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# A VISION FOR SOUTHERN FORESTS

## SUMMARY DOCUMENT

2020 State Forest Action Plan  
Assessments, Southern Region

**SOUTHERN**  
GROUP OF STATE  
**FORESTERS**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In conjunction with the 2008 Farm Bill, Congress asked the U.S. states and territories to assess the condition of trees and forests within their boundaries, regardless of ownership; and to develop strategies to conserve working forest landscapes, protect forests from harm and enhance public benefits from trees and forests. The resulting state Forest Action Plans (completed in 2010, updated in 2015, and comprehensively revised in 2020 by all 59 states and territories) offer practical and comprehensive roadmaps for investing federal, state, local and private resources where they can be most effective in achieving national conservation goals.

To highlight the tremendous effort U.S. southern states put forth to conserve, protect and enhance the region's forests, the Southern Group of State Foresters has developed this summary analysis of Forest Action Plans from southern state forestry agencies (AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, PR, USVI). This document provides a comprehensive overview of strategies, objectives and collaborative efforts aimed at promoting sustainable forest management and conservation across the region.

Key themes emerge from the analysis of these plans, including:

- **Sustainable Forest Management:** States prioritize sustainable practices to enhance forest health, resilience and productivity. Strategies encompass promoting best management practices, conducting forest health assessments and implementing silvicultural treatments to improve stand vigor and reduce susceptibility to pests and diseases.
- **Wildfire Risk Management:** Managing wildfire risk is a shared priority, with states implementing fuel reduction treatments, prescribed burns and

wildfire risk assessment tools to mitigate the potential for catastrophic wildfires and safeguard communities and natural resources.

- **Forest Markets:** With 86% of the South's forestland in private ownership, states rely on current, new and emerging forest markets to maintain forest profitability, so that landowners can afford to keep their working forests intact and growing. While timber and its many by-products are the primary resource generated by well-managed, sustainable working forests, each southern state has its own unique mix of wood resources, services, manufacturing innovations and investment opportunities. Forestry and the forest products industry contribute more than \$251 billion (about \$770 per person in the U.S.) to the South's economy.
- **Invasive Species Control:** States actively combat invasive plants and pests threatening forest health and biodiversity. Strategies encompass surveys, monitoring programs, control measures and education/outreach efforts to raise awareness of invasive species impacts.
- **Habitat Restoration:** Efforts to restore diverse forest habitats are integral, with states conducting reforestation projects, restoring riparian and wetland habitats, and enhancing wildlife habitat to support biodiversity, water quality and ecosystem resilience.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Collaboration among government agencies, non-profit organizations, private landowners and stakeholders is essential for addressing complex forest management challenges. States leverage collaborative mechanisms, formal agreements and regional networks to foster cooperation and resource sharing effectively.

By implementing the strategies outlined in each forest action plan, states and territories aim to ensure the long-term health, sustainability and vitality of southern forest ecosystems while promoting the diverse values and benefits forests provide. This executive summary serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, land managers, stakeholders and the public, highlighting opportunities for collaboration and collective action to achieve shared forest management and conservation goals.

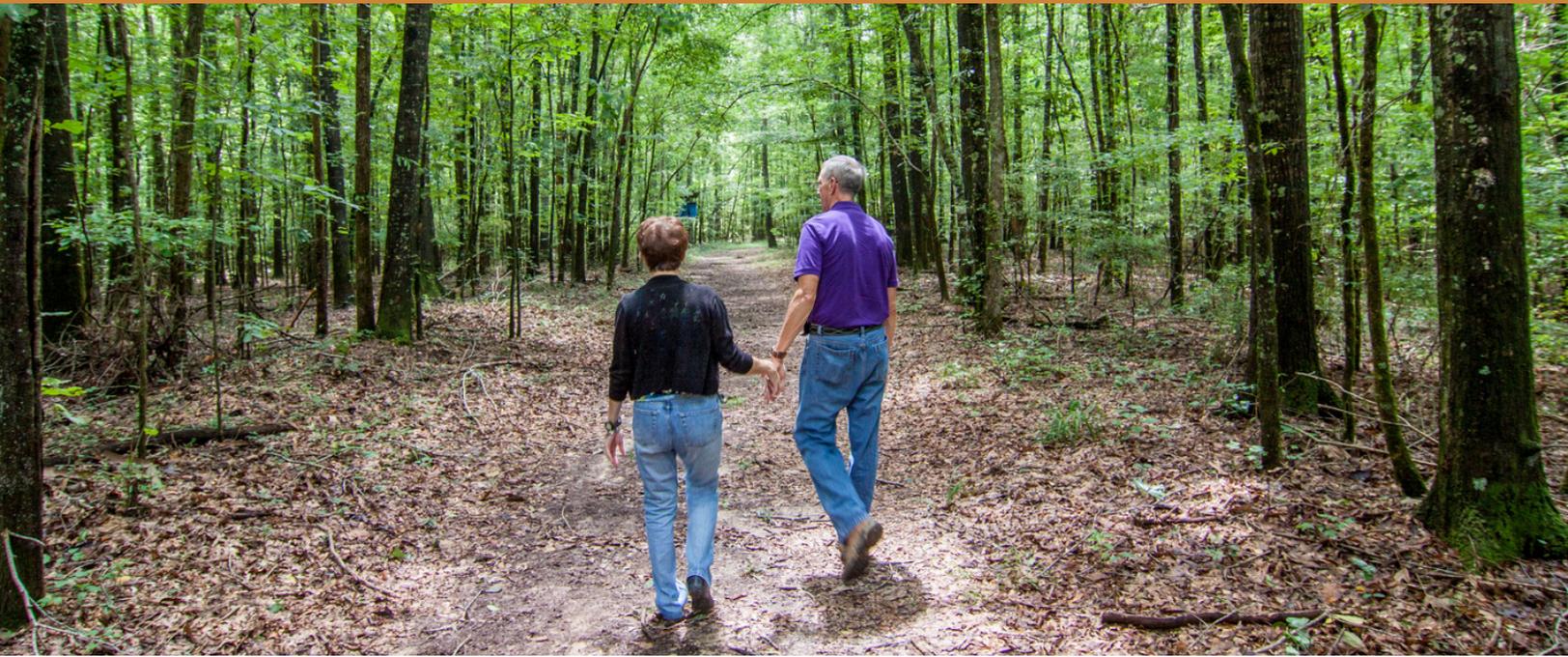
# INTRODUCTION

The South has more than 245 million acres of forestland with some of the most diverse and productive ecosystems in the world. Accounting for over half of timber production in the United States, southern forests support the economy and are responsible for the production of renewable products and resources like lumber, paper products, bioenergy and thousands of other everyday items. Southern forests also produce significant environmental benefits including the protection of air and water quality, capturing and filtering storm water, storing carbon, enhancing wildlife habitat, supplying renewable energy, reducing energy consumption and delivering quality-of-life benefits for communities.

Against the backdrop of escalating climate variability, intensifying wildfire activity and encroaching development pressures, the need for strategic forest management has never been more pronounced, especially in the South. By embracing innovation, sustainable markets, inclusive stakeholder engagement and data-driven decision-making, the 2020 updates to southern state Forest Action Plans chart a course towards resilience, sustainability and equitable access to the many benefits of forests.

## **HISTORY OF STATE FOREST ACTION PLANS**

In conjunction with the 2008 Farm Bill, Congress asked the states and territories to assess the condition of trees and forests within their boundaries, regardless of ownership; and to develop strategies to conserve working forest landscapes, protect forests from harm and enhance public benefits from trees and forests. The resulting state Forest Action Plans (completed in 2010, updated in 2015, and comprehensively revised in 2020 by all 59 states and territories) represent the first-ever comprehensive assessment of America's forest resources across all lands—public, private, rural and urban—and offer proactive strategies to conserve, protect and enhance the trees and forests our nation depends on.



## IMPORTANCE OF STATE FOREST ACTION PLANS

State Forest Action Plans hold significant importance, especially in the context of the southern United States, where unique ecological characteristics and challenges demand tailored strategies. These plans serve as roadmaps for forest management, encompassing a range of factors that collectively contribute to the overall health and sustainability of southern forests.

One pivotal aspect addressed in these plans is the escalating threat of wildfires in the region. The southern states are particularly prone to wildfire incidents, necessitating comprehensive measures for prevention, early detection and efficient response. By outlining strategies to mitigate fire risks and enhance firefighting capabilities, the plans aim to protect both the ecosystems and the communities that rely on these forests.

Another focal point is the control of invasive species, a pervasive issue impacting southern forests. These plans delve into methods for identifying, managing and preventing the spread of invasive plants and pests, and safeguarding the integrity of native ecosystems. This proactive approach is essential in maintaining the biodiversity that characterizes the southern United States.

The plans also prioritize efforts to bolster traditional and emerging forest markets, which generate incentive and provide monetary support for forest landowners to keep their forests as forests instead of converting their lands for other uses like development. State forestry agencies work directly with forest owners, helping them navigate access to available forest product markets while also managing for sustainability. It is imperative to provide private landowners, who own 86% of all forest land in the South, with adequate support and resources to keep southern forests and woodlands intact.

Moreover, the plans emphasize habitat conservation as a means of sustaining diverse ecosystems. By delineating strategies to protect and enhance habitats for various plant and animal species, the plans contribute to the preservation of biodiversity and ecological balance, thereby ensuring the resilience of these forested ecosystems in the face of environmental changes.

In the context of a changing climate, the plans emphasize the need for climate resilience. This involves adapting forest management practices to evolving climatic conditions and incorporating strategies to promote carbon sequestration, contributing to broader climate change mitigation efforts.

Community engagement is another priority integrated into these plans, recognizing the importance of collaboration with local communities, stakeholders and landowners. By involving the people who live and work in and around forests, plans aim to address diverse needs, foster a sense of responsibility and ensure that management practices align with the values and priorities of the communities.

These comprehensive documents address the many, multifaceted challenges facing the region's forests. By integrating strategies for wildfire management, invasive species control, new and emerging forest markets, habitat conservation, climate resilience and community engagement, these plans play a vital role in fostering sustainable forest management practices, and preserving the ecological, economic and social values associated with southern forests.

# METHODOLOGY

The methodology for the analysis of 2020 Southern Region state Forest Action Plans involved several key steps, including data collection, aggregation of data using AI technology, review of individual plans and identification of common elements. The methodology and criteria used for evaluating commonalities included:

- **Data Collection and Aggregation:**

- The initial step involved gathering information on the Forest Action Plans for Southern Region states and territories. This data was collected from publicly available sources, such as state agency and National Association of State Foresters websites.

- **Review of Individual Plans:**

- Each forest action plan was carefully reviewed and analyzed to identify its key components, including goals, objectives, strategies and partners involved. Through analytical assistance from AI technology, the review process involved thorough examination of the content and structure of each plan to understand its unique focus areas and priorities.

- **Identification of Common Elements:**

- After reviewing individual plans, common elements shared among the states and territories were identified. These common elements included priority areas, strategies, approaches and partners involved in forest management and conservation efforts.
- Criteria for evaluating commonalities included frequency of occurrence across multiple plans, consistency in language and terminology used, and alignment with overarching goals and objectives of sustainable forest management.

- **Comparative Analysis:**

- Once common elements were identified, a comparative analysis was conducted to assess similarities and differences among the forest action plans of the identified states and territories. This analysis involved organizing and categorizing common elements to highlight shared priorities, strategies and collaborative efforts across the region.

- **Presentation of Findings:**

- The findings of the comparative analysis were presented in various formats, including narrative descriptions, tables and summaries. This document aims to provide stakeholders with a clear understanding of the collective priorities and approaches outlined in the Southern Region’s state forest action plans.

Overall, the methodology used for comparative analysis involved systematic data collection, thorough review of individual plans, and rigorous identification and evaluation of common elements. By following this methodology, insights into regional trends, priorities and collaborative efforts in forest management and conservation were obtained, facilitating informed decision-making and resource allocation.



# OVERVIEW OF FOREST ACTION PLANS:

The Forest Action Plans developed by the states and territories in the Southeastern United States collectively prioritize sustainable forest management, conservation of biodiversity and resilience to natural disturbances. They emphasize maintaining healthy and resilient forest ecosystems through strategies such as invasive species management, support for traditional and emerging forest markets, wildfire prevention and management, climate change adaptation and urbanization mitigation. Engaging stakeholders and the public in forest management and conservation efforts, along with fostering partnerships and collaboration among government agencies, non-profit organizations, private landowners, and local communities, is also highlighted.



By addressing common priorities and collaborating on regional initiatives, the identified states and territories aim to sustainably manage and conserve forest resources, enhance ecosystem resilience, and ensure the long-term health and vitality of forests across the region. Through coordinated efforts, including education and outreach programs, landowner assistance and advocacy, adaptive management strategies and landscape-scale conservation planning, these plans seek to address the multifaceted challenges facing forests and foster a shared commitment to stewardship and sustainability.

## STATE FOREST ACTION PLANS: KEY PRIORITIES

- **Alabama**
  - Key Priorities: Promoting responsible forest stewardship, enhancing forest resilience to climate change and conserving critical habitats and biodiversity.
  
- **Arkansas**
  - Key Priorities: Reducing wildfire risk, combating invasive species and promoting forest health and resilience to environmental stressors.
  
- **Florida**
  - Key Priorities: Restoring and maintaining healthy forest ecosystems, conserving biodiversity and mitigating the impacts of wildfire, pests and diseases.
  
- **Georgia**
  - Key Priorities: Enhancing forest health and resilience, expanding forest conservation efforts and promoting sustainable forest management practices.
  
- **Kentucky**
  - Key Priorities: Addressing forest health issues, enhancing wildlife habitat and promoting sustainable forest management practices.
  
- **Louisiana**
  - Key Priorities: Protecting and restoring forested ecosystems, managing wildfire risk and conserving critical habitats and wildlife species.

- **Mississippi**
  - Key Priorities: Promoting forest stewardship, conserving working forests and mitigating the impacts of wildfire, pests and diseases.
  
- **North Carolina**
  - Key Priorities: Enhancing forest health and resilience, expanding forest conservation efforts and promoting sustainable forest management practices.
  
- **Oklahoma**
  - Key Priorities: Promoting sustainable forest management, conserving critical habitats and enhancing forest resilience to climate change and natural disturbances.
  
- **South Carolina**
  - Key Priorities: Promoting sustainable forest management, conserving wildlife habitat and mitigating the impacts of wildfire, pests and diseases.
  
- **Tennessee**
  - Key Priorities: Promoting forest stewardship, supporting working forests and forest markets, and mitigating the impacts of wildfire, pests and diseases.
  
- **Texas**
  - Key Priorities: Promoting sustainable forest management, conserving critical habitats and enhancing forest resilience to climate change and natural disturbances.
  
- **Virginia**
  - Key Priorities: Enhancing forest health and resilience, expanding forest conservation efforts and promoting sustainable forest management practices.

- **Puerto Rico**

- Key Priorities: Restoring degraded forests, conserving biodiversity and enhancing resilience to natural hazards such as hurricanes and landslides.

- **U.S. Virgin Islands**

- Key Priorities: Conserving and restoring forest resources, promoting sustainable land use practices and enhancing resilience to climate change and natural disasters.



# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

## FOREST RESOURCES AND ECOSYSTEMS



### REGIONAL OVERVIEW

While there are commonalities in forest types across the region, including pine forests and hardwood forests, there are also notable differences based on factors such as climate, geography and local ecosystems. These differences contribute to the overall biodiversity and ecological richness of forests in the Southern Region.

- **Pine Forests:**

- These forests often include species such as longleaf pine, loblolly pine, slash pine and other pine species depending on the specific area.
- Pine forests are typically found in a variety of ecosystems, including coastal plains, uplands and lowlands.

- **Hardwood Forests:**

- These forests include a diverse array of hardwood species such as oaks, hickories, maples and other deciduous trees.
- Hardwood forests are found in a range of habitats, including mountainous regions, piedmont areas and bottomlands.

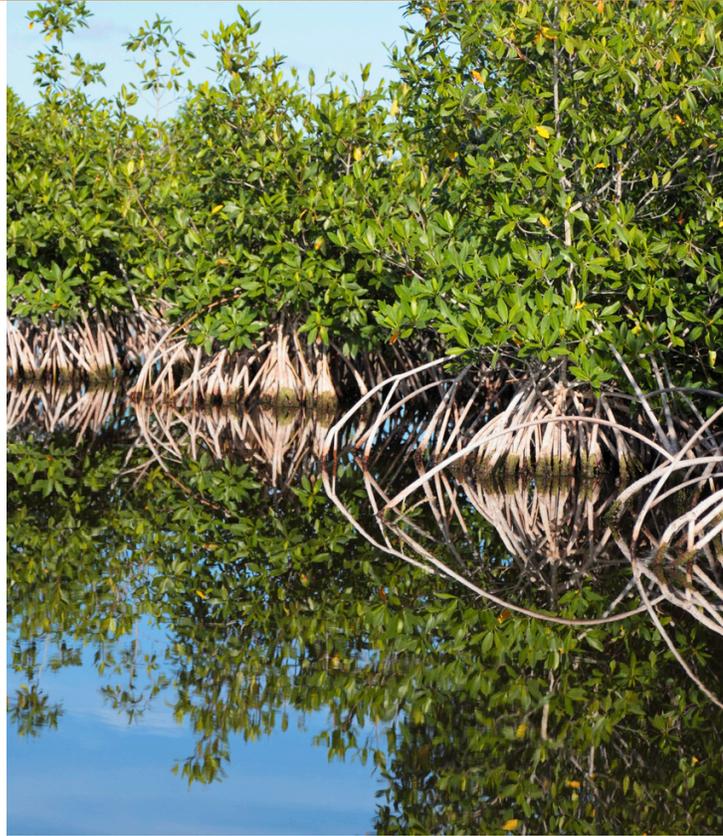
- **Bottomland Hardwood Forests:**

- These forests occur in low-lying areas along rivers, streams and floodplains, characterized by species such as oak, hickory, sweetgum, and bald cypress.
- Bottomland hardwood forests provide important habitat for wildlife and contribute to water quality and flood control.



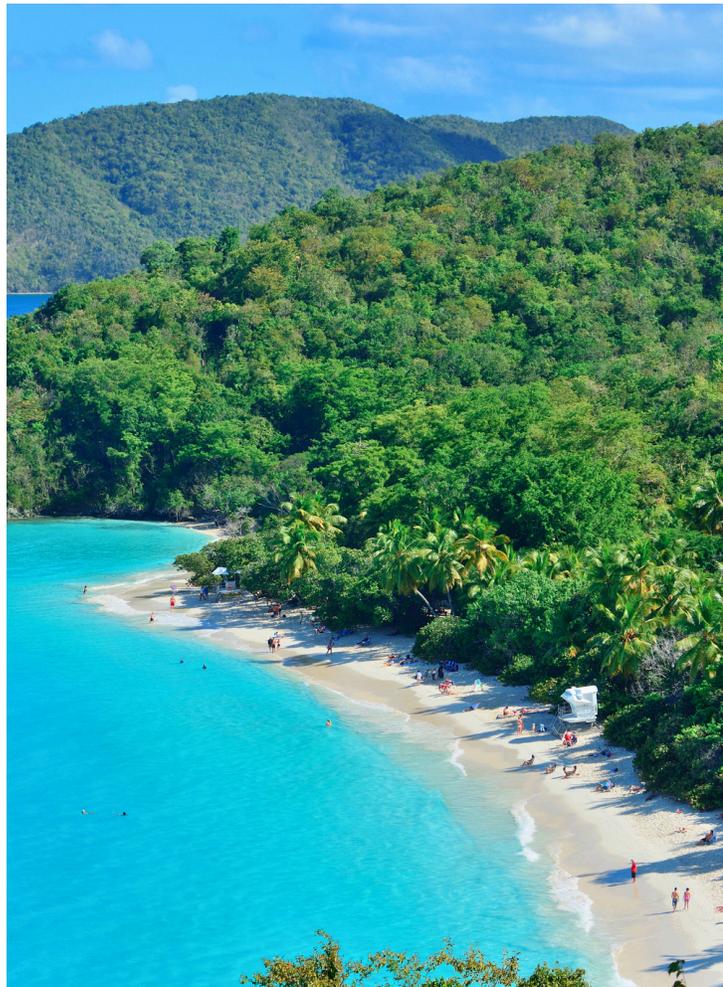
- **Coastal Ecosystems:**

- Coastal ecosystems, including maritime forests, coastal wetlands and mangrove forests, are prominent within the region.
- These ecosystems are characterized by their proximity to the ocean and the influence of saltwater intrusion, tidal fluctuations, and storm events.
- Coastal ecosystems play vital roles in coastal protection, habitat provision and water quality regulation.



- **Tropical Forests:**

- Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands feature tropical forests, including tropical rainforests and montane forests.
- These forests are characterized by high biodiversity, with species adapted to warm and humid climates.
- Tropical forests in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are distinct from the temperate forests found in the continental states.





- **Desert Scrublands:**

- These areas feature sparse vegetation adapted to dry conditions, including mesquite, creosote bush, and cacti.
- Desert scrublands in Texas contrast with the predominantly forested landscapes in other parts of the region.

- **Tallgrass Prairie:**

- Tallgrass prairies are characterized by grassland vegetation dominated by species such as big bluestem, little bluestem and switchgrass.
- These prairies once covered extensive areas of the central United States but have been largely converted to other land uses.

## FOREST TYPES AND ECOSYSTEMS BY STATE

- **Alabama:**

- Forest Types: Pine forests dominate Alabama's landscape, including longleaf, loblolly and slash pine forests. Hardwood forests are also prevalent.
- Ecosystems: Alabama's forests support a diverse range of ecosystems, including bottomland hardwood forests, upland pine forests and mixed hardwood-pine forests.

- **Arkansas:**

- Forest Types: Arkansas boasts a mix of hardwood and pine forests, with oak-hickory forests in the uplands and pine forests in the lowlands.
- Ecosystems: Important ecosystems in Arkansas include the Ouachita Mountains, Ozark Plateau, Mississippi Alluvial Plain and Crowley's Ridge.

- **Florida:**

- Forest Types: Florida's forests include both temperate and subtropical ecosystems. Pine forests, including longleaf and slash pine, are common, as well as hardwood hammocks and cypress swamps.
- Ecosystems: Florida's ecosystems encompass diverse habitats such as the Everglades, coastal dunes, scrublands and wetlands.



- **Georgia:**
  - Forest Types: Georgia's forests include pine forests in the Coastal Plain and mixed hardwood forests in the Piedmont and Mountain regions.
  - Ecosystems: Georgia's ecosystems range from the mountainous regions of the Appalachians to the coastal plains, supporting diverse habitats like wetlands, longleaf pine savannas and hardwood forests.
  
- **Kentucky:**
  - Forest Types: Kentucky's forests consist of mixed hardwood forests, oak-hickory forests and bottomland hardwood forests.
  - Ecosystems: Kentucky's ecosystems include the Appalachian Mountains, Cumberland Plateau and Bluegrass Region, supporting a variety of forest types and associated wildlife.
  
- **Louisiana:**
  - Forest Types: Louisiana's forests primarily consist of bottomland hardwood forests, cypress-tupelo swamps and pine forests.
  - Ecosystems: Louisiana's diverse ecosystems include the Atchafalaya Basin, Mississippi River Delta and coastal marshes, providing habitats for a wide range of species.
  
- **Mississippi:**
  - Forest Types: Mississippi's forests include pine forests in the Coastal Plain and mixed hardwood forests in the uplands.
  - Ecosystems: Mississippi's ecosystems encompass bottomland hardwood forests, cypress swamps and pine savannas, among others.

- **North Carolina:**

- Forest Types: North Carolina's forests include mixed hardwood forests in the mountains and piedmont regions, as well as pine forests in the coastal plain.
- Ecosystems: North Carolina's diverse ecosystems include the Appalachian Mountains, Great Smoky Mountains and coastal wetlands, supporting a variety of plant and animal species.

- **Oklahoma:**

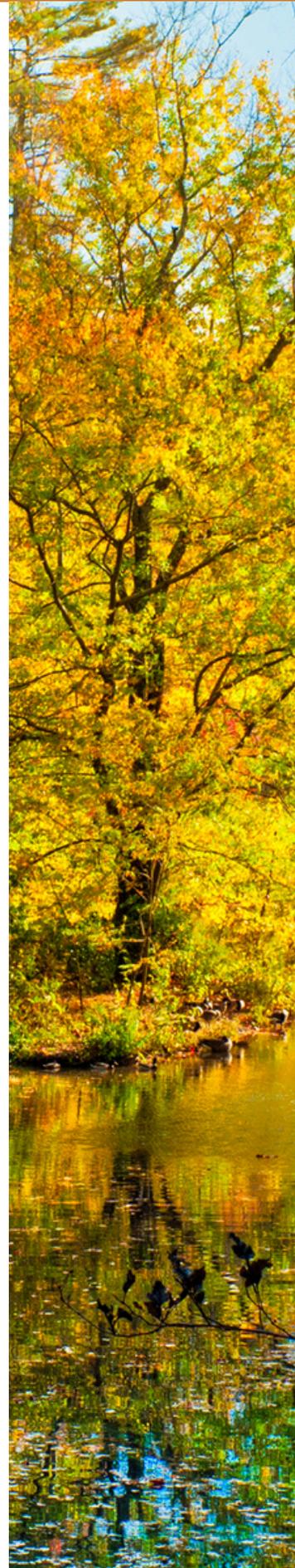
- Forest Types: Oklahoma's forests consist of oak-hickory forests in the eastern part of the state and pine forests in the southeastern region.
- Ecosystems: Oklahoma's ecosystems include tallgrass prairies, Cross Timbers forests and eastern deciduous forests, providing habitats for a range of species.

- **South Carolina:**

- Forest Types: South Carolina's forests include mixed pine-hardwood forests, bottomland hardwood forests and longleaf pine forests.
- Ecosystems: South Carolina's ecosystems encompass the Blue Ridge Mountains, Piedmont and Coastal Plain, supporting diverse habitats like wetlands, swamps and maritime forests.

- **Tennessee:**

- Forest Types: Tennessee's forests consist of oak-hickory forests, mixed hardwood forests and pine forests, as well as bottomland hardwood forests in the Mississippi Plains
- Ecosystems: Tennessee's ecosystems include the Appalachian and Blue Ridge Mountains, Cumberland Plateau, Ridge and Valley, and Southeastern Plains, providing habitats for various wildlife species.





- **Texas:**
  - Forest Types: Texas' forests include pine forests in the eastern part of the state and oak-hickory forests in central and western regions.
  - Ecosystems: Texas' ecosystems encompass coastal prairies, piney woods, Edwards Plateau and desert scrublands, supporting diverse flora and fauna.
  
- **Virginia:**
  - Forest Types: Virginia's forests consist of mixed hardwood forests, oak-hickory forests and pine forests.
  - Ecosystems: Virginia's ecosystems include the Appalachian Mountains, Piedmont and coastal plain, providing habitats for diverse wildlife species.
  
- **Puerto Rico:**
  - Forest Types: Puerto Rico's forests include tropical rainforests, montane forests and mangrove forests.
  - Ecosystems: Puerto Rico's ecosystems encompass El Yunque National Forest, the Luquillo Mountains and coastal mangroves, supporting unique biodiversity.
  
- **U.S. Virgin Islands:**
  - Forest Types: The U.S. Virgin Islands' forests include dry forests, moist subtropical forests and mangrove forests.
  - Ecosystems: The U.S. Virgin Islands' ecosystems encompass coral reefs, coastal mangroves and tropical forests, supporting diverse marine and terrestrial life.

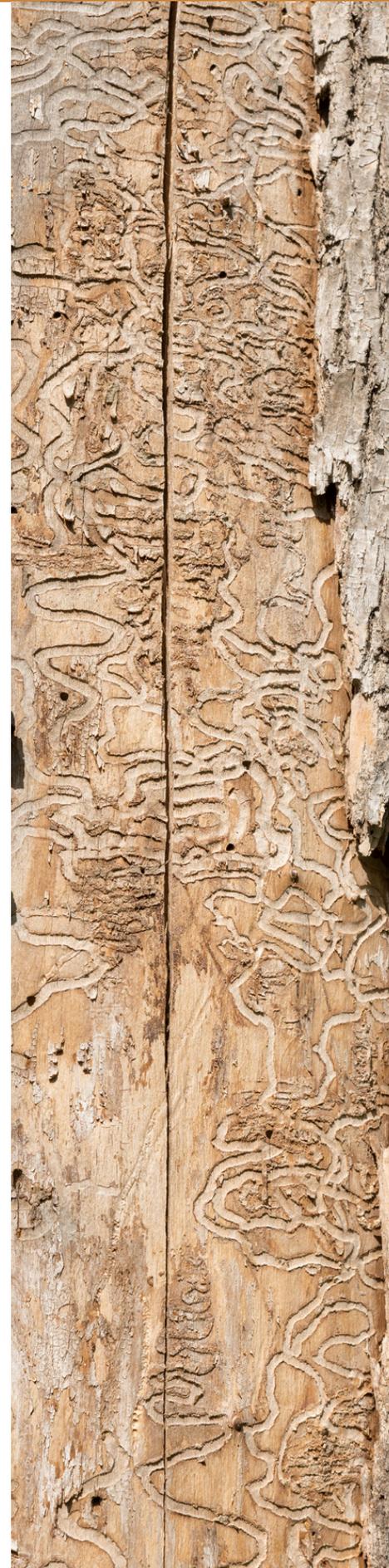
## KEY ISSUES

### REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Addressing threats, challenges and objectives identified within state Forest Action Plans requires coordinated, science-based approaches that integrate forest management, land-use planning, conservation strategies and community engagement efforts. Collaborative partnerships among government agencies, non-profit organizations, private landowners and local communities are essential for developing and implementing effective policies, programs and initiatives to safeguard forest ecosystems for future generations. Some of the threats and challenges identified in the South include:

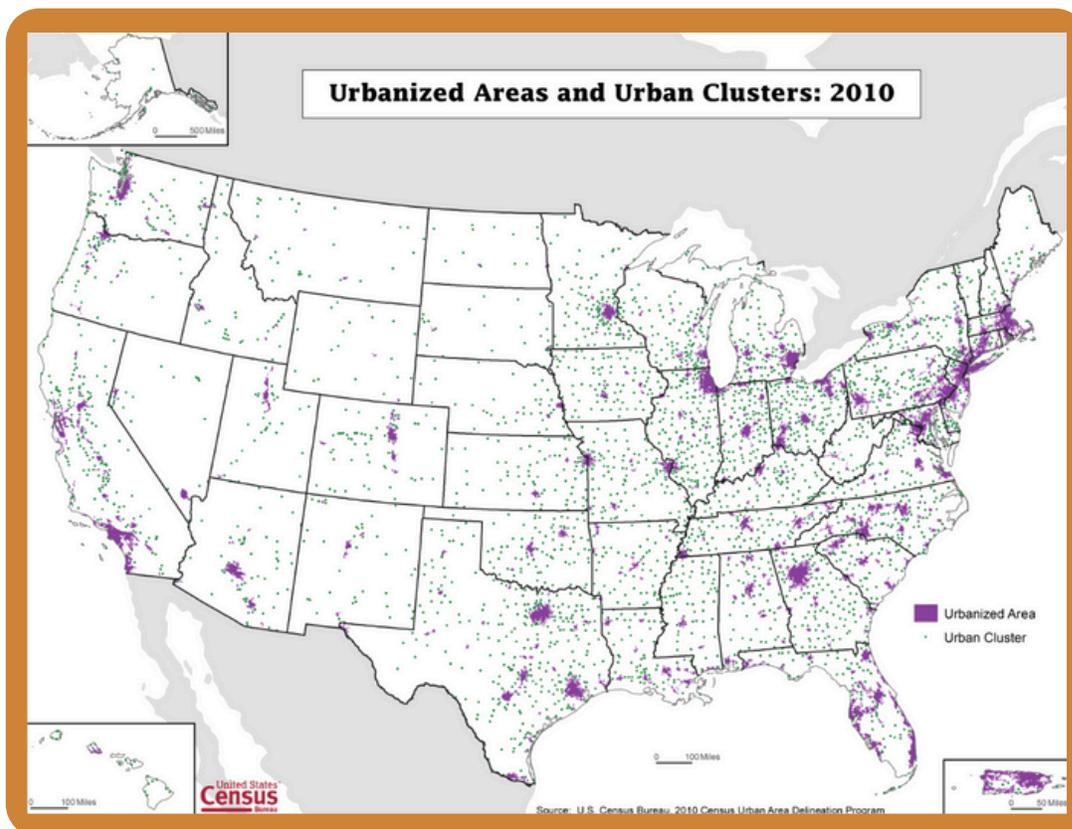
- **Invasive Species and Pests:**

- Invasive species and pests pose formidable challenges to forest health, biodiversity and ecosystem function in the identified states and territories.
- Pests such as the emerald ash borer, southern pine beetle and spongy moth aggressively infest and damage native vegetation, leading to declines in tree health, structural changes in forest communities and economic losses for timber industries.
- Invasive plants such as cogongrass, kudzu, Chinese privet and Japanese stiltgrass outcompete native flora, alter nutrient cycling, and degrade wildlife habitat, exacerbating the spread of pests and pathogens, and hindering forest regeneration and succession.
- Management strategies include early detection and rapid response programs, biological control measures, integrated pest management approaches, and public education and outreach campaigns to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species, restore affected ecosystems and enhance the resilience of forests to pest and disease outbreaks.



- **Urbanization and Development:**

- Rapid urbanization and suburban sprawl exert significant pressure on forested areas, particularly in regions experiencing population growth and expansion of metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Miami and Houston.
- The conversion of forested lands for residential, commercial and industrial purposes leads to habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity and disruption of ecological processes.
- Fragmentation can isolate wildlife populations, impede movement corridors, and increase vulnerability to invasive species and disease outbreaks. Moreover, urbanization alters hydrological cycles, degrades air and water quality, and exacerbates the urban heat island effect, impacting forest health and ecosystem resilience.
- Efforts to mitigate these impacts include providing technical assistance to landowners, supporting sustainable forest markets, land-use planning, zoning regulations, conservation easements and green infrastructure development to preserve and connect forested areas, protect critical habitats and enhance ecosystem services provided by forests in urban and peri-urban environments.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Urban and Rural Population: 1900-1990; Census 2000 Summary File 1 Table P002; 2010 Census Summary File 1 Table P2, A Century of Delineating a Changing Landscape: The Census Bureau's Urban and Rural Classification, 1910 to 2010

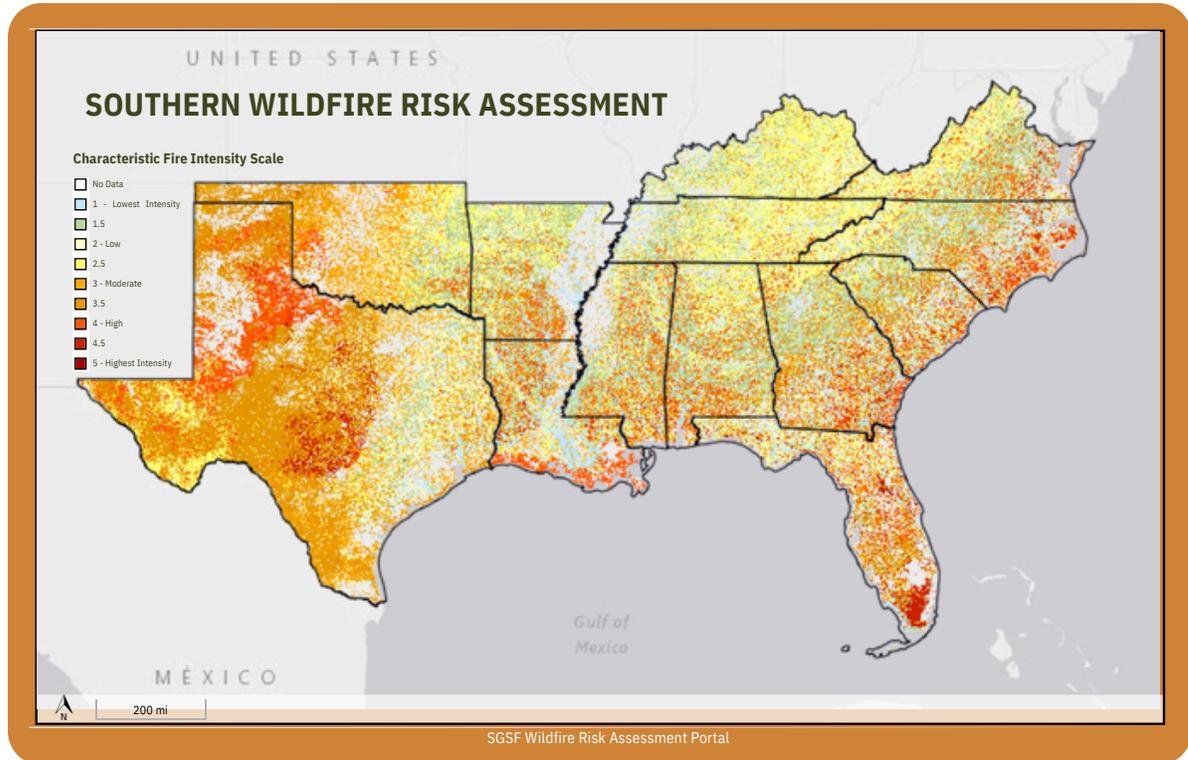
- **Forest Market Availability:**

- In the South, 86% of all forested land is owned by private landowners, many of whom manage their lands as working forests - using sustainable management practices to grow, harvest, sell and regrow timber.
- With so much of the south's forestland in private ownership, states rely on current, new and emerging forest product markets to maintain forest profitability, so that landowners can afford to keep their working forests intact and growing.
- Efforts to support vibrant and sustainable forest markets include providing landowner assistance to navigate available markets and certification programs to overcome market barriers; providing market and supply analysis services to help landowners, foresters, loggers, mills, business investors and other industry professionals make more informed decisions; and advocating to policymakers regarding the connection between strong, diverse markets and the sustainability of southern forests. This includes advocating for the removal of barriers to markets and the development of new and emerging markets, such as mass timber, and recognizing the role of biomass in carbon and climate policymaking both nationally and internationally. States also promote the use of forest products to consumers.



- **Wildfire Risk:**

- The U.S. South experiences more wildfires each year than any other region in the United States. Wildfires are a significant threat to forest ecosystems in the identified states and territories, particularly in the western and southeastern regions characterized by fire-adapted vegetation and fire-prone landscapes.



- Factors such as fuel buildup, fire suppression policies, land-use changes and climate variability contribute to increased wildfire occurrence, severity and duration.
- Uncontrolled wildfires pose risks to human safety, property and infrastructure, degrade air quality, soil fertility and water resources, and alter vegetation composition and successional trajectories, impacting forest structure and function over time.
- Mitigation efforts include fuel reduction treatments, prescribed burning, wildfire suppression and management techniques, community wildfire preparedness programs and public education campaigns to promote fire-adapted landscapes, fire-resilient communities and ecosystem resilience in fire-prone ecosystems.



- **Climate Change Impacts:**

- Climate change is exacerbating forest health challenges in the identified states and territories, manifesting in altered precipitation patterns, increased temperatures, more frequent and severe weather events and shifts in species distributions.
- Rising temperatures and prolonged drought stress trees, weaken their resilience to pests and diseases and increase susceptibility to wildfire ignition and spread.
- Changes in rainfall patterns influence forest hydrology, soil moisture levels, and plant phenology, impacting ecosystem productivity, carbon sequestration and water availability for wildlife and human communities.
- Adaptation strategies include assisted migration of tree species, promotion of climate-smart silvicultural practices, restoration of riparian buffers and wetlands to enhance water retention and flood mitigation, and implementation of prescribed burning and thinning programs to reduce fuel loads and wildfire risk in high-risk ecosystems.

- **Sustainable Land Management:**

- While the majority of landowners and land managers in the South practice sustainable forest management, southern state forestry agencies continue to promote best practices to keep forests healthy and intact. Unsustainable land management practices such as overgrazing and inadequate replanting practices, as well as the conversion of forests for other uses, can degrade soil quality, impair water retention and infiltration rates, and compromise biodiversity conservation and ecosystem resilience.
- Sustainable land management approaches include providing technical assistance to landowners, participation in forest certification programs, best management practices for forestry and agriculture, land-use planning and zoning regulations, and incentives for sustainable land stewardship to promote responsible land management practices, protect sensitive habitats and restore degraded ecosystems for long-term environmental sustainability and resilience.





- **Clean and Reliable Water**

- Water stress and pollution from agricultural runoff, industrial discharge and urban stormwater runoff can degrade water quality, impair aquatic habitats and compromise ecosystem health in forested watersheds.
- Nutrient loading, sedimentation and chemical contaminants impair the functioning of aquatic ecosystems, disrupt food chains/webs and threaten the viability of freshwater species, including fish, amphibians and aquatic invertebrates.
- Increased water demand, coupled with decreased water availability due to climate variability and land-use changes, exacerbate water stress, increase competition for limited water resources and undermine the ecological integrity of forested watersheds.
- Watershed management strategies include the promotion of best management practices for water quality, riparian buffer restoration, wetland creation and restoration, soil conservation practices, stormwater management measures and pollution prevention programs to protect water quality, enhance aquatic habitat and promote sustainable water use in forested landscapes.



- **Biodiversity:**

- Habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation, associated with land-use changes and development, threaten biodiversity by reducing available habitat for wildlife, impeding gene flow between populations and disrupting ecological interactions and ecosystem services.
- Loss of keystone species and functional diversity compromises ecosystem stability, resilience and adaptability to environmental change, increasing vulnerability to disturbances such as invasive species, pests, diseases and climate variability.
- Conservation strategies include habitat restoration and connectivity initiatives, protected area networks, species recovery programs and landscape-scale conservation planning to safeguard critical habitats, protect imperiled species and preserve ecosystem diversity and resilience for future generations.

## KEY ISSUES (BY STATE)

There are a diverse range of issues facing the forests within each state and territory, emphasizing the need for tailored management and conservation strategies to address local and regional concerns.

### Alabama:

- Invasive Species: Threats include pests like southern pine beetle and cogongrass, impacting pine forests and understory vegetation.
- Urbanization: Rapid urban development in areas like Birmingham and Huntsville leads to habitat fragmentation and loss of forested land.
- Climate Change: Increased temperatures and drought stress affect tree health, exacerbating susceptibility to pests and diseases.

### Arkansas:

- Invasive Species: Emerald ash borer and Chinese privet threaten native forests, while feral hogs disrupt understory vegetation.
- Unmanaged Forests: In rural areas, absentee ownership, transfer of ownership to heirs, second-home development and delay of forest management practices are all considered ongoing threats to healthy forests.
- Wildfire Risk: Pine-dominated forests are susceptible to wildfires, especially during drought periods.

### Florida:

- Invasive Species: Burmese pythons in the Everglades, southern pine beetle, invasive plants like cogongrass and other forest health threats like laurel wilt disease threaten native ecosystems.
- Urbanization: Expansion of cities like Miami and Orlando encroaches upon natural habitats, fragmenting forests and disrupting wildlife corridors.
- Sea Level Rise: Coastal forests face saltwater intrusion, storm surges and habitat loss due to rising sea levels and climate change impacts.

**Georgia:**

- **Wildfire Risk:** Pine forests in regions like the Okefenokee Swamp are susceptible to wildfires, exacerbated by dry conditions and lightning strikes.
- **Urbanization:** Atlanta's metropolitan area expansion leads to habitat loss and fragmentation in regions such as the Piedmont.
- **Climate Change:** Shifts in precipitation patterns affect forest hydrology and increase drought stress, impacting tree health and resilience.

**Kentucky:**

- **Invasive Species:** Tree pests like emerald ash borer threaten ash trees, while invasive plants like Japanese honeysuckle disrupt native vegetation.
- **Mining:** Surface coal mining operations can impact forested areas, leading to habitat destruction and water pollution in regions like the Appalachian Plateau.
- **Climate Change:** Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns affect forest ecosystems and wildlife populations, altering habitat suitability.

**Louisiana:**

- **Coastal Erosion:** Wetland loss and coastal erosion threaten bottomland hardwood forests, impacting wildlife habitat and ecosystem resilience.
- **Oil and Gas Development:** Energy extraction activities in regions like the Gulf Coast impact forested wetlands and contribute to habitat fragmentation.
- **Invasive Species:** Chinese tallow tree invades wet forests and grasslands, while spongy moth has caused heavy hardwood defoliation and mortality.

**Mississippi:**

- **Pollution:** The introduction of pollutants from point and non-point sources, such as household sewage, urban wastewater, and industrial and military effluents, can impact wildlife habitat and ecosystem resilience, and degrade water quality.
- **Invasive Species:** Threats include invasive plants like Chinese privet and kudzu, impacting forest health and biodiversity.
- **Urbanization:** Expansion of cities like Jackson leads to habitat loss and fragmentation, affecting wildlife populations and ecosystem services.

**North Carolina:**

- **Urbanization:** Development in cities like Charlotte and Raleigh leads to habitat loss and fragmentation, impacting forest biodiversity and ecosystem function.
- **Invasive Species:** Threats include pests like hemlock woolly adelgid and invasive plants like Japanese knotweed, impacting native forests and wildlife habitat.
- **Climate Change:** Shifts in temperature and precipitation patterns affect forest ecosystems, increasing wildfire risk and altering species distributions.

**Oklahoma:**

- **Wildfire Risk:** Improper or lack of land management practices in many parts of Oklahoma, coupled with the suppression of wildfire for nearly 100 years have allowed for significant accumulation of wildland fuels which contributes to wildfire severity.
- **Urbanization:** Development in cities like Oklahoma City and Tulsa leads to habitat loss and fragmentation, affecting wildlife habitat and connectivity.
- **Invasive Species:** Threats include pests like emerald ash borer and invasive plants like eastern redcedar, impacting forest health and biodiversity.

**South Carolina:**

- **Coastal Development:** Urbanization along the coast leads to habitat loss and fragmentation, impacting maritime forests and coastal wetlands.
- **Invasive Species:** Threats include pests like Asian longhorned beetle and invasive plants like Japanese honeysuckle, impacting forest health and biodiversity.
- **Climate Change:** Sea level rise and increased storm intensity threaten coastal forests, exacerbating saltwater intrusion and habitat loss.

**Tennessee:**

- **Forest Health:** Critical challenges include insect and disease risk, invasive species, and the impact of climate change resulting in rising temperatures, altered precipitation patterns and changes in disturbance regimes like wildfire and insect outbreaks.
- **Forest Industry:** Threats include declining tree grade due to long-term stand degradation, lack of diverse forest product markets and lack of staffing in the logging workforce.
- **Forestland Area Change:** Parcelization and fragmentation impacts clean water, recreation opportunities, wildfire complexity and suitable environments for diverse plants and wildlife.

**Texas:**

- **Urbanization:** Development in cities like Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth leads to habitat loss and fragmentation, impacting forest ecosystems and wildlife habitat.
- **Invasive Species:** Threats include pests like southern pine beetle and invasive plants like Chinese tallow, impacting forest health and biodiversity.
- **Wildfire Risk:** Population growth, changing land use and increasing drought frequency have contributed to wildfires which have threatened and, in some cases, burned through small towns and large cities alike, destroying hundreds of homes.

**Virginia:**

- **Urbanization:** Development in cities like Richmond and Virginia Beach leads to habitat loss and fragmentation, impacting forest biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- **Invasive Species:** Threats include pests like emerald ash borer and invasive plants like Japanese knotweed, impacting native forests and wildlife habitat.
- **Wildfire:** Changing climates, and changing forest management regimes associated with new and changing ownership all contribute to increased wildfire risk.

**Puerto Rico:**

- **Hurricanes:** Tropical storms and hurricanes pose significant threats to forest ecosystems, causing wind damage, flooding and landslides in regions like El Yunque National Forest.
- **Invasive Species:** Threats include pests like yellow tea thrip and mango borer, impacting forest health and biodiversity.
- **Land Use Change:** Conversion of forests for agriculture and urban development leads to habitat loss and fragmentation, affecting native species and ecosystem function.

**U.S. Virgin Islands:**

- **Hurricanes:** Tropical storms and hurricanes pose significant threats to forest ecosystems, causing wind damage, erosion and saltwater intrusion in regions like Virgin Islands National Park.
- **Invasive Species:** Threats include noxious weeds like the tan-tan tree that impact forest health and biodiversity.
- **Coastal Development:** Urbanization and tourism infrastructure development lead to habitat loss and fragmentation, impacting coastal forests and mangrove ecosystems.

## GOALS & OBJECTIVES

State Forest Action Plans in the South share several common overarching goals centered around promoting sustainable forest management, supporting new and emerging forest markets, conserving biodiversity and enhancing ecosystem resilience. These goals reflect a collective commitment to safeguarding forest resources and associated ecological, economic and societal benefits. Specific objectives outlined in these plans vary slightly based on regional priorities and challenges, but there are notable similarities.

Throughout the region, there is a strong emphasis on wildfire prevention and management, with objectives aimed at reducing wildfire risk, implementing fuel reduction strategies and enhancing community preparedness. Invasive species management is another common priority, with objectives focused on controlling and eradicating invasive plants and pests that threaten forest health and biodiversity.

Additionally, many of the Forest Action Plans highlight the importance of enhancing forest health and resilience by promoting sustainable forestry practices, providing technical assistance to landowners, restoring degraded habitats and conserving critical wildlife habitat. Water quality protection is also a recurring theme, with objectives aimed at safeguarding water resources and mitigating the impacts of land-use activities on aquatic ecosystems.

There is also a significant connection illustrated between healthy timber markets and optimum forest management. The South, nicknamed the world's wood basket, accounts for over half of all timber production in the United States and is a choice resource for buyers, suppliers and investors seeking an affordable supply of sustainable wood products with a variety of species, year-long harvesting and over 1,600 mills. The southern state Forest Action Plans heavily emphasize the critical role of forest markets in driving economic returns and sustainable management practices, highlighting the importance of healthy timber markets and sustainable logging practices for economic development, forest conservation and the enhancement of public benefits from forests. This includes traditional markets for products paper, lumber and furniture; non-timber forest products like pine straw, firewood, food and certain medicines; as well as emerging markets like biomass, biofuels, mass timber, carbon credits and more.

Sustainable timber harvesting practices balance economic objectives with ecological stewardship. Timber markets are seen as essential for landowners' incentives to invest in forest regeneration and management, and the success in timber and rural development is measured by maintaining forests as a source of wealth generation. The plans also touch upon the challenges and opportunities within the forestry workforce, and the states' strategic actions towards workforce development, which is deemed crucial for sustaining the south's \$251 billion forest products economy.

Community engagement and stakeholder involvement are integral components of several plans, reflecting a commitment to collaborative decision-making and inclusive governance. Objectives related to education, outreach and partnerships underscore the importance of building awareness and fostering stewardship among diverse stakeholders, including landowners, local communities, cities and municipalities, and the public.

While each state and territory will face unique challenges and opportunities in forest management and conservation, the overarching goals and objectives outlined in their respective action plans demonstrate a shared vision for sustainable forest stewardship and a commitment to addressing common priorities regionally. By working collaboratively and sharing resources and expertise, southern states and territories can effectively address complex forest management challenges and ensure the long-term health and vitality of their forest ecosystems.



State/Territory	Overarching Goal	Specific Objectives
<b>Alabama</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote sustainable forest management and conservation to enhance forest health and resilience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase forest stewardship</li> <li>Prevent and manage wildfires</li> <li>Protect water quality - Restore forested habitats</li> <li>Promote biodiversity conservation</li> </ul>
<b>Arkansas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance forest resources through sustainable management practices and collaborative partnerships.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce wildfire risk</li> <li>Combat invasive species</li> <li>Improve forest health and productivity</li> <li>Enhance wildlife habitat</li> <li>Promote sustainable forestry practices</li> </ul>
<b>Florida</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restore and maintain healthy forest ecosystems to support biodiversity, water resources, and recreation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage wildfire risk</li> <li>Control invasive species</li> <li>Restore degraded habitats</li> <li>Conserve biodiversity</li> <li>Promote sustainable forest management</li> </ul>
<b>Georgia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protect and manage forest resources to sustain environmental, economic and social benefits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance forest health and resilience</li> <li>Conserve biodiversity</li> <li>Promote sustainable forest management</li> <li>Engage stakeholders in forest stewardship</li> </ul>
<b>Kentucky</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conserve and enhance forest resources to support ecological, economic and recreational values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address forest health issues</li> <li>Promote sustainable forest management practices</li> <li>Enhance wildlife habitat</li> <li>Engage stakeholders in forest conservation</li> </ul>
<b>Louisiana</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protect and restore forested ecosystems to support biodiversity, water quality and cultural values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage wildfire risk</li> <li>Combat invasive species</li> <li>Restore wetland forests</li> <li>Enhance wildlife habitat</li> <li>Promote sustainable forestry practices</li> </ul>

State/Territory	Overarching Goal	Specific Objectives
<b>Mississippi</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustain forest resources and ecosystem services through collaborative management and conservation efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage wildfire risk</li> <li>• Control invasive species</li> <li>• Improve forest health and productivity</li> <li>• Enhance wildlife habitat</li> <li>• Promote sustainable forest management practices</li> </ul>
<b>North Carolina</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and manage forest resources to support ecological, economic and cultural values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance forest health and resilience</li> <li>• Conserve biodiversity</li> <li>• Manage wildfire risk</li> <li>• Promote sustainable forest management</li> <li>• Engage stakeholders in forest conservation</li> </ul>
<b>Oklahoma</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance forest resilience and ecosystem services through sustainable management and conservation practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage wildfire risk</li> <li>• Control invasive species</li> <li>• Improve forest health and productivity</li> <li>• Enhance wildlife habitat</li> <li>• Promote sustainable forestry practices</li> </ul>
<b>South Carolina</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and manage forest resources to sustain ecological, economic and social benefits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance forest health and resilience</li> <li>• Conserve biodiversity</li> <li>• Promote sustainable forest management</li> <li>• Engage stakeholders in forest stewardship</li> </ul>
<b>Tennessee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve and sustain the health, diversity and resiliency of Tennessee’s forests through strategic management activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance Forest Health and Resiliency</li> <li>• Expand Market Diversification</li> <li>• Maintain and Improve Connected Landscapes</li> <li>• Strengthen Wildfire Resilient Communities</li> </ul>

State/Territory	Overarching Goal	Specific Objectives
<b>Texas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and manage forest resources to support ecological, economic and social values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance forest health and resilience</li> <li>• Conserve biodiversity</li> <li>• Promote sustainable forest management</li> <li>• Engage stakeholders in forest stewardship</li> </ul>
<b>Virginia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conserve and manage forest resources to support ecological, economic and cultural values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance forest health and resilience</li> <li>• Conserve biodiversity</li> <li>• Manage wildfire risk</li> <li>• Promote sustainable forest management</li> <li>• Engage stakeholders in forest conservation</li> </ul>
<b>Puerto Rico</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore and sustainably manage forest resources to support biodiversity, water resources and cultural heritage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore degraded forests</li> <li>• Conserve biodiversity</li> <li>• Manage wildfire risk</li> <li>• Promote sustainable land use practices</li> <li>• Engage communities in forest stewardship</li> </ul>
<b>U.S. Virgin Islands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and restore forested ecosystems to support biodiversity, water quality and resilience to natural hazards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore degraded forests</li> <li>• Conserve biodiversity</li> <li>• Manage wildfire risk</li> <li>• Promote sustainable land use practices</li> <li>• Enhance community resilience to natural disasters</li> </ul>



## STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

Southern state Forest Action Plans collectively propose a comprehensive set of strategies and actions aimed at achieving common objectives related to sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation and ecosystem resilience. Across the region, there is a strong emphasis on proactive approaches to address key challenges such as wildfire risk, invasive species management and habitat restoration.

One of the primary strategies emphasized in many plans is the use of prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to reduce fuel loads and manage wildfire risk. By applying these measures in strategic areas, southern states aim to minimize the potential for catastrophic wildfires while promoting ecosystem health and resilience.

Supporting strong traditional and emerging forest markets is a major priority for state forestry agencies in the South. Strategies include providing technical assistance to help landowners make and document sustainable forest management decisions which can lead to long-term forest productivity and overall market stability. States are also engaged in facilitating market development, including traditional and new markets for wood products, bioenergy, specialty products and non-timber forest products. Agencies also collectively advocate for favorable policies and incentives that support forest landowners and the forestry industry and are working to improve infrastructure and logistics to facilitate market access for forest products, particularly in rural areas. These include, but are not limited to tax incentives, grant programs, and support for certification and/or documentation of sustainable forest management practices.



States also track, monitor and provide valuable data on forest resources, market trends, and industry needs to help stakeholders make informed decisions. Recognizing the need for skilled labor in the forestry sector, agencies support are also supporting training programs and initiatives to cultivate a knowledgeable and skilled workforce. These strategies collectively aim to support and sustain forest markets while ensuring the ecological and economic health of forested landscapes.

Invasive species management is another shared priority, with states implementing surveys, programs for monitoring and control measures to combat the spread of invasive plants and pests which threaten forest health and biodiversity. Strategies include targeted herbicide treatments, mechanical removal and biological control methods to suppress invasive species populations and prevent their establishment in sensitive habitats.

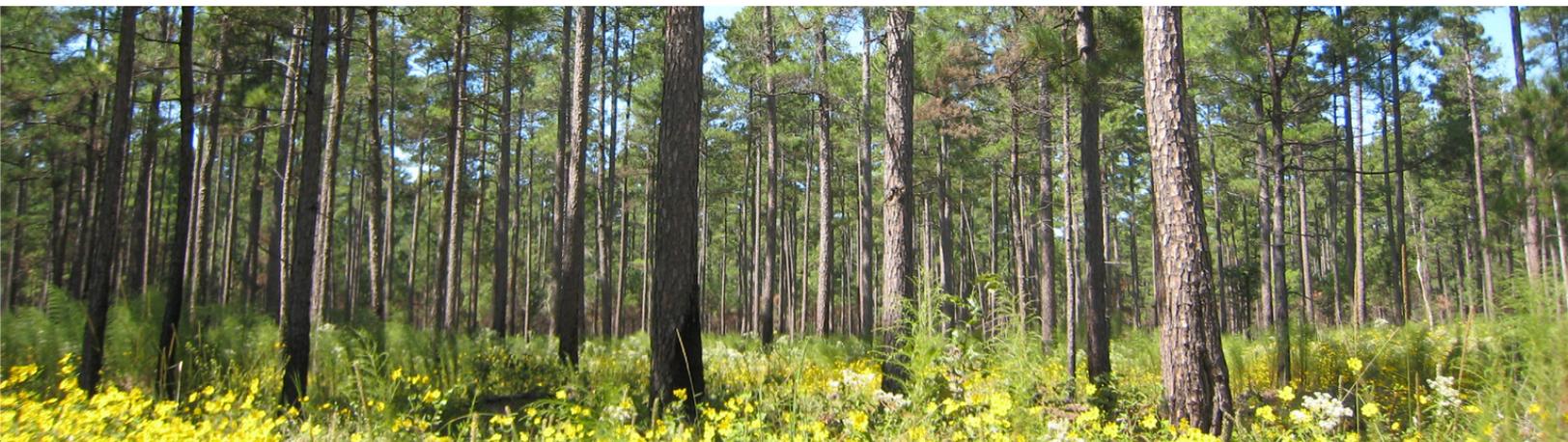
Additionally, states are actively engaged in habitat restoration efforts to enhance ecosystem function and support wildlife populations. This includes reforestation and afforestation projects on degraded lands, as well as the restoration of riparian and wetland habitats to improve water quality and enhance biodiversity.

Promoting sustainable forest management practices is a common theme across the region, with states providing technical assistance, financial incentives and education programs to encourage landowners to adopt responsible stewardship practices. This includes promoting certification programs such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) to ensure that forests are managed in an environmentally and socially responsible manner.

Furthermore, states are actively engaging stakeholders and communities in forest stewardship and conservation efforts. Through collaboration with federal, state and local government agencies, non-profit organizations, private landowners and local communities, states aim to foster a sense of shared responsibility for the management and protection of forest resources.

By implementing these strategies and actions collectively, states aim to enhance the health, resilience and long-term viability of forest ecosystems across the region, while also supporting the diverse ecological, economic and social values that forests provide.

State	Objective	Strategies & Actions
<b>Alabama</b>	Increase forest stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote best management practices for forest landowners.</li> <li>Provide technical assistance and financial incentives for sustainable forest management practices.</li> </ul>
	Prevent and manage wildfires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct prescribed burning and mechanical treatments to reduce fuel loads.</li> <li>Provide wildfire training and equipment to fire departments and landowners.</li> </ul>
	Protect water quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement riparian buffer zones along streams and water bodies.</li> <li>Monitor water quality parameters and assess impacts of forest management activities on aquatic ecosystems.</li> </ul>
	Restore forested habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct reforestation and afforestation projects on degraded lands.</li> <li>Restore riparian and wetland habitats through targeted restoration efforts.</li> </ul>
	Promote biodiversity conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and protect critical habitats for threatened and endangered species.</li> <li>Conduct surveys and monitoring programs to assess wildlife populations and habitat quality.</li> </ul>
<b>Arkansas</b>	Reduce wildfire risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement fuel reduction treatments in high-risk areas.</li> <li>Conduct prescribed burns to mimic natural fire regimes and reduce fuel buildup.</li> </ul>
	Combat invasive species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct surveys and monitoring to detect invasive species.</li> <li>Implement control and eradication efforts for priority invasive plants and pests.</li> </ul>
	Improve forest health and productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct forest health assessments and monitoring programs.</li> <li>Implement silvicultural treatments to improve stand structure and reduce susceptibility to pests and diseases.</li> </ul>



State	Objective	Strategies & Actions
<b>Arkansas</b> <i>(continued)</i>	Enhance wildlife habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore and maintain diverse forest habitats for wildlife.</li> <li>• Implement habitat improvement projects such as creating snags, brush piles and wildlife openings.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable forestry practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education and outreach on sustainable forest management.</li> <li>• Encourage certification programs such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI).</li> </ul>
<b>Florida</b>	Manage wildfire risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and maintain wildfire risk assessment and planning tools.</li> <li>• Conduct prescribed burns and mechanical treatments to reduce fuel loads and wildfire risk.</li> </ul>
	Control invasive species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct surveys and monitoring for invasive plants and pests.</li> <li>• Implement control measures such as herbicide treatments, mechanical removal and biological control.</li> </ul>
	Restore degraded habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore wetlands, longleaf pine ecosystems and other degraded habitats.</li> <li>• Conduct reforestation and restoration projects to enhance ecosystem function and biodiversity.</li> </ul>
	Conserve biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and protect critical habitats for rare and endangered species.</li> <li>• Conduct species recovery programs and habitat restoration initiatives.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable forest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide technical assistance and financial incentives for sustainable forest management practices.</li> <li>• Encourage landowners to implement conservation easements and forest management plans.</li> </ul>
<b>Georgia</b>	Enhance forest health and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct forest health assessments and monitoring programs.</li> <li>• Implement silvicultural practices to improve stand vigor and resilience to pests, diseases and climate stressors.</li> </ul>
	Conserve biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and manage priority habitats for rare and endangered species.</li> <li>• Restore and maintain habitat connectivity through land acquisition and conservation easements.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable forest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education and outreach on sustainable forestry practices.</li> <li>• Develop voluntary incentive programs for forest landowners to implement conservation practices and management plans.</li> </ul>

State	Objective	Strategies & Actions
<b>Georgia</b> <i>(continued)</i>	Engage stakeholders in forest stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate collaboration and partnerships among government agencies, NGOs, private landowners and local communities.</li> <li>Conduct outreach events, training and workshops to promote forest stewardship.</li> </ul>
<b>Kentucky</b>	Address forest health issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct forest health assessments and monitoring programs.</li> <li>Implement silvicultural treatments to improve stand vigor and reduce susceptibility to pests and diseases.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable forest management practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide technical assistance and financial incentives for sustainable forestry practices.</li> <li>Encourage forest certification programs to promote responsible forest management.</li> </ul>
	Enhance wildlife habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restore and maintain diverse forest habitats for wildlife.</li> <li>Implement habitat improvement projects such as creating snags, brush piles and wildlife openings.</li> </ul>
	Engage stakeholders in forest conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, private landowners, and local communities.</li> <li>Conduct outreach and education programs to promote forest conservation and stewardship.</li> </ul>
<b>Louisiana</b>	Manage wildfire risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct prescribed burns and mechanical treatments to reduce fuel loads.</li> <li>Develop and maintain wildfire risk assessment and planning tools.</li> </ul>
	Combat invasive species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct surveys and monitoring for invasive plants and pests.</li> <li>Implement control measures such as herbicide treatments, mechanical removal, and biological control.</li> </ul>
	Restore wetland forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restore hydrological processes and vegetation communities in degraded wetland forests.</li> <li>Conduct reforestation and restoration projects in priority wetland areas.</li> </ul>
	Enhance wildlife habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restore and maintain diverse forest habitats for wildlife.</li> <li>Implement habitat improvement projects such as creating snags, brush piles and wildlife openings.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable forestry practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide education and outreach on sustainable forestry practices.</li> <li>Encourage landowners to implement conservation easements and sustainable forest management plans.</li> </ul>

State	Objective	Strategies & Actions
<b>Mississippi</b>	Manage wildfire risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct prescribed burns and mechanical treatments to reduce fuel loads.</li> <li>• Develop and maintain wildfire risk assessment and planning tools.</li> </ul>
	Control invasive species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct surveys and monitoring for invasive plants and pests.</li> <li>• Implement control measures such as herbicide treatments, mechanical removal and biological control.</li> </ul>
	Improve forest health and productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct forest health assessments and monitoring programs.</li> <li>• Implement silvicultural treatments to improve stand vigor and resilience to pests and diseases.</li> </ul>
	Enhance wildlife habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore and maintain diverse forest habitats for wildlife.</li> <li>• Implement habitat improvement projects such as creating snags, brush piles and wildlife openings.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable forest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide technical assistance and financial incentives for sustainable forestry practices.</li> <li>• Encourage landowners to participate in forest certification programs.</li> </ul>
<b>North Carolina</b>	Enhance forest health and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct forest health assessments and monitoring programs.</li> <li>• Implement silvicultural practices to improve stand vigor and resilience to pests, diseases and climate stressors.</li> </ul>
	Conserve biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and manage priority habitats for rare and endangered species.</li> <li>• Conduct species surveys and monitoring to assess biodiversity and habitat quality.</li> </ul>
	Manage wildfire risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct prescribed burns and mechanical treatments to reduce fuel loads.</li> <li>• Develop and maintain wildfire risk assessment and planning tools.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable forest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education and outreach on sustainable forestry practices.</li> <li>• Encourage implementation of conservation easements and forest management plans.</li> </ul>
	Engage stakeholders in forest conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, private landowners and local communities.</li> <li>• Conduct outreach events and workshops to promote forest conservation and stewardship.</li> </ul>

State	Objective	Strategies & Actions
<b>Oklahoma</b>	Manage wildfire risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct prescribed burns and mechanical treatments to reduce fuel loads.</li> <li>• Develop and maintain wildfire risk assessment and planning tools.</li> </ul>
	Control invasive species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct surveys and monitoring for invasive plants and pests.</li> <li>• Implement control measures such as herbicide treatments, mechanical removal, and biological control.</li> </ul>
	Improve forest health and productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct forest health assessments and monitoring programs</li> <li>• Implement silvicultural treatments to improve stand vigor and resilience to pests and diseases.</li> </ul>
	Enhance wildlife habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore and maintain diverse forest habitats for wildlife.</li> <li>• Implement habitat improvement projects such as creating snags, brush piles and wildlife openings.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable forestry practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide technical assistance and financial incentives for sustainable forestry practices.</li> <li>• Encourage implementation of forest certification programs.</li> </ul>
<b>South Carolina</b>	Enhance forest health and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct forest health assessments and monitoring programs.</li> <li>• Implement silvicultural practices to improve stand vigor and resilience to pests, diseases and climate stressors.</li> </ul>
	Conserve biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and manage priority habitats for rare and endangered species.</li> <li>• Conduct species surveys and monitoring to assess biodiversity and habitat quality.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable forest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education and outreach on sustainable forestry practices.</li> <li>• Encourage implementation of conservation easements and forest management plans.</li> </ul>
	Engage stakeholders in forest stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, private landowners and local communities.</li> <li>• Conduct outreach events and workshops to promote forest stewardship.</li> </ul>
<b>Tennessee</b>	Enhance Forest Health and Resiliency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen monitoring, treatment, and prevention against invasive pest and plant species.</li> <li>• Maintain fire-adapted communities, expand reforestation in riparian zones, and track forest composition changes.</li> </ul>
	Expand Market Diversification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance markets for low-quality hardwood forest products and encourage forest landowners to plan for sustainable forest management.</li> <li>• Strengthen the forest industry by identifying data collection methods for wood removal and utilization across all ownership types, creating a sustainable workforce, and ensuring responsible forest management for a sustainable wood supply.</li> </ul>

State	Objective	Strategies & Actions
<p><b>Tennessee</b> <i>(continued)</i></p>	<p>Maintain and Improve Connected Landscapes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategically connect rural and urban working forests to improve economies of scale for forest operations.</li> <li>• Increase and maintain canopy cover in urban and riparian areas to protect water quality and reduce future environmental stressors caused by urbanization</li> </ul>
	<p>Strengthen Wildfire Resilient Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement fire management activities to reduce wildfire frequency and severity</li> <li>• Improve wildfire resilience through Fire Adapted Community activities and enhance emergency responder capacity in priority areas</li> </ul>
<p><b>Texas</b></p>	<p>Enhance forest health and resilience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct forest health assessments and monitoring programs.</li> <li>• Implement silvicultural practices to improve stand vigor and resilience to pests, diseases and climate stressors.</li> </ul>
	<p>Conserve biodiversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and manage priority habitats for rare and endangered species.</li> <li>• Conduct species surveys and monitoring to assess biodiversity and habitat quality.</li> </ul>
	<p>Promote sustainable forest management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education and outreach on sustainable forestry practices.</li> <li>• Encourage implementation of conservation easements and forest management plans.</li> </ul>
	<p>Engage stakeholders in forest stewardship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, private landowners and local communities.</li> <li>• Conduct outreach events and workshops to promote forest stewardship.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Virginia</b></p>	<p>Enhance forest health and resilience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct forest health assessments and monitoring programs.</li> <li>• Implement silvicultural practices to improve stand vigor and resilience to pests, diseases and climate stressors.</li> </ul>
	<p>Conserve biodiversity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and manage priority habitats for rare and endangered species.</li> <li>• Conduct species surveys and monitoring to assess biodiversity and habitat quality.</li> </ul>
	<p>Manage wildfire risk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct prescribed burns and mechanical treatments to reduce fuel loads.</li> <li>• Develop and maintain wildfire risk assessment and planning tools.</li> </ul>
	<p>Promote sustainable forest management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education and outreach on sustainable forestry practices.</li> <li>• Encourage implementation of conservation easements and forest management plans.</li> </ul>

State	Objective	Strategies & Actions
<b>Virginia</b> <i>(continued)</i>	Engage stakeholders in forest conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, private landowners and local communities.</li> <li>Conduct outreach events and workshops to promote forest conservation and stewardship.</li> </ul>
<b>Puerto Rico</b>	Restore degraded forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct reforestation and afforestation projects on degraded lands.</li> <li>Restore riparian and wetland habitats through targeted restoration efforts.</li> </ul>
	Conserve biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and protect critical habitats for threatened and endangered species.</li> <li>Conduct surveys and monitoring programs to assess wildlife populations and habitat quality.</li> </ul>
	Manage wildfire risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and maintain wildfire risk assessment and planning tools.</li> <li>Conduct prescribed burns and mechanical treatments to reduce fuel loads and wildfire risk.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable land use practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement land-use planning and zoning regulations to conserve forested areas.</li> <li>Encourage sustainable land management practices through education and outreach programs.</li> </ul>
	Engage communities in forest stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate collaboration with local communities and stakeholders.</li> <li>Conduct outreach and education programs to promote awareness and stewardship of forest resources.</li> </ul>
<b>U.S. Virgin Islands</b>	Restore degraded forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct reforestation and afforestation projects on degraded lands.</li> <li>Restore riparian and wetland habitats through targeted restoration efforts.</li> </ul>
	Conserve biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and protect critical habitats for threatened and endangered species.</li> <li>Conduct surveys and monitoring programs to assess wildlife populations and habitat quality.</li> </ul>
	Manage wildfire risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and maintain wildfire risk assessment and planning tools.</li> <li>Conduct prescribed burns and mechanical treatments to reduce fuel loads and wildfire risk.</li> </ul>
	Promote sustainable land use practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement land-use planning and zoning regulations to conserve forested areas.</li> <li>Encourage sustainable land management practices through education and outreach programs.</li> </ul>
	Enhance community resilience to natural disasters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement community-based disaster preparedness and response plans.</li> <li>Provide resources and support for community-led initiatives to enhance resilience to natural hazards.</li> </ul>

## PRIORITY LANDSCAPE AREAS

State forestry agencies used various approaches when identifying priority landscape areas, depending on their needs and capacity. This section highlights several representative examples and various approaches states used to determine priority level for landscapes.

State	Identified Priority Areas	Selection Criteria	Methodology
<b>Alabama</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appalachian Mountains</li> <li>Mobile River Basin</li> <li>Coastal Plains</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological significance</li> <li>Conservation value</li> <li>stakeholder input</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological assessments (habitat mapping, species inventories, etc.)</li> <li>Stakeholder consultations</li> <li>Conservation value assessments</li> </ul>
<b>Arkansas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ozark and Ouachita National Forests</li> <li>Mississippi Alluvial Plain</li> <li>Arkansas River Valley</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological significance</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Water resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remote sensing data</li> <li>Biodiversity surveys</li> <li>Water resource analyses</li> </ul>
<b>Florida</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apalachicola National Forest</li> <li>Ocala National Forests</li> <li>Big Cypress National Preserve</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unique ecosystems</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Conservation value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species distribution models</li> <li>Habitat assessments</li> <li>Ecological surveys</li> </ul>
<b>Georgia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest</li> <li>Coastal Plain</li> <li>Piedmont region</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological diversity</li> <li>Recreational opportunities</li> <li>Economic importance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Socioeconomic data</li> <li>Ecological assessments</li> <li>Recreational surveys</li> </ul>
<b>Kentucky</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daniel Boone National Forest</li> <li>Cumberland Plateau</li> <li>Green River Basin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological significance</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Recreational value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Habitat suitability models</li> <li>Biodiversity assessments</li> <li>Recreational surveys</li> </ul>
<b>Louisiana</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kisatchie National Forest</li> <li>Atchafalaya Basin</li> <li>Coastal wetlands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological importance</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Resilience to climate change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate change projections</li> <li>Biodiversity inventories</li> <li>Resilience assessments</li> </ul>
<b>Mississippi</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DeSoto National Forest</li> <li>Mississippi River Alluvial Plain</li> <li>Gulf Coast region</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological diversity</li> <li>Wildlife habitat</li> <li>Economic significance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Habitat suitability models</li> <li>Wildlife surveys</li> <li>Economic impact analyses</li> </ul>

State	Identified Priority Areas	Selection Criteria	Methodology
<b>North Carolina</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests</li> <li>Uwharrie National Forest</li> <li>Great Smoky Mountains</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological integrity</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Recreational value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological integrity assessments</li> <li>Biodiversity surveys</li> <li>Recreational value analyses</li> </ul>
<b>Oklahoma</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ouachita National Forest</li> <li>Cross Timbers region</li> <li>Ozark Plateau</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological significance</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Water resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Habitat assessments</li> <li>Biodiversity surveys</li> <li>Hydrological analyses</li> </ul>
<b>South Carolina</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Francis Marion National Forest</li> <li>Sumter National Forest</li> <li>Blue Ridge Escarpment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological diversity</li> <li>Wildlife habitat</li> <li>Recreational opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Habitat mapping</li> <li>Wildlife population surveys</li> <li>Recreational assessments</li> </ul>
<b>Tennessee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cumberland Plateau</li> <li>Tennessee River Valley</li> <li>Highland Rim Basin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Majority forested areas</li> <li>Support forest markets and rural economies</li> <li>High ecological importance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Nature Conservancy's Connected and Resilient Prioritized Networks</li> <li>USFS Forest Inventory &amp; Analysis Program's Forest Carbon Stock Estimates</li> <li>USFS Forests to Faucets</li> </ul>
<b>Texas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pineywoods region</li> <li>Edwards Plateau</li> <li>Gulf Coast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological diversity</li> <li>Wildlife habitat</li> <li>Economic significance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wildlife habitat models</li> <li>Economic impact assessments</li> <li>Biodiversity surveys</li> </ul>
<b>Virginia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>George Washington and Jefferson National Forests</li> <li>Shenandoah Valley</li> <li>Coastal Plain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological integrity</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Cultural heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecological integrity indices</li> <li>Biodiversity assessments</li> <li>Cultural heritage surveys</li> </ul>
<b>Puerto Rico</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>El Yunque National Forest</li> <li>Luquillo Mountains</li> <li>Guánica Dry Forest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unique ecosystems</li> <li>Biodiversity</li> <li>Cultural significance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Endemism assessments</li> <li>Biodiversity surveys</li> <li>Cultural significance inventories</li> </ul>

## OTHER DATA SOURCES

In keeping with the direction within the Farm Bill to develop state Forest Action Plans, most states used preexisting geospatial analysis efforts as a point of reference as they identified priority areas. As they refined their priority issues, these were often enhanced to tailor the analysis to each state's particular situation. The following resources were likely used to support priority assessments.

### **Southern Forest Land Assessment**

The Southern Forest Land Assessment (SFLA) is a project of the Southern Group of State Foresters to identify important rural lands across the South where efforts in rural forestry assistance should be focused. It addresses objectives of the USDA Forest Service Spatial Analysis Project. The SFLA project combined 13 weighted layers to produce an index map showing areas across the South of high, medium, and low priority. Ten of the layers relate to the status of forest resources; three are related to threats to those resources. A majority of states used SFLA layers to develop one or more of their priority area maps. For example, Texas created most of its priority area maps using one or more SFLA layer for each. To address urban priority areas, it supplemented SFLA with information such as tree canopy cover and amount of impervious surface.

### **Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal**

The Southern Group of State Foresters manages the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment (SouthWRAP) tool to help states identify wildfire-related priority lands. Of the states that identified geospatial wildfire-specific priority areas, nearly all used this tool, either on its own or in conjunction with other information. The states that provided named priority landscapes either used SouthWRAP to inform those areas or plan to use the tool to further refine priority areas.

### **Forest Inventory and Analysis**

Through the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program, the USDA Forest Service and State forestry agencies collect, analyze and publish data on the extent and condition of forests across the United States. States rely on FIA data for their assessments, and several used the information to help identify priority areas.

### **National Insect and Disease Risk Maps**

Several states made use of the USDA Forest Service Insect and Disease Risk Maps (NIDRM). These maps estimate the risk of tree mortality due to various forest pests. States typically used this information in combination with other data as part of their priority area identification process. Others used one or more maps to illustrate threats to their forest resources.

## PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION

Southern state Forest Action Plans consistently highlight the importance of partnerships and collaborative efforts among all levels of government, non-profit organizations, private landowners and other key stakeholders. These collaborations are recognized as essential for addressing complex forest management challenges and achieving shared conservation goals.

Across the region, various coordination mechanisms and initiatives are proposed to foster cooperation and enhance stakeholder engagement. One common approach is the establishment of collaborative working groups or task forces comprised of representatives from diverse sectors, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, industry associations, academia and local communities. These groups serve as platforms for sharing information, coordinating activities and developing joint strategies to address priority issues such as wildfire management, invasive species control, and habitat restoration.



Additionally, many states emphasize the importance of building partnerships through formal agreements, memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and cooperative agreements with external stakeholders. These agreements outline specific roles, responsibilities and commitments for participating organizations, facilitating coordinated action and resource sharing to achieve common objectives.

Furthermore, states leverage existing networks and alliances to enhance collaboration and utilize resources more effectively. This includes participation in regional initiatives, such as the Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF), which provide opportunities for states to collaborate on regional forestry issues, share best practices and access funding opportunities.



Education and outreach programs are another key component of states' collaborative efforts, aimed at raising awareness, building capacity and fostering stewardship among stakeholders and the public. States conduct workshops, training sessions and public forums to engage diverse audiences and promote a shared understanding of important forestry issues and priorities.

Overall, state Forest Action Plans demonstrate a strong commitment to partnership and collaboration as essential elements of effective forest management and conservation. By working together across sectors and jurisdictions, states aim to leverage collective expertise, resources and influence to address complex challenges and achieve positive outcomes for forest ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

## CROSS-BOUNDARY PARTNERSHIPS &amp; INITIATIVES

Partnership/Initiative	Description
<b>Southern Group of State Foresters (SGSF)</b>	SGSF facilitates collaboration among state foresters and forestry agencies across the southern region of the United States. It serves as a platform for sharing best practices, coordinating forest management efforts and addressing common challenges such as invasive species, wildfire management and sustainable timber harvesting. By fostering interstate cooperation, SGSF aims to promote healthy forests, resilient ecosystems and vibrant rural economies across the region.
<b>Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS)</b>	SERPPAS is a collaborative partnership among federal, state, and local agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations and private stakeholders, to promote sustainable land use planning and natural resource management in the Southeast region. The partnership focuses on addressing key challenges such as habitat loss, water quality degradation, and climate change impacts through coordinated planning, research, and implementation of best management practices.
<b>Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA)</b>	SEAFWA is a collaborative partnership among state fish and wildlife agencies in the southeastern United States. The association works to address common conservation challenges and manage wildlife resources across state lines. Through joint research, monitoring, and management efforts, SEAFWA aims to conserve biodiversity, restore habitat, and ensure sustainable management of fish and wildlife populations across diverse ecosystems, including forests, wetlands, and coastal areas.
<b>Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act (CFAA) Cooperative Forestry Program</b>	The CFAA Cooperative Forestry Program provides funding and technical assistance to support collaborative forestry projects and initiatives across multiple states. Through partnerships with state forestry agencies, non-profit organizations, and private landowners, the program promotes sustainable forest management practices, wildfire prevention, and conservation of forest resources. By leveraging federal resources and expertise, the program helps enhance forest health, biodiversity, and ecosystem services across diverse landscapes.
<b>Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP)</b>	JFSP is a collaborative initiative that supports scientific research and knowledge exchange to improve wildfire management across the southern United States. By fostering partnerships among federal agencies, state forestry agencies, universities, and other stakeholders, JFSP advances understanding of fire behavior, fire ecology, and effective fire management strategies. Through research grants, training programs, and outreach activities, JFSP contributes to building resilient communities, protecting natural resources, and reducing wildfire risks across diverse landscapes.

## CROSS-BOUNDARY PARTNERSHIPS &amp; INITIATIVES

Partnership/Initiative	Description
<b>Forest Stewardship Program</b>	The Forest Stewardship Program provides technical assistance and financial incentives to private landowners for sustainable forest management practices. Through partnerships with state forestry agencies, extension services, and conservation organizations, the program helps landowners develop forest management plans, implement best management practices, and enhance wildlife habitat on their properties. By promoting active forest management and stewardship, the program contributes to healthy forests, productive landscapes, and resilient communities across the region.
<b>Longleaf Pine Restoration Initiative</b>	The Longleaf Pine Restoration Initiative is a collaborative effort to restore and conserve longleaf pine ecosystems across the southeastern United States. Led by federal, state, and non-profit partners, the initiative focuses on restoring habitat, conducting prescribed burns, and implementing sustainable forestry practices to enhance the health and resilience of longleaf pine landscapes. By restoring native ecosystems and promoting stewardship, the initiative aims to conserve biodiversity, protect water resources, and sustain traditional land uses across state boundaries.
<b>Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) River Basin Conservation Initiative</b>	The ACF River Basin Conservation Initiative is a multi-state effort focused on conserving and managing water resources within the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin. This collaborative initiative addresses water quality, quantity, and ecosystem health issues through integrated watershed management, stakeholder engagement, and science-based decision-making. By promoting sustainable water management practices and collaborative governance, the initiative aims to safeguard critical habitats, support diverse economies, and enhance community resilience across state boundaries.
<b>Mississippi River Alluvial Valley (MAV) Conservation Partnership</b>	The MAV Conservation Partnership is a collaborative effort to restore and enhance wildlife habitat and water quality within the Mississippi River Alluvial Valley. Led by federal, state, and non-profit partners, the partnership focuses on restoring bottomland hardwood forests, wetlands, and other critical habitats to benefit migratory birds, fish, and other wildlife species. By implementing conservation practices and engaging landowners, the partnership aims to conserve biodiversity, improve water quality, and sustain traditional land uses across state boundaries.
<b>Central Appalachian Forest Ecosystem Collaborative (CAFEC)</b>	CAFEC is a collaborative initiative focused on conserving and restoring forest ecosystems in the Central Appalachian region. Led by federal, state, and non-profit partners, the initiative aims to address key conservation challenges such as habitat fragmentation, invasive species, and unsustainable land use practices. By promoting landscape-scale conservation planning, stakeholder engagement, and on-the-ground restoration efforts, CAFEC seeks to enhance forest health, biodiversity, and ecosystem resilience across state boundaries.

**CROSS-BOUNDARY PARTNERSHIPS & INITIATIVES**

Partnership/Initiative	Description
<p><b>Southern Blue Ridge Fire Learning Network</b></p>	<p>The Southern Blue Ridge Fire Learning Network promotes prescribed fire and other fire management practices in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains. Led by federal, state, and non-profit partners, the network provides training, technical assistance, and knowledge sharing opportunities to landowners, fire managers, and communities. By fostering collaboration and building capacity for safe and effective fire management, the network aims to reduce wildfire risks, restore fire-adapted ecosystems, and enhance community resilience across state boundaries.</p>
<p><b>Central Hardwoods Joint Venture (CHJV)</b></p>	<p>CHJV is a partnership among states within the Central Hardwoods region, focusing on conserving bird species and their habitats across diverse forest landscapes. Led by federal, state, and non-profit partners, the joint venture supports habitat restoration, land protection, and research initiatives to address key conservation challenges such as habitat loss, climate change, and invasive species. By promoting collaborative conservation efforts, CHJV seeks to conserve biodiversity, enhance ecosystem resilience, and sustain healthy forest ecosystems across state boundaries.</p>
<p><b>Gulf Coast Prairie Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GCPLCC)</b></p>	<p>GCPLCC is a partnership focused on conserving natural resources and biodiversity in the Gulf Coast Prairie region. Led by federal, state, and non-profit partners, the cooperative supports collaborative research, planning, and conservation efforts to address key conservation challenges such as habitat loss, invasive species, and climate change impacts. By promoting landscape-scale conservation actions and stakeholder engagement, GCPLCC seeks to conserve critical habitats, protect wildlife populations, and sustain ecosystem services across state boundaries.</p>



# COMMONALITIES ACROSS PLANS



Shared priorities, strategies and approaches among southern states and territories are evident across several key areas in their forest action plans:

- **Sustainable Forest Management:**

- Across the region, states prioritize sustainable forest management practices aimed at enhancing forest health, resilience and productivity. Strategies include promoting best management practices, conducting forest health assessments and implementing silvicultural treatments.
- States recognize the importance of adopting science-based approaches to ensure that forests are managed in an environmentally and economically sustainable manner for present and future generations.

- **Wildfire Risk Management:**

- Managing wildfire risk is a shared priority, with states implementing a combination of fuel reduction treatments, prescribed burns and wildfire risk assessment tools to mitigate the potential for catastrophic wildfires.
- Strategies focus on enhancing community preparedness, improving firefighting capabilities and reducing fuel loads in high-risk areas to minimize the impact of wildfires on communities and natural resources.

- **Support for Forest Markets:**

- Thriving forest markets help ensure private landowners, who own 86% of all forest land in the South, have the capability and freedom to keep the South's forests intact, healthy and productive. Supporting strong traditional and emerging forest markets is a priority for state forestry agencies in the South.
- Strategies include promoting sustainable practices, supporting traditional marketing and developing new markets, enhancing workforce training, fostering public-private partnerships, leveraging technology, advocating for supportive policies, providing industry data and improving infrastructure to sustain both the ecological and economic health of forests.

- **Invasive Species Control:**

- States are actively engaged in combating invasive plants and pests threatening forest health and biodiversity through surveys, monitoring programs and control measures.
- Strategies include early detection and rapid response efforts, implementing quarantine measures and raising public awareness to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species.



- **Habitat Restoration:**

- Efforts to restore diverse forest habitats are a common priority among states, including reforestation projects, riparian and wetland habitat restoration, and wildlife habitat enhancements.
- Strategies aim to support biodiversity, improve water quality and enhance ecosystem resilience by restoring degraded habitats and creating habitat corridors for wildlife movement.

- **Partnerships and Collaboration:**

- Collaboration among government agencies, non-profit organizations, private landowners and stakeholders is emphasized as essential for addressing complex forest management challenges effectively.
- States leverage collaborative mechanisms, formal agreements and regional networks to foster cooperation, share resources and implement coordinated action plans to achieve shared forest management and conservation goals.

# CONCLUSION

In reviewing the Forest Action Plans and associated data from the states and territories of the Southern Region, a comprehensive picture emerges of the South's collective forest management and conservation strategies. Across diverse landscapes and ecosystems, shared priorities are evident, including sustainable forest management, wildfire risk mitigation, forest market availability, invasive species control, habitat restoration and collaborative partnerships. These common goals reflect a collective commitment to preserving the ecological integrity, economic viability and community wellness derived from forest resources.

While each state and territory approaches forest management with unique strategies and resources, the overarching aim remains consistent: to conserve, protect and enhance forest ecosystems for current and future generations. Through proactive tactics such as conducting forest health assessments, implementing best management practices and engaging in collaborative partnerships, these entities strive to address complex challenges and promote the resilience of forest ecosystems.

Despite variations in state-specific data availability and approaches, the collective commitment to safeguarding forest resources and their many benefits is evident. By leveraging collaborative mechanisms and sharing resources effectively, these states and territories aim to ensure the long-term health, resilience and vitality of southern forest ecosystems.

Looking ahead, sustained collaboration, innovation and adaptive management will be critical for effectively addressing emerging threats such as climate change, biodiversity loss, wildfire impacts and socioeconomic pressures. By harnessing the collective expertise and resources of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, private landowners and communities, the region can achieve greater resilience and sustainability in forest management practices. Ultimately, the success of these efforts hinges on ongoing commitment, cooperation and shared stewardship.

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