

New Hampshire Hosts Listening Session on Working Forests

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack visited New Hampshire on August 9th to invite ideas from citizens from around New England on how to best advance the new *America's Great Outdoors* initiative. The event, attended by 300 people, was one of 25 listening sessions being hosted around the nation. Secretary Vilsack and others are leading the effort to develop an action plan to promote and support innovative community-level efforts to conserve outdoor spaces and to reconnect Americans to the outdoors.

The August 9 event in Concord was the first and only *America's Great Outdoors* listening session to focus on the nation's privately owned working forests. [Secretary Vilsack's keynote speech](#) at the session was preceded by remarks from New Hampshire Governor Lynch and U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen. Secretary Vilsack then moderated a panel discussion that explored the challenges facing working forests and what the federal government can do to help private forest land owners. The Forest Society's President/Forester Jane Difley served on the panel. Later in the afternoon, session participants broke out into smaller groups to provide direct comments to senior administration officials.

The Forest Society made the following key points at the working forests session:

- Keep the nation's private forests as forests by sustaining existing forest products markets.
- Help keep the private ownership of forest land economically viable by creating new markets for the many "ecosystem services" that forests provide to all Americans, such as maintaining water quality and sequestering carbon.
- The President and the Congress should make permanent the temporary tax benefits presently available to private landowners who conserve their land in perpetuity.
- The President and Congress should fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Forest Legacy program and more directly target the funds to the conservation of privately-owned, working forest lands that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses.
- Today the nation's land trusts have conservation and stewardship capacity that equals (and in some cases surpasses) that of federal and state government. The President and the Congress should seek innovative partnerships with qualified private, non-profit land trusts to focus on the most critical forested landscapes based on the best available science.
- The federal government could leverage federal investments with those of state, local and private partners by channeling LWCF funds to local conservation partnerships, such as the Quabbin-to-Cardigan Partnership (Q2C) in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. The Q2C collaborative effort is one of several regional forest conservation strategies recently adopted by the New England Governors.

To learn more:

America's Great Outdoors website:

<http://www.doi.gov/americasgreatoutdoors/>

News article about the event:

<http://www.concordmonitor.com/article/ag-secretary-lends-ear-to-landowners>

<http://www.nashuatelegraph.com/news/819718-196/answers-among-the-trees.html>