

2017 VERMONT FOREST ACTION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR) has the statutory authority to assess the state's forest resources and guide the department in fulfilling program responsibilities. In addition, each state is required to complete a state assessment and develop resource strategies to receive funds from the USDA Forest Service under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act (CFAA). The Vermont Division of Forests (Division) currently receives approximately 20% of its funding through the CFAA for Forest Stewardship, Urban and Community Forestry, Forest Legacy Administration, Fire Assistance, and Forest Health Monitoring.

On June 17, 2010, FPR submitted "The 2010 Vermont Forest Resources Plan - State Assessment and Resource Strategies" to the USDA Forest Service. The 2010 Plan laid out future actions in the areas of biological diversity; forest health and productivity; forest products and ecosystem services; land ethics; and legal, institutional, and economic framework. The 2017 Forest Action Plan (2017 Plan) builds upon these fundamental elements.

The 2017 Vermont Forest Action Plan is a proactive, comprehensive, and balanced approach to the management of Vermont's forests. It provides an assessment of conditions and trends of the forest resources in the state, discusses threats, and identifies priority areas on which to focus resources. Finally, the 2017 Plan identifies long-term strategies for assuring that our forests are healthy and providing ecological services while meeting the economic needs of the citizens of Vermont. For each strategy, the role of the Division and our various stakeholders is identified, as well as financial resources needed. The strategies will be the basis of concrete actions later identified in annual work plans and federal grant narratives. As with previous Forest Resources Plans, the 2017 Forest Action Plan relies upon partnerships that are critical if we are to meet our vision for the future.

The sustainability of Vermont's forests depends upon keeping forests forested. Decisions we make and actions we take today will influence our forests for years to come. Livable communities, functioning natural systems, and our quality of life depend on healthy, sustainable forests. We must accept and embrace responsibility as stewards of this valuable resource.

As emphasized in the 2010 Plan, the overarching goal of the 2017 Plan is to minimize the loss of forest cover to conversion to other uses. The following list addresses other emerging issues, threats, and new strategies needed to ensure sustainable forests in Vermont.

- We continue to place priority on maintaining highly functioning forest lands for their ecological values, habitat and wildlife connectivity, and adaptive capacity during climate change. Strategies include encouraging working with partners in assessments and enhancing ecosystem integrity.

- Non-native invasive plants threaten to impact native regeneration, particularly in uninvaded forests. Strategies that track the spread of these species, support partnerships, and encourage efforts across property lines will promote integrated management.
- Climate change threatens our native tree species and the many valuable goods and services they provide. Implementation of strategies outlined in our 2015 document “Creating and Maintaining Resilient Forests in Vermont- Adapting to Climate Change” will be key to maintaining forests that can adapt to changing environmental conditions and stressors.
- Urban canopy enhancements can provide a myriad of social, economic, and ecological benefits. Our staff continue to focus on communities that have less than average urban tree canopy, higher than average population, and high impervious surface area.
- The economic viability of Vermont’s working lands is challenged by changing land use, development pressure, and macroeconomic trends in the forest product economy. Maintaining focus and investment in Vermont’s working lands will grow forest businesses, improve our economy, and keep forests as forests.
- In Vermont, forest-based recreation has outpaced forest products in economic value. The demands on public land stretch staffing and raise resource concerns. Private lands represent an opportunity to provide forest-based recreation but will require support and guidance.
- Intergenerational transfer of forest land is a critical issue as Vermont’s population is aging. Working with partners, providing estate planning is a key strategy.
- Organizational capacity and workforce development continues to be a priority within the Forestry Division. Staff reductions and the loss of institutional memory due to retirements make it more difficult for remaining staff to perform their jobs. Better onboarding and mentoring of new employees, developing employee guides and written procedures, and working on better performance measures will address these concerns.

Other key priority landscapes and focus areas in the 2017 Plan are:

PRIORITY LANDSCAPES

- Forest Legacy Program
- Forest Land Eligible for Use Value Appraisal
- High Ecologically Functioning Forests
- Conserved Lands
- Forest Land Threatened by Non-Native Invasive Pests
- Wildland Urban Interface
- Lake Champlain Watershed
- Developed Lands
- Public Lands
- Landscape Zones: urban, rural residential, and rural

FOCUS AREAS

- Working Lands Economic Vitality
- Water Quality Protection
- Forest-Based Recreation
- Voluntary Harvesting Guidelines
- Non-Native Invasive Plants
- Climate Change
- Forest Fragmentation and Parcelization
- Forest Carbon
- Environmental Literacy
- Intergenerational Transfer of Forest Land
- Municipal Urban Forest Management
- Forestry Division Funding
- Supporting Partnerships
- Organizational Capacity and Workforce Development
- Policies, Rules, and Laws