

**Executive Summary of Public Comments
Federal Register Notice - June 22, 2007
Draft Open Space Conservation Strategy**

The Forest Service published a Federal Register Notice on June 22, 2007 requesting public comment on a Draft Open Space Conservation Strategy. The comment period closed on July 23, 2007. The Forest Service received over 13,000 comments, including over 75 unique comments from citizens; local, state, and federal government agencies, and environmental, conservation, forestry, grazing, recreation, and wildlife organizations.

Nearly all the letters recognized the loss of open space as a major threat to our nation's forests and expressed strong support for the overall goals of the Open Space Conservation Strategy. There was strong support the Strategy's vision of an "interconnected network of open space" and for prioritizing areas for open space conservation.

Most comments called for fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Forest Legacy Program to conserve open space.

Recreation – Many comments called for stronger emphasis on recreation and public access.

- Called for better recognition of recreation and tourism-based industries.
- Some suggested empowering private landowners to provide recreation opportunities, especially on lands adjacent to public lands – possibly through incentives or special use of NFS lands.
- A few comments call for more mention of recreation groups and parks and recreation departments in the document.
- A few comments were worried that OHV or other uses would be limited on conserved land.

Private Lands – Several comments wanted a clear statement that conservation of private lands would be voluntary.

- Some expressed concern that in West particularly, where a large amount of federal lands, that the remaining open space is the only place left for development.
- Many were opposed to using eminent domain powers to conserve open space.

Wildlife – There were several comments on the importance of open space conservation for wildlife and fish habitat.

- Recommended using the State Wildlife Action Plans for setting priorities.
- Stressed the importance of open space for hunting and fishing.
- A number mentioned the importance of wildlife corridors and connecting wildlife habitat.

Water – There were several comments on the importance of open space conservation for water quality and ground water.

Financial Incentives to Conserve Open Space – Many comments expressed the need for new sources of income as an incentive to private landowners to conserve open space.

- Natural Resource-Based Industries – Many comments stressed the importance of promoting farming, ranching, forest products industry, woody biomass, and recreation industries.
- Ecosystem Services – Many comments emphasized markets for ecosystem services and other innovative tools to promote conservation of open space conservation.
- Tax Policy – Several comments expressed the importance of analyzing tax policy and its effects on land ownership.
- Community Assistance – Many comments asked for greater financial assistance for communities, specifically mentioning the proposed Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program and Stateside LWCF program.

Fire – There were many comments on fire management, hazardous fuels reduction, and partnering with state and local fire departments.

- Some stated that open space conservation can reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire in the WUI.
- Some stressed that we should focus our efforts on reducing hazardous fuels on NFS lands.

Forest Service Management – Many comments emphasized the management of NFS lands and the role of Forest Plans.

- Many comments mentioned that the national forests should be the “centerpiece” or “cornerstone” of an interconnected network of open space.
- Several comments mentioned that road building, ski area development, and oil/gas development on National Forests threaten open space efforts.
- Consolidating NFS lands - some suggested acquiring adjacent lands to consolidate holdings, while others suggested disposing of isolated parcels.

Partnerships– There were many comments stressing the importance of partnerships.

- The comments mentioned many existing efforts and knowledge that are complimentary and should be utilized by the Forest Service.
- Emphasized FS role in information sharing, research, technical support.
- Asked for specific mention of state forestry agencies, recreation groups, CSREES, fish & wildlife agencies, and farmers and ranchers as partners.

Education and Outreach – A number of comments stressed the importance of outreach and education, and suggested that the strategy should place greater emphasis on this.

- Emphasized the importance of connecting people, especially youth, to the outdoors.
- Encouraged the FS to raise public awareness of the importance of and threats to open space.
- Suggested that we should reach out to the new and next generation of landowners.

Internal Capacity – A number of comments asked for more specifics on implementation, and asked the FS to sufficiently fund and emphasize implementation of the strategy. Some comments suggested that the agency should provide incentives for local FS officials to engage in open space partnerships.