

**Executive Summary of Internal (Forest Service Employee) Input**  
In response to Chief's Letter dated November 6, 2006  
*Open Space Conservation Strategy*

On November 6, 2006, Chief Dale Bosworth requested that Forest Service employees submit their input into the development of the Forest Service (FS) Open Space Conservation Strategy (Strategy) and Implementation Plan. Specifically, Chief Bosworth requested input focusing on the agency's role in addressing the effects of the loss of open space on private forests; on the National Forests and Grasslands and surrounding landscape; and on forests in cities, suburbs, and towns. The Chief requested input on programs, research, partnerships, and/or policy recommendations. This optional request for input was made through the Forest Service Correspondence Database, signed by the Chief, and sent to Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Staff. The Optional Reply due date was posted on this letter as December 8, 2006; however, comments on the Open Space Conservation Strategy by Forest Service employees were accepted by the Open Space Conservation Strategy staff team and incorporated into the comment summaries below through January 8, 2007.

A total of 26 comments from internal agency employees was received and incorporated into the comment summary table which follows. Most of these were quite detailed. Respondents to the Chief's request were diverse in terms of both mission and geography: Comments were received from employees in National Forest Systems in five different regions, at the Regional Office, Forest, and Ranger District levels; from Research and Development at three different Research Stations; and from staff representing State and Private Forestry, the Washington Office, and International Programs.

The comments received from within the agency were quite supportive of the Strategy. No comments opposed the strategy. Many comments focused on what the agency's role should be in open space conservation, and some focused more specifically on what the agency's comparative advantages are with respect to open space conservation. In other words, what can the Forest Service do better than other players in open space conservation circles? Commenters suggested that the Open Space Conservation Strategy for the Forest Service should focus on these comparative advantages, to take best advantage of sparse funding. Some of the comparative advantages listed included the following:

- Research
- Dissemination of Information
- Public and landowner education and outreach
- Formation and facilitation of community groups, and convening of stakeholders
- Ability to initiate and maintain a regular dialogue to build collaborative relationships
- A holistic view and the capability to engage from different perspectives, including land management, research and development, and private landowner assistance
- Ability to be a national leader in open space conservation

Other major topics, or "themes" that emerged from the internal comments include a need for changes (large and small) to Forest Service culture and to agency processes, in order to enable

and enhance effective open space conservation; prioritization of lands to be conserved; research needs; and education, outreach, and landowner assistance. A major thread running through many if not most of the comments was the need to look beyond the boundaries of the National Forest System and think about ecosystems when conserving open space. Below are included brief synopses of some of the major topics on which employees submitted comments, but this should not be substituted for a review of the attached, more detailed comment summary table. The comments submitted from internal sources were as varied and diverse as the experiences of the employees who submitted them.

### *Changes to Forest Service Culture and Processes*

While the comments recognized the importance of open space conservation, many also noted that the Forest Service must make internal changes before an agency open space conservation policy can be effective. Suggested changes began with basic logistical changes such as appropriately staffing, organizing, and rewarding employees for open space conservation, and progressed to major programmatic and budgetary directional shifts, such as assigning more responsibility for the costs of firefighting in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) to state and local governments, and using the federal savings to conserve open space in WUI areas. Many comments fell in between these ends of the spectrum. Several comments focused on the need to include open space conservation in land management planning and suggested that line officers (Forest Supervisors and District Rangers) would be critical in the success or failure of an open space program.

### *Prioritize Lands to Protect*

As was true for the external comments the agency received in response to the *Federal Register* notice, internal agency comments placed great emphasis on prioritizing lands to protect. Many mirrored exactly those comments from external sources: prioritize conservation or protection of private inholdings within National Forests and “buffer zones” around the boundaries of National Forest System units. More generally, comments expressed a need to identify areas where potential development could adversely impact National Forest System resources, and prioritize them. Other comments suggested prioritizing conservation of areas adjacent to wilderness, roadless areas, National Parks, and National Monuments. Many comments suggested working with partners such as state and local governments, local and national land trusts, and local and regional planning boards, to identify shared conservation priorities and align efforts to protect these areas. One comment suggested *not* prioritizing lands to conserve, because it may have the effect of alienating or “scaring off” local landowners.

### *Research and Development Needs*

Several extremely detailed comments were submitted emphasizing the need for additional or continued research on issues related to open space. The bulk of these comments can be categorized into a need for further or continued research into **drivers and trends** of loss of open space (especially socio-economic trends); **effects of loss of open space** and/or development (on ecosystem services, quality of life, forest health functionality, etc.); and more information on actions that may help to **mitigate loss of open space**, including market-based solutions, drivers

of public support for conservation, and keeping working forests as forests. Comments suggested not only further research but a need for **applied tools**, such as models to identify rising opportunity costs for land conservation, or databases that track priorities for land conservation. The potential beneficiaries of the suggested research and tools span a wide range, including forestry practitioners, private landowners, and public land managers.

#### *Education, Outreach, and Landowner Assistance*

Many comments focused on the need for education and outreach activities by the Forest Service, including the specific need for landowner assistance. Other comments identified education, outreach, and landowner assistance as potential strengths or “comparative advantages” of the Forest Service. Some comments identified specific needs in open space outreach efforts, such as an “Open Space Clearinghouse”: one-stop shopping for providing information and resources available for Open Space conservation planning and implementation, or the development of a web-based tool to aggregate management of small forest or open space parcels and develop a joint management plan. Other comments identified techniques to conduct education and outreach more effectively, such as using everyday conservation terms that resonate with the public, or synthesizing already-existing information on technical and financial assistance.

In addition to the preceding “themes,” the comments emphasized a need for coordinated **planning**. Comments suggested a need to engage, to the extent legally possible, in local and regional planning efforts, and to concurrently ensure that National Forest land management plans are compatible with local, state, and non-governmental organizations’ open space conservation goals and priorities.