

FOREST INCENTIVES PROGRAM ACT

The Forest Incentives Program Act will support rural economies, reduce carbon emissions and help keep private forests intact at a time when landowners are under constant pressure to develop their forestlands. Specifically, this bill provides incentives for private forest owners to improve and maintain sustainable forest management and for non-residential building owners to use less energy-intensive products, such as wood, as structural building materials.

Forests are the backbone of rural America and our environment. Of all U.S. forests, more than half are privately owned, and more than a third are owned by families and individuals. These private forests contribute billions to states' economies, employ thousands of people, protect wildlife habitats and reduce carbon in the atmosphere by sequestering carbon. However, unfortunate shifts in the U.S. forest products markets, including consolidations in the pulp and paper sector, downturn in the housing market and significant losses of mills, have made it difficult for families to afford to keep their land in trees and pay for needed management.

The Forest Incentives Program Act offers landowners a voluntary, long-term plan that makes forest management more affordable and helps forest owners preserve their land.

Forest Incentives Program

- Offers private forest owners financial incentives to undertake sustainable forestry management practices on their land.
- Landowners would agree to maintain these practices under contracts with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for at least 15 years, and landowners who agree to a contract with USDA to permanently protect their land would receive additional payments.
- Eligible practices would be determined by the Secretary of USDA, but the bill does suggest approved practices, including reforestation on forestland impacted by wildfire and afforestation on non-forested lands.
- USDA would establish and implement monitoring and verification protocols based on verified sustainable management practices.

Encouraging the Use of Sustainable Building Materials

- Commercial building owners may be eligible to receive financial incentives for using biological products, such as wood, as structural materials instead of more energy-intensive materials in newly constructed and renovated non-residential buildings.
- USDA will determine which projects meet eligibility requirements and will award payments at the completion of a building's construction or renovation.