



Solutions for America's National Forests: Reforestation

America's forests are a critical part of our daily lives, providing clean drinking water, supporting jobs and the economy, naturally capturing carbon from the atmosphere, and supporting our outdoor heritage. Our forests, though, are facing new challenges that we need to address. We have a responsibility to ensure our forests continue to provide these benefits for our children and grandchildren.

Reforestation needs to be at the center of efforts to revitalize America's forests. Specifically, Congress should focus on strategies that:

- Dramatically increase the pace and scale of ecologically appropriate climate-informed reforestation of national forests;
- Enhance the capacity of the U.S. Forest Service to eliminate the huge reforestation backlog;
- Strengthen forest resilience to climate change while enhancing carbon sequestration and storage; and,
- Optimize existing reforestation efforts to enhance ecosystem function, resilience, and benefits such as drinking water supplies.

Quick Facts

- Up to 7 million acres of our national forests are in need of reforestation, with over 1.3 million in need of immediate attention.
- The recent increase in severe forest fires has significantly increased the acres of national forests in need of reforestation.
- Reforesting national forests will yield significant climate mitigation benefits by sequestering carbon in growing trees. In fact, if reforested, our national forests could sequester the equivalent greenhouse gas emissions of 160,000 to 260,000 cars per year.
- National forests are the single most important source of water in the United States. They provide water to 66 million people in 3,400 communities, including cities.
- Reforesting streambanks reduces erosion, improves water quality, enhances habitat, and expands recreational opportunities.
- Reforestation can increase the carbon stored in soils.



CASE STUDY: Reforesting Minnesota for Climate

Thanks to climate change, the forests of northern Minnesota are undergoing a broad transition from boreal to temperate ecosystems. As part of its Plant a Billion Trees initiative, The Nature Conservancy is partnering with American Forests and others to plant 600,000 trees in northeastern Minnesota, including in Superior National Forest. By planting mixtures of boreal conifers and more warmth-tolerant hardwoods, this reforestation effort will help increase species diversity, protect wildlife habitat, and foster resilient, functioning forests in a warming climate.



Mixed conifer/hardwood forest, Minnesota.
Photo: Christian Dalbec

Recommendations

While it is federal policy that our national forests should be reforested after severe wildfires and other catastrophic events, the US Forest Service has been unable to meet this goal for decades. To address this, Congress needs to ensure the US Forest Service has the tools and resources to address existing and future reforestation needs and ensure reforestation efforts are climate-informed and ecologically appropriate. To do so, policymakers should:

- Increase mandatory funding for reforestation of national forests by eliminating the cap on the Reforestation Trust Fund.
- Establish and fund a sister program to DOI's Burned Area Rehabilitation (BAR) program for the USFS for post-fire rehabilitation, that is complementary to the Forest Service Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) program.
- Ensure existing reforestation and restoration programs align with best practices for climate adaptation.
- Increase the capacity of USDA climate hubs and other research units for delivering climate-related science to forest professionals.



Great horned owl chicks, Pennsylvania.
Photo: Pamela Dimeler



Pacific Fisher, California. Photo:
USFWS Pacific Southwest Region



Brown bear, Tongass National Forest, Alaska.
Photo: Larry Imhoff