

A Position of the Florida Division of the Society of American Foresters

Position

In order to reduce loss and fragmentation of forests in Florida, the Florida Division of the Society of American Foresters supports:

- creative land-use planning strategies that respect the rights and responsibilities of forest landowners, while recognizing the importance of forests to the people of Florida
- market-based approaches that value environmental services provided by forests
- tax treatment for forest owners that recognizes the value of forests to the people of Florida and the inequitable tax burden imposed on forest landowners
- creative voluntary programs that ensure the long-term protection of Florida's forests
- maintaining existing and developing new markets for forest products that incentivize forest landowners to keep their land in forests
- education and incentive programs that reward and assist landowners who maintain their land in forests
- regulation of forests that reduces the cost of forest landownership

Issue

In addition to timber products, forests provide watershed protection, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and aesthetic values. Population growth, unintended consequences of public policy and loss of markets for forest products result in the loss of forests and fragmentation of remaining forests in Florida. As a result, those values that society depends upon from its forests will be lost.

Background

Forests cover over half of Florida and are important to the health, environment and economy of the State. Florida's Forests provide:

- Economic Impact – 8 Billion Dollars in direct economic output annually and 30,000 jobs¹
- Environmental Benefits – watershed protection; clean water; wildlife habitat; carbon sequestration²
- Societal Benefits – open space; aesthetic values; hunting; recreation³

Over 80% of Florida's forests are privately owned.⁴ Private owners include not only forest industry and institutional investors, but also 350,000 non-industrial private landowners – who control over half of Florida's forests.⁵

Over the past seventy years, Florida has lost over 5 million acres of private forests.⁶ Some of this loss is the unavoidable result of population growth; however, the rate of forest loss resulting from the addition of each additional person has accelerated significantly in recent years. Specifically, the rate of conversion of land from rural uses to urban uses has risen nationally from an average of 0.5 acres per additional person from 1945 until 1992 to 1.2 acres per additional person for years 1992 to 1997 – a 140% increase in the rate of loss of rural land to population growth.⁷ Of the rural land that is converted to urban uses nationwide, approximately 40% was forested.⁸

It is estimated that Florida's population will double from its current level of 17.8 million to approximately 35.8 million by the year 2060,⁹ resulting in the loss of approximately 7 million acres of rural land, approximately 40% of which is forested.¹⁰ This equates to a loss of 0.4 acres for each additional resident of Florida – a much more modest rate of land conversion than was experienced in the mid 1990s. Even so, the result would be the loss of over one third of Florida's remaining rural land that has not already been conserved or converted to urban land uses.

In addition to unavoidable forest loss resulting from increases in population, many acres are lost as the result of unintended consequences of public policy. The following are a few examples of such unintended consequences:

- **Development Incentives** – Public policies favoring homeownership result in favoring development over maintaining land in forests (mortgage interest deduction; homestead exemption; save our homes amendment; favorable capital gains treatment; subsidization of home mortgage market; subsidization of public services (the average homeowner pays \$1.00 in taxes for every \$1.14 in services received, whereas the average forest landowner pays \$1.00 in taxes for every \$0.34 in services received))¹¹
- **Land Use Regulation** – Outdated land-use regulation may encourage uncontrolled urban expansion
- **Regulation** – Expenses associated with complying with regulations make owning forests less attractive than alternative uses
- **Limited Economic Incentives to Manage Forests** – While society values forests, it does not pay for many of the service provided by forests. Among the values often supplied by forests without compensation are: carbon sequestration; storm water control; watershed protection; wildlife habitat; air quality improvement¹²

Simultaneous with the decrease in forests, it is estimated that the number of forest landowners will nearly double by 2050, resulting in a significant decrease in the size of the average forest landholding or "parcelization".¹³ In addition to parcelization, it is estimated that the rapid pace of development will result in the breaking up of large, contiguous expanses of forests – "use fragmentation" – which will in turn result in a loss of function from the remaining forests. Parcelization and use fragmentation (collectively "Fragmentation") across our state is resulting in the loss of biological, economic and social values provided by remaining forests.¹⁴

As a result of forest loss and fragmentation, Florida will face the following problems:

- **Degraded watershed conditions**
- **Loss of wildlife habitat**
- **Increased risk of flooding¹⁵**
- **Increased threat of fires¹⁶**
- **Loss of carbon sink¹⁷**
- **Loss of recreation opportunities and open space amenities¹⁸**
- **Loss of rural economies and forest industry¹⁹**

Recommendations

1. Encourage innovative land-use planning techniques that encourage and reward forest owners for keeping land in forests
2. Encourage the development of markets, such as mitigation banking, conservation banking and carbon trading, that value environmental services provided by forests
3. Change current tax structure to reduce incentives for conversion of forests to development
4. Provide education and incentive programs that reward and assist landowners who maintain their land in forests

¹ Alan Hodges, et al., Economic Impacts of the Forest Industry in Florida, 2003 (Univ. of Fla. Institute of Food and Agric. Sciences 2005)

² Florida Division of Forestry, Florida's Forest Resources Plan, Setting the Course for 2030 (2005)

³ Florida Division of Forestry, Florida's Forest Resources Plan, Setting the Course for 2030 (2005)

⁴ Florida Division of Forestry, Florida's Forest Resources Plan, Setting the Course for 2030 (2005)

-
- ⁵ Florida Division of Forestry, Florida's Forest Resources Plan, Setting the Course for 2030 (2005)
- ⁶ Summary of Forest Fragmentation 2000 Conference, <http://www.sampsongroup.com/acrobat/fragsum.pdf>
- ⁷ Summary of Forest Fragmentation 2000 Conference, <http://www.sampsongroup.com/acrobat/fragsum.pdf>
- ⁸ Summary of Forest Fragmentation 2000 Conference, <http://www.sampsongroup.com/acrobat/fragsum.pdf>
- ⁹ Paul D. Zwick & Margaret H. Carr, Florida 2060, a Population Distribution Scenario for the State of Florida (Univ. of Fla. GeoPlan Center 2006).
- ¹⁰ Florida 2060, a Population Distribution Scenario for the State of Florida, GeoPlan Center, University of Florida, Zwick, Paul D. and Carr, Margaret H., August 15, 2006, p. 17-18.
- ¹¹ Summary of Forest Fragmentation 2000 Conference, <http://www.sampsongroup.com/acrobat/fragsum.pdf>
- ¹² Summary of Forest Fragmentation 2000 Conference, <http://www.sampsongroup.com/acrobat/fragsum.pdf>
- ¹³ Summary of Forest Fragmentation 2000 Conference, <http://www.sampsongroup.com/acrobat/fragsum.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Summary of Forest Fragmentation 2000 Conference, <http://www.sampsongroup.com/acrobat/fragsum.pdf>; Florida Division of Forestry, Forest Legacy Program in Florida, *at* http://www.fl-dof.com/forest_management/forestlegacy_index.html
- ¹⁵ Society of American Foresters, Loss of Forest Land, A Position Statement of the Society of American Foresters (2004), http://www.safnet.org/policyandpress/psst/loss_of_forest_land.cfm
- ¹⁶ Society of American Foresters, Loss of Forest Land, A Position Statement of the Society of American Foresters (2004), http://www.safnet.org/policyandpress/psst/loss_of_forest_land.cfm
- ¹⁷ Society of American Foresters, Loss of Forest Land, A Position Statement of the Society of American Foresters (2004), http://www.safnet.org/policyandpress/psst/loss_of_forest_land.cfm
- ¹⁸ Society of American Foresters, Loss of Forest Land, A Position Statement of the Society of American Foresters (2004), http://www.safnet.org/policyandpress/psst/loss_of_forest_land.cfm
- ¹⁹ Society of American Foresters, Loss of Forest Land, A Position Statement of the Society of American Foresters (2004), http://www.safnet.org/policyandpress/psst/loss_of_forest_land.cfm