

WESTERN FORESTRY LEADERSHIP COALITION

Threats to Western Private Forests Strategic Initiative

A Collaborative Process Addressing Threats to the Health and Sustainability of Private Forests in the Western U.S.

Western forests provide values we all depend on

Clean water, wildlife habitat, wood products, family and community identity, scenic hikes, breathtaking views, and carbon sequestration. These are just a few of the myriad ecosystem services our western forests provide every day. Often viewed as “free”, these assets are frequently not valued or are undervalued as individuals, corporations, and governments at all levels make decisions about where and how to conserve and manage land. Our western forests — and the services they provide — are at increasing risk of degradation and conversion. This is true regardless of ownership, but there is a particularly poignant story to tell about western private forests and a diverse group of voices to tell it.

Forests and the services they provide are at risk

Changing climate, economic conditions, demographics, and competing social values are altering the operating environment for forest landowners seeking to manage their land for the provision of multiple ecosystem services. The impact of these changes to western forests is degradation (decreased health and resilience) or conversion to non-forest uses. An example of changes leading to conversion: more than 44 million acres of private forest nationwide may be developed within the next 25 years. A second example: more than 500 sawmills have closed in the west since 1989, about 40 since 2007. These closures have reduced our collective capacity to manage all western forests in the face of increased ecological threats such as insect and disease infestations, increased wildfire risk, and invasive species.

Creative solutions require collaborative processes

To explore the relationships among these threats and to identify solutions that address underlying issues, the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition (WFLC) is bringing together family and industrial forest landowners, county commissioners, local and regional planning agencies, state forestry and wildlife agencies, federal land managers, tribes, universities, conservation districts, and nonprofit organizations. A 20-member team is synthesizing input collected from over 80 stakeholders at six workshops across the west. This team will work closely to produce a report and strategy to address the threats to western private forests. The goal is to facilitate the creation of a new business model and a new policy framework that, together, address the needs of private forest landowners; local, state and federal agencies; environmental organizations; and other stakeholders in the Western U.S.



About the WFLC

The Western Forestry Leadership Coalition (WFLC) represents a unique partnership between state and federal government forestry leaders. Membership includes the Council of Western State Foresters and the western US Forest Service's Regional Foresters, Research Station Directors, and the Forest Products Lab Director.

The WFLC's mission is to promote science-based forest management that serves the values of society and ensures the health and sustainability of western forests.



CHANGING CLIMATE

Altered weather patterns are leading to increased fire risk, insect outbreaks, and other impacts.



CHANGING ECONOMICS

Selling and converting land is becoming more economic than owning and managing land.



CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND SOCIAL VALUES

Population growth and urbanization are often at odds with rural values.

For more information on an individual workshop or the larger project, contact Dana Coelho, WFLC Program Manager, at dcoelho@fs.fed.us or 303-445-4364.