

Forest Products Modernization

Need for Change

A strategic effort designed to better align our culture, policies, and procedures with current and future forest restoration needs, in order to increase the pace and scale of restoration, improve forest conditions, and improve efficiency of forest product delivery.

Background

There are an estimated 65 to 82 million acres of forest and grassland in need of restoration to lower fire risk and insect and disease impacts. Of the 65 to 82 million acres at risk, we estimate there are 51 million forested acres at risk from a combination of impacts from insects and disease, high to very high fire risk, and stress from climate change. We believe that in many situations, some vegetation management treatments can reduce these stresses. Restoration activities that include the use of fire, mechanical treatments, and timber harvest have treated on average just over two million acres per year. Having sustainable, healthy, resilient forests in the future depends on our ability to increase work on the ground today. We are striving to increase the pace and scale of our restoration activities by increasing the number of acres treated through mechanical treatments (timber harvest and other fuel treatments) and prescribed burning. The goal in 2018 is 3.5 million acres treated. Even at this increased rate, it would take 20 years to achieve restoration goals. As such, there remains a need to be strategic in the placement of restoration treatments.

In addition, our non-fire workforce is at its lowest capacity in years. The workforce supported with forest products funding was 38 percent larger in 1980 compared to 2016. That workforce included nearly 3.5 times more professional foresters than today. Improving forest product delivery efficiency is critical to getting more work done on the ground.

Forest Products Modernization is not a means to simply increase timber volume outputs but rather is a way to make forest product delivery a more efficient restoration tool.

Today's Challenge

Changing forest conditions—massive wildfires, changing climate, insect damage, disease, drought, and other forces—require a rethinking of our forest management practices, including our approach to timber production. Systems that have served us well in the past need to evolve to keep up with the best available science, changes in authorities, technology, markets, and stewardship ideals. At the same time we must continue to support rural and urban communities and economies in a way that leverages or increases our ability to improve forest conditions through treatment. New authorities, such as the 2014 Farm Bill and its authorization of stewardship contracting and Good

Neighbor Authority, provide more flexibility but currently are not fully used across the agency.

Many of the production processes and policies we now use in the Forest Service were put in place decades ago and are based, in large part, on the sale of high-value timber. Today's forest health treatment needs are often focused on lower-value timber and the condition of the land after treatment, where the long-term value of land treated and restored and the cost of treatment are often more than that derived from the sale of timber. Systems that were critical to safeguarding high-value forest products work against the development of a nimble, responsive system that increases acres treated and restores forest resilience. An approach that delivers quality products at an increased pace and scale and results in sustainable, healthy forests must be accountable and mindful of systems that work well, and it must be easy to understand and execute.

Goals

Forest Products Modernization is a work in progress. It is designed to align our practices, policies, and guidance to be more agile, nimble, and flexible to better meet current and future forest improvement goals. We want to improve forest conditions, meet forest restoration needs, create sustainable landscapes, and increase the amount of forest products coming from National Forest System lands.

To begin this process, a small core group of national-level leaders has been working with a guiding team of line officers, directors, and national staff representatives from all nine regions to create a vision and overview for FPM, and to design a system for implementation. Over the past several months, they have solicited input from the field to create an inventory of systems that are working well, not working well, or need improvement. The top needs have been prioritized by regional representatives (see below).

One of our first goals is to make progress on and spread several innovations and ideas that are working well around the country, and share what is being learned. Recognizing different needs of regions, we intend to create a shared, national approach to modernizing the delivery of forest products over the long-term. At the same time, we have been identifying actions that will make restoration harvest work easier and developing an aggressive schedule for implementation. By doing so we'll increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and be able to apply these actions more consistently and effectively across the agency.

To achieve these goals, we will strengthen existing and develop new relationships with scientists, industry, partners, environmental groups, tribes, other government agencies, and the communities we serve. Through these relationships, we will be better able to support jobs, rural economies, milling operations, and the development of new infrastructure, and treat more land/acres. The modernization and collaboration processes will better position the Forest Service to quickly and efficiently adapt to future forest restoration challenges.

Our work is consistent with our Strategic Plan principles, USDA Strategic Goals, and Forest Service priorities. Agency Priority 4 (improving the condition of forests and grasslands) strongly aligns with the Forest Products Modernization effort.

Actions

Forest Products Modernization is an overarching effort to examine how we can:

- **Update training for our employees.**
- **Examine and reform Forest Service policy.**
- **Improve efficiency through better use of technology.**
- **Change processes and systems to be more responsive and efficient.**
- **Change the way we do business to get more work done on the ground.**

We are examining how we can leverage updated or new training strategies, materials, and methods. We are identifying redundant processes, policies, rules, and regulations associated with our forest products delivery system. We are committed to highlighting and fully using advances in technology to get more work done on the ground. We are focusing on how we do business (our culture) and examining how we can improve efficiency by strengthening project design and implementation, integrating public engagement, incorporating innovation, enhancing internal and external communications, and working closely with our partners and agency staff to identify new ways to accomplish our mission.

We have identified and are implementing several activities, including:

- Distributing recently-purchased data recorders, lasers and tablets to field units and training staff in their use (improve efficiency through technology);
- Implementing the re-engineered National Cruise System to gain efficiencies in cruising (change our systems);
- Expanding use of Good Neighbor Authority across the nation (change the way we do business);
- Developing and implementing bar codes on log removal receipt tickets and load accountability, among others (reform policy);
- Developing clear communication about the importance of forest products delivery for restoration and the intent of this project,

communicating about success measures and metrics, gathering input from employees at all levels, opening lines of communication and integrating across staff areas, building partner relationships, and increasing awareness around key innovations already in use (change the way we do business);

- Reviewing our current appraisal process and approaches to improve our process for estimating fair market value (reform policy).

We have begun to identify other possible actions to initiate soon, including:

- Reviewing our current accountability policy (reform policy);
- Reviewing the Timber Information Manager database to determine if changes are needed (change our systems);
- Designing and implement a training strategy/academy for timber sale administrators, Forest Service representatives (FSR), and timber sale contracting officers (train our employees).

We are preparing action plans to track our progress on these and many other in-progress and planned activities.

Detailed Change Needs

Working with our guiding team and receiving input from around the country, we have identified additional needs that must be addressed to move toward our long-term goals. We are examining training, policy reform, technology efficiencies, systems changes, and business change opportunities within each of the following forest products delivery system categories. The top six priorities will receive resources and support first:

1. Personnel recruitment, staffing, and training programs:

Offer personnel recruitment, training, and staffing opportunities to better support forest product delivery system needs. Consider training program managers and using specialized staff to develop and implement training programs, including contracting officers, economists, transportation engineers, and logging systems engineers, and include technical support for using software and hardware.

2. Sale layout, including transportation and logging systems:

Determine which sale layout policies and procedures (including cruise standards and design, paint, and unit and sale boundary delineation) can be altered or eliminated to increase efficient and effective timber sale layout. Streamline our policies and procedures for logging systems transportation analysis, rights-of-way acquisition, funds availability for future haul routes, availability of employees with technical expertise, and partner collaboration.

3. Timber sale accounting, scaling, and accountability:

Increase flexibility and efficiency in our financial system, accountability standards, and timber scaling policies and procedures by determining which ones can be eliminated, changed, or streamlined. Consider financial determinations, availability of employees with financial expertise, sale inspections, haul routes, selling at base rates, measurements, timber disposal authorities, export requirements, and weight services agreements.

4. Certification:

Streamline certification requirements for timber sale preparation and contracting positions (contracting officers, Forest Service representatives, sale administrators, harvest inspectors, and cruisers). Determine which requirements can be eliminated or modified while still ensuring an adequate agency pool of skilled practitioners. Examine duplications or overlaps in contract policies and procedures between traditional sale contracting and stewardship-integrated resource contracting.

5. Appraisals:

Determine which appraisal system policies and procedures can be eliminated, changed, or streamlined to increase efficiency and effectiveness. Review current standards for low-value forest products and base rates.

6. Contracting and permitting:

Examine our current policy and procedures for timber sale contracting and non-commercial forest products permitting, to determine which ones can be eliminated, changed, or streamlined when in the best interests of both parties. Consider low-value markets, post-contract awards, term adjustments, award timeframes, road package contracts, end-results clauses, and stewardship and Good Neighbor Authority contracts.

7. Project and program management:

Thoroughly examine timber project management systems from initial planning to a signed decision to on-the-ground implementation. Explore progress tracking, line officer engagement, and the handoff between the interdisciplinary sale planning and environmental analysis teams and the sale implementers to find best practices, and determine if efficiencies can be gained. Coordinate with the Environmental Analysis and Decision Making (EADM) agency change effort to see how we can streamline our current policy and procedures for implementing the requirements of NEPA, Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and other laws and regulations for forest products projects (the gate system), while still meeting resource objectives and public benefits. Consider how the financial feasibility analysis is done in Gate 1, to integrate across budget line items. Also consider connections with the planning handbook (FSH 1909.12) and land use/special use authorizations.

8. Permanent and trust funds management:

Discover the best ways to enhance spending flexibility outside the timber sale area by reviewing our policies and procedures for managing permanent allocations and trust funds. Determine what can be eliminated, changed, or streamlined. Find out how to improve transparency in national overhead collections.

9. Information management:

Review the Timber Information Manager (TIM) database to determine processes that can be eliminated, changed, or streamlined for efficiency and effectiveness. Consider improvements based on contract type (stewardship, weight and tree measure) and improved linkages with other databases (FACTS, PALS).

10. Forest products utilization and available markets:

As possible, expand the available market for wood products (domestic and international), the forest products supply chain, and the existing capacity of mills to process wood products. Encourage and support innovations in forest products utilization for bio-energy/biomass production.

11. Silviculture:

Discover how to 1) improve silviculture support to forest products, 2) better implement designation by prescription, and 3) improve operational flexibility of prescriptions. Review and streamline our policies and procedures.

12. Reviews and audits:

Determine how best to use our timber sale reviews and audit processes so that they can best provide assistance and guidance to timber production personnel.

We will continue to refine these categories and potential change ideas, based on continued input from the Forest Products Modernization team, agency leadership, other agency employees, and our non-Forest Service partners. We invite your input as we refine our systems and processes.

For more information, visit the [FPM SharePoint site](#). To offer input or ask a question, use the [FPM Outlook inbox](#) or the [FPM discussion forum](#).