize quickly on salvage

Deploy salvage incident support teams as needed during incidents (summer 2025).

Modernize processes

Create and share geospatial tools to quickly identify areas available for salvage, hazard tree, and reforestation work (September 2026).

Build capacity

Form a team to assist in planning for all salvage efforts (July 2025).

USDA Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz visits the Alaska Peak Timber Sale on the Tahoe National Forest in May 2025. USDA Forest Service photo by Preston Keres.



Next Steps

Using the framework provided by this strategy, regional offices will work with the Washington Office to develop tailored strategies to meet their specific timber goals. The actions identified in this national strategy will provide tools and efficiencies to help field units and regions achieve their program goals.

A working implementation guide, tiered to this document, will provide additional details for Forest Service practitioners. The actions described in this strategy will be further defined, with detailed information on implementation guidance, status updates, and policy changes.



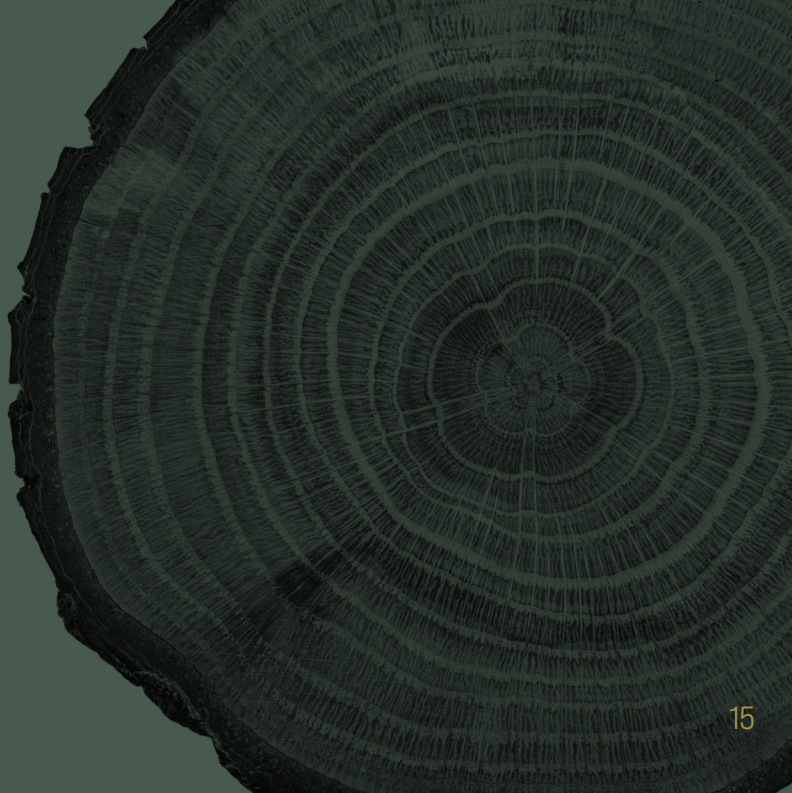
Timber operations take place on the South Park Ranger District on Pike and San Isabel National Forests and Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands in April 2025. USDA Forest Service photo by Preston Keres.



After wildfire consumed large swaths of Washington's Colville National Forest in 2015, foresters planted species including ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and western larch in the Stickpin Fire burn scar to ensure the forest becomes resilient and genetically diverse while still meeting commercial and environmental demands. In May 2019, the Forest Service planted more than 77,000 trees across 380 acres in this area. USDA Forest Service photo by Joseph M. de Leon.

Conclusion

The National Active Forest Management Strategy responds directly to new Federal directives and the urgent need for domestic timber, wildfire risk reduction, and rural economic revitalization as identified in Executive Order 14225. By modernizing processes, building capacity, streamlining compliance, and strengthening partnerships, the agency aims to deliver greater value to the public, protect natural resources, and ensure America's forests remain resilient and productive for present and future generations.





Sustainably harvesting timber to make wood products is good for local economies and forest health. The Forest Service is fostering new markets for wood products through its Wood Innovations Program while also working with local partners through the Forest Legacy Program to conserve private forest lands and ensure that working forests remain intact. The Fontaine Mill in Stratton, ME, manufactures a broad range of wood products. Their systems can utilize low-grade wood fiber and provide markets for loggers for their timber while supporting forest management. USDA Forest Service photo by Preston Keres.



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