

Overview Summary
of the Three Roundtable Dialogue Listening Sessions
on the Forest Service's Role in Conserving Open Space

On November 28, 2006, December 1, 2006 and December 5, 2006, the Conservation Fund held three roundtable dialogue listening sessions for the Forest Service on their role in conserving open space. The three sessions were held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Washington, D.C. and Denver, Colorado, respectively.

While all three sessions had tremendous similarities as encapsulated in the three enclosed reports, the sessions were all very different in terms of tone and emphasis of issues. These differences may be important to the Forest Service when deliberating over the importance of various feedback received. For example, the session held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina focused on issues in the southeast, with not surprisingly, the greatest emphasis area being placed on private lands and landowners. This session contained the greatest number of non-traditional constituents and the tone of the meeting in general was very positive. Participants jumped right into the discussion at hand and provided specific suggestions on areas where the Forest Service could develop new tools, partnerships, or programs. This session is contrasted by the session in Washington, D.C. where the attendees were, by and large, the 'usual suspects', i.e., traditional partners of the Forest Service. The tone of the meeting while jovial was slightly more critical than that of Chapel Hill and tended to focus on overall program policies and directions rather than specific on-the-ground suggestions. The Denver meeting was held last and was the most difficult in terms of recruiting participants and holding their interest throughout the duration of the meeting. The emphasis of this meeting was the national forests and the feedback received was the most critical of the Forest Service. In fact, the level of frustration with the Forest Service expressed uniformly by all participants was high.

Areas of similarities of note included the following:

- Participants in Washington, D.C. and in Denver both wanted to understand the Forest Service's 'role' or 'vision' in conserving open space prior to engaging in dialogue on specific partnerships, tools, or research that could be developed and/or conducted. They encouraged the Forest Service to articulate this role or vision as part of the national strategy.
- Participants in all three roundtables, but particularly in Washington, D.C. strongly encouraged the Forest Service to develop metrics and criteria for measuring success of the national strategy, and for developing a common definition of the term 'open space'.
- Participants in Washington, D.C. and Denver roundtables recommended the Forest Service integrate the national strategy, or at a minimum, develop it in conjunction with the Chief's four national threats. The threats are inter-related and that relationship should be acknowledged. Participants also wanted to

understand how this strategy will relate in terms of priority given to the other threats and recommended this answer be provided when the national strategy is disseminated.

- Participants in all three roundtables strongly encouraged the Forest Service to examine its culture in terms of collaboration and the forming of partnerships. As partnerships will be a key component of the national strategy, participants felt it particularly important for the Forest Service to develop performance metrics for employees that can be incorporated into annual performance evaluations. These metrics are particularly important for field employees, and should measure their ability to form partnerships, collaborate, problem-solve, etc. – All skills necessary to conduct effective outreach and form meaningful partnerships.
- Participants in all three roundtables commented that the Forest Service needs to improve management of national forests, particularly acquisition of in holdings, as part of the national strategy. Participants in Denver were particularly vocal about the need for the Forest Service to review and revamp its land acquisition and land exchange program, if it is to be successful at conserving open space. The quality of management provided to the national forests directly connects to adjacent landowners and their willingness to protect their land from conversion.
- Participants in all three roundtables expressed a great need for the Forest Service to continue its research on ecosystem services and recommended the Forest Service serve as a clearinghouse -- both in disseminating pertinent research findings and in familiarizing landowners with the variety of assistance programs available to them.
- The issue of communicating and working with landowners was discussed in all three roundtable sessions with participants acknowledging that resources will not be available for the Forest Service to reach all potentially impacted landowners. However, participants in all three roundtables felt the Forest Service should strive to broaden its base of landowners with whom it communicates, and to establish a prioritization process, possibly utilizing the green infrastructure approach.
- Participants in all three roundtables noted the connection of urban forests to children and commented that the Urban and Community Forestry program should work with various partners to connect children to nature.
- Participants in all three roundtables commended the Forest Service for participating in the listening sessions and encouraged the Forest Service to hold more dialogue and to expand the comment period for input into the national strategy.