

Executive Summary: 2020 Alaska Forest Action Plan

Developed by the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry with assistance from cooperative fire and cooperative forestry program stakeholders, the 2020 Alaska Forest Action Plan is a roadmap to address threats facing forests statewide—threats that know no boundaries, such as wildland fire and forest insects and disease. The 2020 Alaska Forest Action Plan is also a roadmap to make the most of the benefits provided by forests, including clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, subsistence, heating for homes, commercial forest products, local jobs, community well-being, and more. The Division of Forestry works in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service State and Private Forestry to deliver the federally funded cooperative programs housed within the Division: Cooperative Fire, Community Forestry, Forest Health, and Forest Stewardship. These programs are geared towards non-federal lands. The programs' national priorities are to conserve and manage working forest landscapes for multiple resources and values, protect forests from threats, and enhance public benefits from trees and forests. The Plan provides strategies to meet these priorities to benefit Alaska's forests and people.

A new State Forest Action Plan is required by the 2008 Farm Bill every 10 years. This Plan replaces the 2010 Plan, which was amended in 2016. The 2020 Alaska Forest Action Plan includes three main components to guide the implementation of the cooperative forestry and fire programs through the next decade.

Alaska Forest Action Plan Components



Forests in Alaska cover 129 million acres and fall into two main forest types: the 15-million-acre coastal temperate rainforest of Southeast and coastal Southcentral, and the 114-million-acre boreal forest of inland Southcentral and the Interior. The coastal forest is made up primarily of western hemlock and Sitka spruce, and is renewed through small gap disturbances created by wind. The boreal forest is made up primarily of paper birch, white spruce, and black spruce. The cycle of succession in the boreal forest is driven by fire, and, particularly in the transitional forest of Southcentral, bark beetle outbreaks. Alaska's forests provide key habitat for all five species of Pacific salmon as well as moose, Sitka black-tailed deer, and other wildlife. These fish and wildlife resources are integral to the subsistence way of life that is economically and culturally vital, especially to rural communities.

Alaska's forest industry has historically been and continues to be focused on the coastal forests of Southeast Alaska where both timber volume and value are greatest. The forest industry of Southeast declined significantly in the 1990s when the region's largest landowner, the Tongass National Forest, ended its long-term timber sale contracts. By 2015, timber harvest volume in Alaska overall had decreased to half of its 2005 level. In Southeast, the forest industry is transitioning to young-growth harvest, but most young-growth stands have not yet reached harvestable size. By volume, timber harvest in the boreal forest makes up just 6%

FOREST BENEFITS

- Ecosystem services
- Fish and wildlife habitat
- Subsistence
- Cultural and spiritual benefits
- Watershed values
- Carbon storage
- Forest products and timber management opportunities
- Energy independence for communities
- Non-timber forest products
- Aesthetic and scenic values
- Community benefits
- Forest Recreation

FOREST THREATS

- Wildland fire
- Forest insects, disease, & abiotic stressors
- Reduced forestry infrastructure
- Climate change
- Invasive species
- Forest conversion and fragmentation

of Alaska’s total, but this harvest provides forest products important for local uses as well as local jobs. Because of high transportation costs, wood harvested in one region stays in that region for processing. Two-thirds of wood products made in Alaska are sold in Alaska. Wood energy has great potential to reduce the extremely high heating costs in rural communities dependent on diesel fuel for heat and power, as well as to add local jobs.

Alaska’s population is growing and so is the wildland-urban interface, where forest fuels are intermixed with homes, recreational cabins, and community infrastructure. Wildland fire is the forest threat of greatest concern to stakeholders, followed by forest insects and disease—particularly the spruce beetle. At the time of this Plan’s release, Southcentral was in the ongoing midst of a spruce beetle outbreak in its fifth year, which covered over 1.1 million acres in 2019 with 2020 impacts still being assessed. Alaska’s forests are also experiencing the impacts of climate change. Alaska’s fire seasons are beginning earlier and lasting longer. Fires are larger and more resistant to control because of hotter, drier weather. There is high need for strategic fuels management to help reduce risk to communities and important infrastructure.

Alaska’s vast intact forest ecosystems provide abundant benefits, but their sheer size also presents challenges to cooperative fire- and forest-management. These challenges are magnified by Alaska’s small population and associated capacity limitations related to workforce, funding, and number and size of available cooperators, such as local governments and non-profit organizations. To make the most of limited resources, the Plan seeks to prioritize areas where forests matter most to Alaska’s people—forest lands and wildland urban interface areas that have been identified through the robust Alaska Interagency Wildland Fire Management Plan as having resources requiring fire protection; private forest lands including Alaska Native corporation lands; and State Forests and State land classified for forestry. The Priority Landscape Area is meant to be targeted enough to shape on-the-ground implementation, but large enough to accommodate the variation in cooperator capacity in different areas over time. Strategies in the plan will help to efficiently provide federal, state, local, and private resources where they can have the most impact.

The Statewide Forest Resource Strategy provides a roadmap to address the threats facing Alaska’s forests and reflects the current implementation of the cooperative programs as well as future needs. To implement the strategy, the State Forester will require resources including the Division of Forestry’s cooperative programs, a variety of federal grant funding sources, and the participation of a wide range of partners, including federal, state, and local government agencies; Alaska Native tribes; Alaska Native corporations; organized land management and scientific partnerships; and other non-governmental organizations. The 2020 Alaska Forest Action Plan brings these resources together for healthy forests and communities into the future.

Statewide Forest Resource Strategy

	Conserve working forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and ensure sustainable forest practices • Assist private landowners to conserve and manage their forests • Support wood products opportunities • Maintain and improve fish and wildlife habitat • Support non-timber forest products 	All priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase fire and forest management capacity • Educate and involve people regarding forest threats, benefits, and opportunities • Support forest science and new technology and methods to better understand and manage Alaska’s forests • Obtain better forest- and fire-related information
	Protect forests from threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate fire adapted communities • Manage fuels to reduce risk to communities & to benefit forest ecosystems • Monitor & mitigate economic & ecological impacts of forest insects & disease • Prevent, identify, and control invasive species • Retain working forests and important forest land 	
	Enhance public benefits from trees and forests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximize the benefits of trees and forests to communities • Provide sustainable recreation opportunities 	