

**Forum on Forests**  
**With Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell**  
*September 2, 2009*

**Summary of Remarks**

Following are observations and suggestions offered by participants in an informal forum with Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. The forum was held at the Pinchot Institute offices at the Resources and Conservation Center in Washington, DC on September 2, 2009, and facilitated by Pinchot Institute President Al Sample. A list of the participants and their affiliations is attached.

In this summary, individual remarks are not attributed, as agreed. The comments and suggestions here are those of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Pinchot Institute. These remarks have not been recorded verbatim, but they have been summarized as accurately and concisely as possible, and organized into the following groupings:

1. Land conservation and restoration
2. Energy
3. Climate
4. Water
5. Forest Service organization

Also attached is the transcript from a speech given by USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack in Seattle on August 14, 2009, entitled *A National Vision for America's Forests*. In his opening remarks, Chief Tidwell made reference to several elements of Secretary Vilsack's speech, particularly its emphasis on (1) Forest Service responsibility for promoting sustainable management of all the nation's forests—federal, state, and private; (2) forest land conservation and reducing the loss of forests to development; (3) ecosystem restoration on federal forest lands, especially to improve resilience to wildfires, invasive species, and climate change; (4) rebuilding the community economic infrastructure needed to support sound forest stewardship; (5) implementation of the 2001 Roadless Rule, in compliance with the recent decision by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals; and (6) development of revised Federal regulations pursuant to the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (16 U.S.C. 1600), following a Federal court decision overturning the existing planning rule.

**Land conservation and restoration**

- The “all lands” theme was very well received, and a variety of interests welcomed the prospect of the Forest Service devoting greater attention to forest conservation on private lands.
- It would be helpful to have the Forest Service play a stronger role in land conservation, especially in cooperation with state and tribal governments, through a better funded and more broadly applicable approach to Forest Legacy.

- Stronger incentives are needed for state and local conservation actions; the Forest Lands Restoration Act is not fulfilling its potential because current funding is far from adequate; Forest Service should solicit conservation proposals as way to demonstrate need and advocate for more adequate funding.
- Federal and state forestry agencies looking to restore forests and expand the area of forest land need to develop a program to do this without competing for agricultural lands.
- The Rural Legacy program uses transfer taxes to preserve working agricultural lands; extending this to preservation of working forest lands would be easier if there was an opportunity for significant federal leveraging of these locally developed funds.
- The Forest Service can facilitate integration in the implementation of the State Forest Management Assessments that are soon to be completed (deadline June 2010); facilitate linkage to 2010 National Report on Sustainable Forests, and implementation of State Wildlife Action Plans.

## Energy

- Even though federal forest lands will be, at best, a minor source of forest biomass for energy, this probably offers the best near-term opportunities for rebuilding of the “industry infrastructure” for forest management on the National Forests.
- Although producing biomass for energy is conceivably within the broad multiple-use mandate for the National Forests, there is a deep-seated concern over looking to federal lands as sources of large volumes of woody biomass; biomass removals should be indirect results of hazardous fuels treatments and other activities that are clearly driven ecosystem restoration objectives.
- Forest Service commitment to implement the 2001 Roadless Area rule will help ease concern about revising the sustainable biomass definition (i.e., the provision in the EISA Renewable Fuels Standard making biomass from federal forest lands ineligible for Renewable Fuels Credits) but there is still a need to identify other areas of sensitive wildlife habitat and keep them off-limits to biomass harvesting.
- The public needs to know what the follow-up will be to the National Forest certification study; forest bioenergy commitment to certification standards and responsible-sourcing would provide additional public assurance regarding biomass harvesting on federal forests.
- The Forest Service needs to move beyond the Fuels for Schools program, and serve as a catalyst for the establishment of thermal biomass facilities in rural communities; it can do this by adopting and demonstrating thermal biomass technologies in its own buildings, or by “anchoring” the market for thermal biomass energy from a facility that can serve the broader community.
- The Forest Service should give greater consideration to wildlife habitat in the siting of renewable energy facilities, especially wind power, because of the impact of accompanying transmission lines and service roads on habitat fragmentation.
- The Forest Service has extensive experience in developing guidelines to limit the environmental impacts of natural gas drilling in forests; state and private forest landowners are under increasing pressure and would benefit from Forest Service experience and guidance in working with energy developers.
- The Forest Service should avoid creating the perception that it is abandoning “old industry” (i.e., the traditional forest products industry) for “new industry” (i.e., energy), and look for ways to support an integration of wood products and bioenergy.
- “Creating rural wealth,” i.e., maintaining existing industries while pursuing new economic opportunities, is a key operational concept in rural community development; FS should keep this in mind in supporting integrated wood products/bioenergy industry
- Consulting foresters provide a key link between Forest Service national/regional estimates of forest biomass for energy, and realistic estimates of locally available supply considering things like private forest landowner objectives; current requirements for consulting foresters to qualify as Technical Service Providers (NRCS?) are too expensive and time-consuming, and serve to discourage the development of needed capacity in private forestry consulting.

## **Climate**

- The Forest Service is conducting valuable research on the theory of carbon sequestration and storage by forests; but what is needed is a series of actual demonstration projects in forests around the country, to demonstrate practical aspects to private forest owners, and to provide a basis for credible quantitative proposals for including forest management in future carbon credit programs.

## **Water**

- “Rise to the Future” has been among the country’s most successful programs for restoring aquatic habitat and water quality; FS and USDA support has been important to this success; support from Secretary Vilsack would be helpful

## **Forest Service organization**

- To make the “all lands” approach a reality, the Forest Service needs to incorporate the idea of state and private forest responsibility into the agency culture, with NFS and Research staff, not just S&PF staff; individual career movement that includes assignments in S&PF, even for NFS types, would facilitate this.
- The Forest Service needs to focus on developing the capacity for taking on new challenges; in the recent past it seems to have focused most of its energy on winning court challenges; it needs to shift resources away from defensive analysis and getting public “input,” and toward building long-term trust-based relationships with a diversity of interests that benefit from the Forest Service more effectively achieving its mission.
- Agency culture needs to incorporate greater receptivity to accepting help from the outside, and recognizing it is sometimes best to let someone else take the lead; FS partnerships depend on doing everything the FS way, so they don’t last.
- The recent survey showing employee morale at the Forest Service is among the lowest of Federal agencies also showed that job satisfaction is highest among those who are actively cooperating with outside organizations.
- Forest Service employees complain they don’t have enough resources (funding, staff) to perform well, but they have more resources than many agencies; need to accept that there will never be enough resources to do everything; the Forest Service can accomplish more with less by working more creatively and truly cooperatively with outside organizations that share FS goals and objectives.
- The Forest Service needs to be doing more to “replenish” itself as an organization; training and employee development suffering badly, and inadequately trained managers are set up to fail; FS needs to do more to “bring on, and bring up” its next generation of leaders.
- The forest community, of which the Forest Service is one part, needs to build a cadre of Congressional members who are informed and engaged in forestry and conservation policy on a regular basis; ad hoc engagement of Congress doesn’t build knowledge and is not working.
- The Forest Service needs to rebuild its own constituency at the state and local levels through more attention to personal relationships and trust; constituents talking to Congress about how the FS can help meet community needs is more effective than FS advocating for itself and its own programs.
- More frequent open forums with the Chief like this would help (quarterly? semi-annually?); focus on one or two current themes or topics, but leave time for general comments, questions, and suggestions too.

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**with Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell**  
Hosted by the Pinchot Institute for Conservation  
September 2, 2009  
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## Transcript of Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack's Speech: National Vision for America's Forests (August 14, 2009, Seattle, WA)

Well, it is certainly a pleasure for me to be here in Washington State, home to six of our national forests and to millions of acres of state, tribal, and private forest lands.

It's particularly appropriate that we are in the home state of the forest named for our first Chief of the Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot. He gave us a guiding principle still relevant today when he defined conservation. And I quote, "As foresighted utilization, "preservation, and/or renewal of forests, waters, "land, minerals for the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time." A healthy and prosperous America relies on the health of our natural resources, particularly our forests.

America's forests today supply communities with clean and abundant water, shelter wildlife, help us mitigate and adapt to climate change. Forests can also help generate rural wealth through recreation and tourism, through the creation of green jobs, and through the production of wood products and energy. They are too a source of cultural heritage for Americans and American Indians alike. And they are our national treasure, requiring all of us to protect and preserve them for future generations.

Now, our new administration offers an opportunity for a new vision, a vision that will both guide the policies and the approach of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service towards forest conservation and management, a vision to address the challenges we face and to make the most of our opportunities to conserve and restore our forests. Our national forests are an enormously important environmental and economic asset. So too are our nonfederal forests, our state, tribal, and private forest lands. President Obama has made clear his interest in conserving our natural environment, and I intend to take that responsibility very seriously and to devote the time necessary to do it right. And I also know our new forest chief, Tom Tidwell, shares that commitment.

You know, I like to call our USDA an every way, every day department, because we do so many things each day to touch Americans' lives, from helping farmers to providing affordable housing to promoting clean energy. An every day, every way department, USDA helps American Farmers and ranchers provide a sufficient, safe, and nutritious food supply for all Americans. But our farmers and ranchers are also vitally important stewards of our working lands to ensure that in addition to food and fiber, those lands provide clean water and preserve wildlife habitats.

In the same vein, our forests and our forest landowners provide more than wood products. Our forests too are sources of clean water and home to wildlife habitat. Let me just give you one measure often overlooked of how important America's farms, ranches, and forests are to every American. It is America's forests, farms, and ranches that provide 87% of the surface supply of drinking water in America. Let me repeat that. It is our forests, our farms, and our ranches that provide 87% of the surface supply of drinking water in America.

When Americans turn on the faucet, most don't realize the vital role that our rural lands and especially our forests play in ensuring that clean and abundant water flows out of that faucet. So while some may think it odd that I give a major speech on forests in a major urban area like Seattle, I do so in order to emphasize this important point. That is, while most Americans may live in urban areas, most of us are also dependent upon rural lands, particularly forest lands for clean water and a healthy climate. For these reasons, conserving our forests is not a luxury. It is, in my view, a necessity.

Yet America's forests today are threatened like never before. Climate change, catastrophic fires, diseases and pests have all led to declining forest health. We're losing our privately owned working forest lands to develop and fragmentation at an alarming pace. All of these changes have enormous impacts on drinking water, greenhouse gas emissions, the climate, local economies, and wildlife and recreational opportunities. Notwithstanding these trends, we have enormous opportunities. And one example is climate change, for it will create new markets for carbon storage and biomass energy which ought to significantly bolster sustainable forest management and forest restoration.

Unfortunately, the debate about the future of our forests and our forest policy has been highly polarized for a long time. I don't think I need to remind anyone in Washington State about the debates surrounding spotted owls, clear-cutting, and other forestry issues. But given the threats that our forests face today, Americans must move away from polarization. We must work and must be committed to a shared vision, a vision that conserves our forests and the vital resources important to our survival while wisely respecting the need for a forest economy that creates jobs and vibrant rural communities.

Our shared vision must begin with a complete commitment to restoration. Restoration, for me, means managing forest lands first and foremost to protect our water resources while making our forests far more resilient to climate change. The forest restoration effort led by the dedicated people of our Forest Service will open up nontraditional markets for climate mitigation and biomass energy while appropriately recognizing the need for more traditional uses of forest resources.

Importantly, and this is very important, this vision holds that the Forest Service must not be viewed solely as an agency concerned only with the fate of our national forests but must instead acknowledge for its work in protecting and maintaining all of America's forests, including state, tribal, and private ones. Our shared vision must adopt an all-lands approach, requiring close collaboration with the NRCS and its work on America's private working lands.

Now, why should restoration be the driving principle in forest policy? Well, there's no doubt that we're facing a health crisis in our forests. Climate change places them under increasing stress that exacerbates the threat of fire, disease, and insects throughout the West but in other parts of the country as well. A legacy of fire suppression has resulted in forests that are overstocked and much more susceptible to catastrophic fire and disease. Restoring forest ecosystems, particularly in fire adapted forests, will make our forests more resilient to climate



induced stresses and will ensure that our forests will continue to provide ample, abundant clean water.

In many of our forests, restoration will also include efforts to improve or decommission roads, to replace and improve culverts, and to rehabilitate streams and wetlands. Restoration will also mean the rehabilitation of declining ecosystems. One example in the South is the long leaf pine ecosystem, a forest that has been reduced from 90 million acres to today a mere 3 million acres.

Yet the Forest Service faces a number of barriers in pursuing a restoration agenda. For years, the Forest Service has struggled with a budget that has forced management funds to be shifted to firefighting. We must do better, and we can do better. The Obama administration is already working with Congressman Dicks and others in the congress to ensure that the Forest Service has the funds it needs to fight fires and to manage forests. Now, this is an important issue for our forests. But it is also important for the men and women who make up the Forest Service. It is our responsibility to give them the resources they need to succeed.

A second barrier to accomplishing restoration is a history of distrust between environmentalists, the Forest Service, and the forestry community. The result has been seemingly countless appeals of forest management activity and subsequent litigation. Now, certainly appeals and litigation have served as a useful backstop against misplaced management decisions. But given the scale of restoration that must occur and the time in which we have to do it, a shared vision built on collaboration will help us move beyond the timber wars of the past. Litigation and conflict should become less prevalent because they can be viewed as less necessary. Now, fortunately, this process has begun. In many regions today, the Forest Service is already charting a path forward by building trust through diverse stakeholders through collaboration and engagement.

A third barrier revolves around the loss of forest infrastructure represented by those who work in the forest industry. In large parts of the West we've lost timber mills, and those who worked in them have left the area. As a result, today we continue to lose the capacity to perform the important kinds of restoration work that must be done from thinning for habitat or watershed function to reducing hazardous fuels to removing trees to prevent the spread of insects and disease. Without a robust forest industry that includes both traditional markets and these new markets like biomass energy, it will be much more difficult and much, much more expensive to improve the health of our forests.

Now, the Colville National Forest right here in Washington is a terrific example of the sort of collaborative effort that allows for appropriate forest management while providing timber supply to local mills. It is here-- the first national forest that is so-- that engaged a diverse group of stakeholders in the most recent revision to their forest plan. Individuals and groups including elected officials, timber interest, motorized recreationists, conservationists; they all got together to discuss the common goals for the forest. The result: general acceptance was reached about where to concentrate future recreation and where to timber-- harvest timber. And tens of thousands, tens of thousands of additional acres in Colville were recognized for their roadless character and the potential for wilderness designation. It is no small testament to this effort and to the energy of those involved that this area has avoided litigation for more than five years since

that process was initiated. Now, the experience here is not unique, but it can be more broadly applied. If we undertake restoration of our national forests at a scale commensurate with the need, we will need to do more of this.

The Forest Service planning process provides an important venue to integrate forest restoration, climate resilience, watershed protection, wildlife conservation, the need for vibrant local economies, and the collaboration necessary to manage our national forests. Our best opportunity to accomplish this is in the developing of a new forest planning rule for our national forests. As many of you may know, in late June, a federal court overturned a 2008 planning rule put forward by the Forest Service. This came on the heels of a similar court decision overturning the 2005 planning rule.

Now, faced with this, the Forest Service has a decision to appeal these decisions or not. Well, we've decided not to seek further review of the latest court decision. And I've asked Chief Tidwell to develop a new planning rule to ensure management and restoration of our national forest with the goal and vision of protecting our water, climate, and wildlife while also creating economic opportunity.

Another integral part of our shared vision must be adequate protection for roadless areas. President Obama was quite clear in his campaign in emphasizing his support for protecting roadless areas. He understood the important role they play in preserving water, climate, and recreational opportunities. Just last week, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's decision reinstating the 2001 Clinton roadless rule. I view this as a very, very positive development, yet the Forest Service is still subjected to a court injunction from a Wyoming district court judge in the tenth circuit in joining the Forest Service from implementing the 2001 rule.

Let me be clear. We will seek to lift that injunction in light of the ninth circuit's decision. And if the courts remain conflicted, or it's not possible to protect roadless areas through the courts, we will initiate a new rule making process to do so. I recognize that some states are already taking action on their own. Colorado is moving forward with its own roadless rule as Idaho already has. We believe Idaho's rule is a strongly protective one for roadless areas. And we note wisely that Governor Ritter in Colorado has asked for additional input on his draft roadless plan for Colorado. He understands, as I do, that Colorado needs strong roadless protection, and so does the entire nation.

Now, the threats facing our forests do not recognize property boundaries. So in developing a shared vision around forests, we must also be willing to look across property boundaries. In other words, we must operate a landscape scale operation by taking an all-lands approach. The reality is that 80% of the forest area in the United States is outside of the national forest system. And many of our national forests are adjacent to state and private land. Management decisions that are made both on and of the national forest obviously have important implications for that forest landscape.

More broadly, privately owned forests across the country face a daunting set of challenges. As Congressman Dicks indicated, the Forest Service estimates that over 40 million acres, 40 million

acres of private forest could be lost to development and fragmentation over the coming decades. Americans tend to think that deforestation is a problem only in tropical countries. Well, I'm here to tell you that we have our own deforestation problem right here in the U.S. of A. And this has enormous implications for the climate, our drinking water, our rural economies, and wildlife. Just keeping forests as forests remains a significant challenge.

The good news is that conservation groups, forest industry, and government agencies are increasingly willing to unite to address the common threat of the potential loss of forest lands on private land. I want the Forest Service and the USDA to partner with these stakeholders in protecting those privately owned forests. I believe, and I know Chief Tidwell agrees, that the Forest Service and the USDA can play an important role in working with these stakeholders to address forest loss.

Indeed, our Forest Service has a long history in working with private landowners through its partnership with state foresters and others in addressing stewardship on privately owned forests. And USDA has its own unique strengths in this area as well. The 2008 farm bill provides new opportunities to use existing conservation programs and to focus those resources on the most pressing problems facing family owned forests. Many of our farm programs and conservation programs have much greater potential than the USDA has realized today to protect, rehabilitate, and conserve family forest land. An important goal of the USDA and the Forest Service should be to integrate the work of the Forest Service and our National Resources Conservation Service. This will be vital to embrace an all-lands approach.

Now, government programs provide only part of what is needed to realize our shared vision. For forest ownership and stewardship to remain viable, it must remain economically rewarding as well for landowners. Markets for wood will remain important to those landowners and local communities. But private and public landowners must also access new markets for both low- and high-value products and services and forest uses in order to underwrite stewardship activities. Emerging markets for carbon and sustainable bioenergy will provide landowners with expanded economic incentive to maintain and restore our forests.

Our Forest Service must play a significant role in the development of these new markets and must ensure their integrity. But carbon and bioenergy aren't the only new opportunity for landowners. Markets for water can also provide landowners with incentives to restore wetlands, watersheds, and to manage forests for clean and abundant water supplies. These markets can also create jobs in rural communities near forests. By generating rural wealth, we can make it possible again for landowners to sustain our forests and our working landscapes. I hope we'll examine other policies and approaches outside of the USDA and the Forest Service that can address both management and also potential loss of private forest land.

I know Chief Tidwell and his counterpart, David White at NRCS, will seek out opportunities to work with conservation groups, with the forest industry, with state foresters and others to ensure that we maintain the private forests and utilize this all-lands approach. The loss of our private working lands and private forests deserve constant attention. Now, I've offered a broad vision today to guide the Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture in setting a new course for America's forests. I recognize that there is a great deal of work yet to be done to make this a

reality. And so I'm tasking the Forest Service and USDA in partnership with all the stakeholders to make this vision a reality.

In the short term, I'll ask Chief Tidwell to initiate that process to develop new planning rules to guide the management of our national forests consistent with this vision. We'll also monitor progress towards the protection of roadless areas in the courts, and we'll act to protect roadless areas as necessary. When it comes to restoring our forests, I want the Forest Service to improve its existing authorities and take advantage of new tools to restore all of our forests in order to protect our water and make our forests more resilient to climate change.

I'm asking Chief Tidwell and Chief White to work together in partnership with all groups, state forester, conservation groups, the forest industry, and others to develop a broad agenda for protecting our privately owned forests and our working lands. And I want the Forest Service and USDA to play an even more prominent role in developing those new markets I spoke of, carbon, bioenergy, and water, as a means to conserve our forests. The path ahead is challenging, but it is full of opportunity.

We must encourage, catalogue, and expand the collaborative solutions that hold the most promise to protect our public lands and our working lands. We must dramatically accelerate the scale and pace of forest stewardship here on both public and private lands. On our national forests, we must restore more acres more rapidly if we are to prevent catastrophic fires, insect outbreaks, and other threats, particularly as climate change makes those threats more potent. On private land, we must move more quickly to protect our forest landscapes before they no longer can function to support watershed health, biodiversity, conservation, and viable wood markets. Americans often assume that our health and well-being are separate from the health of our natural world.

But I return again to the simple act that we Americans often take for granted every day: turning on those water faucets. The clean water that emerges is made possible in large part by the stewardship of our working rural land and our forests in particular. My hope, and I trust you share it, is that together we can foster a greater appreciation in this country for our forests and that all Americans, regardless of where they live, see the quality of their lives, and the quality of their forests as inseparable. Thank you very much.