

Message From the Chief

As Chief of the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, I am proud to present our fiscal year (FY) 2011 Agency Financial Report (AFR). This report describes the stewardship and management of the public funds entrusted to our care, as reflected in our mission—“to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”



Founded in 1905, the Forest Service has a long tradition of caring for the land and serving people. The seven strategic goals in the Forest Service Strategic Plan for FY 2007–2012 are (1) to restore, sustain, and enhance the Nation’s forests and grasslands; (2) provide and sustain benefits to the American people; (3) conserve open space; (4) sustain and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities; (5) maintain basic management capabilities of the Forest Service; (6) engage urban America in Forest Service programs; and (7) provide science-based applications and tools for sustainable natural resource management.

Our focus is on the ground—on the places where you live, work, and play. Above all, we are dedicated to keeping everyone on the ground safe and secure. Our objective is to serve our communities, both rural and urban. One way to achieve this objective is to work with partners to sustain healthy, resilient forests and rangelands on Federal, State, and private lands. Healthy lands support the outdoor activities of millions of Americans each year, a service we proudly provide on the National Forest System. A central concern for all Americans is sustainable land management. We owe it to ourselves and to future generations to protect our communities, properties, and wildland resources from catastrophic fire and other threats.

Today’s conservation challenges are daunting. Climate change has intensified regional drought, triggered extreme weather events, and contributed to uncharacteristically severe wildfires and outbreaks of insects and disease. America’s forested watersheds also face degradation by invasive species and from the conversion of working forests and ranches to developed uses.

To address this challenging environment, the Forest Service has embraced five major focus areas:

Safety. Our jobs sometimes take us into high-risk environments, such as managing wildland fires. A constant, relentless focus on safety is the only way we work.

Inclusiveness. Diversity of thought is fundamental to any successful organization. We are creating a work environment that fully supports inclusiveness and diversity—that is free from barriers and discrimination, both for our employees and for the public we serve.

Restoration. The key to conservation is to restore the functions and processes characteristic of healthy, resilient forest and grassland ecosystems. We are bringing people together to collaborate across ownerships—to pursue common restoration goals based on mutual respect. Watershed restoration is essential to accomplish our restoration goals. Watersheds capable of delivering plentiful supplies of pure, clean water can also deliver all the other benefits that people get from forests—clean air, habitat for wildlife, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and more.

Wildland fire. As communities have spread into fire-prone forests, fire seasons have steadily worsened. We are meeting the challenge by restoring fire-adapted ecosystems; helping to create fire-adapted human communities; and making safe, effective, risk-based wildland fire management decisions.

Community. Conservation begins where people live. Our job is to work with local communities for social and economic, as well as ecological sustainability. Our goal is a continuous network of healthy forested landscapes, from remote wilderness areas to shady urban neighborhoods, parks, and greenways. Community- or place-based conservation provides jobs and economic opportunities associated with restoration projects and with outdoor recreation and tourism.

At the Forest Service, a sound financial foundation is necessary for meeting our obligations to the American people. This report demonstrates our accountability to the people we serve. In lieu of a Performance and Accountability Report, it complies with Office of Management and Budget Circular A-136, Financial Reporting Requirements.

I am pleased to announce that the Forest Service received an “unqualified audit opinion” for FY 2011, meaning that the auditor found our financial statements to be true and fair. The audit reported no material weaknesses. The agency officially closed all open financial statement audits and recommendations, in addition to closing a record number of program audits. In total, the Forest Service closed 15 audits and 99 audit recommendations during the year; thereby significantly improving agency internal controls.

Founded more than a century ago, the Forest Service was a model of financial accountability for its time. Since then, our responsibilities have grown; we now play a role in sustainable forest management all over the country and, indeed, around the world. Nevertheless, we are still committed to our founding principles of sound financial management and accountability to the American people. Our continued success is due to the hard work of our Forest Service employees and their steadfast dedication—together with our partners and volunteers—to protecting and restoring America’s forests and grasslands, for the benefit of generations to come.



THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Chief of the Forest Service