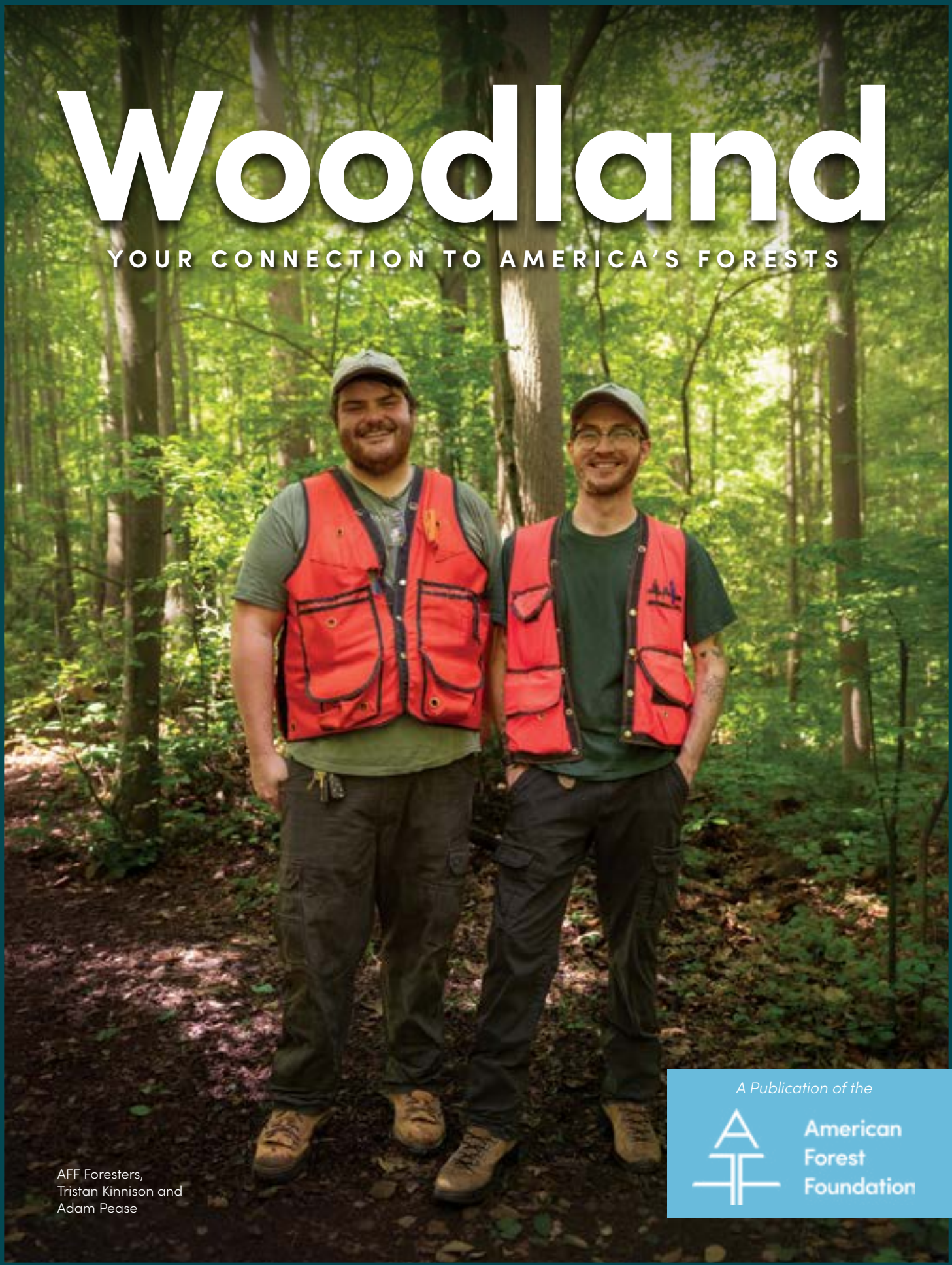
Woodland

YOUR CONNECTION TO AMERICA'S FORESTS



AFF Foresters, Tristan Kinnison and Adam Pease

A Publication of the

American Forest Foundation

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Contents

Fall 2026

4 Overstory
Rita Hite

5 Policy Update
Taldi Harrison

6 Remembering Salem Saloom
Beth Riley Barney

8 Beyond Carbon
Nathan Truitt

11 Five Years of Measurable Impact
Ema Johnson

12 Birding in the Lehigh Valley
Matt Levy

14 From Doubt to Direction
Megan O'Connell

16 A Partner on Every Step of the Journey
Sarah Connor

18 Biochar: A Simple Solution That Can Help Forests
Daniel Leathers

21 A Walk in the Woods
Tom Gresham

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BY RITA HITE
PRESIDENT & CEO
AMERICAN FOREST FOUNDATION

As I look through this issue of Woodland, I'm struck by a common theme: the power of long-term stewardship. Across stories about policy, climate solutions, family forest owners, and leaders who helped shape American Forest Foundation (AFF), we see what becomes possible when people invest in the present and future of our mission.

In our policy update, you'll read about encouraging progress for family forest owners across the country. Bipartisan support helped advance legislation to improve disaster recovery programs, giving family forest owners better tools to recover after natural disasters. AFF also continues to advocate for a Farm Bill that recognizes the essential role family forests play in our communities, while protecting key forestry and conservation investments and expanding access to emerging climate markets.

This issue also honors the life and legacy of former AFF Board member Rev. Salem G. Saloom, MD, whose contributions continue to shape our work today. Together with his wife Dianne, for more than two decades, Salem served as a community leader, advocate, Tree Farmer, founding member of AFF's planned giving program, the Seedling Society, and true champion for family forests. His leadership guided AFF through a period of remarkable growth with his passion for stewardship, deep curiosity, and belief in people's ability to make a difference. Those who knew Salem remember his kindness and generosity, and we are forever grateful for the lasting legacy he leaves behind.

In these pages, you'll also find stories that expand how we think about the benefits forests provide. In "Beyond Carbon," we share new research from the Sorenson Impact Institute showing how your support for programs like the Family Forest Carbon Program creates value beyond carbon storage, including measurable benefits for water quality, biodiversity, human health, and rural economic development. It is a powerful reminder of the broad scope of impact that your support has on our forests, the families that care for them, and all of us who depend on these many forest benefits!

That same spirit of measurable impact comes to life in our story about AFF's partnership with Chemours. What began as an effort to support 50 landowners in West Virginia has grown into a model for long-term collaboration, highlighting what is possible when corporate philanthropy is grounded in measurable outcomes and community partnership.

Our commitment to innovation is another thread running through this edition. Our feature on biochar describes a practical tool that can improve soil health, support forest health, and keep carbon out of the atmosphere. As new tools emerge, AFF is on the front line of advancing and developing these opportunities to support the sustainability of our forests. In these pages, you'll also meet people whose stories demonstrate stewardship on the ground, from the leaders at Templin Woods Preserve, to landowners creating spaces for learning and connection, to the ways our staff connect to the woods. Their journeys vary, but they share a commitment to caring for the land in ways that benefit future generations.

As always, I hope you see yourself in these stories. Your support makes this work possible. Together, we are helping family forest owners care for their land and build a stronger future for the forests we all depend on. Thank you for being on this journey with us!



BY TALDI HARRISON,
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF POLICY

The American Forest Foundation's advocacy remains focused on a simple goal: ensuring family forest owners have the tools they need to keep their forests as forests, and grow healthy and productive forests for generations to come.

Across the country, we continue to see bipartisan interest in keeping working forests intact and helping landowners navigate increasingly challenging economic and environmental conditions. Over the past several months, that interest has translated into important progress—and several opportunities American Forest Foundation (AFF) is continuing to pursue.

IMPROVING DISASTER RECOVERY FOR FOREST OWNERS

In July, we celebrated the Emergency Conservation Program Improvement Act being signed into law. This bipartisan legislation makes important improvements to the Emergency Forest Restoration Program and Emergency Conservation Program to better meet the needs of family forest owners recovering from natural disasters.

For forest owners, recovery can take years or even decades. Improvements that make federal assistance more accessible and responsive can help landowners restore damaged forests, protect their investment, and reduce the risk that forests are converted to other uses after a disaster.

PROTECTING KEY FORESTRY AND CONSERVATION INVESTMENTS

Congress is also working through funding decisions for fiscal year 2027. AFF continues to advocate for the priorities highlighted in our last Woodland update, including:

- A bipartisan Farm Bill that recognizes the important role family forests play in rural economies, conservation, wildlife habitat, clean water, and climate solutions
- State and Private Forestry programs at the U.S. Forest Service
- Forest Inventory and Analysis, which provides critical information about the condition and trends of America's forests
- Wildfire mitigation on private forestlands, including programs such as Community Wildfire Defense Grants
- Continued investment in voluntary conservation programs such as the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

These investments help forest owners actively manage their land, reduce wildfire and other risks, improve forest health, and keep working forests economically viable.

REMOVING BARRIERS AT THE STATE LEVEL

We also saw encouraging momentum in several states this year.

In Georgia, lawmakers passed legislation clarifying that landowners participating in forest carbon programs can continue to qualify for the state's current-use property tax valuation, similar to other actively managed forestlands. This action removed an important barrier for landowners interested in participating in the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP).

In New Hampshire, AFF was invited to present our FFCP to the state's Forest Carbon Study Commission, helping policymakers better understand how forest carbon markets work for family forest owners.

We look forward to continuing this work to remove policy barriers that make it harder for forest owners to participate in emerging markets and conservation opportunities.

STRENGTHENING MARKETS FOR WORKING FORESTS

There is plenty more ahead. In our next Woodland update, we hope to share additional progress on the Farm Bill, fiscal year 2027 funding, international climate policy, and other efforts to create stronger opportunities for family forest owners.

Remembering Salem Saloom

BY BETH RILEY BARNEY, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY

We are heartbroken at the loss of former American Forest Foundation (AFF) Board member, Rev. Salem G. Saloom, MD. Salem leaves an incredible legacy of leadership, stewardship, service and support for AFF. He first volunteered as a Grasstops Leader for our policy advocacy work two decades ago and then served the American Tree Farm System (ATFS) locally and nationally, making countless friends throughout the network and helping to select the regional and national Tree Farmer of the Year. He went on to serve several terms on our Board and was a founding member and champion of AFF's planned giving program, the Seedling Society.

Salem, recently ordained as a minister after serving an esteemed career as a doctor, and his wife Dianne, own and care for an incredible Tree Farm in Alabama, which they have stewarded along with their son Patrick and their beloved dogs. He will be remembered for his faith, his love of longleaf pine and turkey hunting by fellow conservationists. As a Board member, Salem was a strong advocate for our work to grow AFF's impact through programs like the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP).

AFF President and CEO Rita Hite said, "While many will remember Salem for his commitment to conservation, his leadership in our community, and his steadfast love for any person he interacts with, in my view, his legacy stretches far beyond this. Salem has been instrumental over the last 20 years in directly shaping the vision and direction of AFF. With Salem's direct leadership, AFF went from an organization that was impacting maybe 8,000 new acres a year of family forests to impacting 8,000 new acres of family forests a month! Family forest owners are on the map, generating significant new political and financial support because of the work that Salem and Dianne both have put into advocating for family forests. Not many people can say they have had a direct hand in work that has benefitted so many family forest owners in the U.S."



Some members of the AFF team visiting Salem Saloom and his wife, Dianne.

"I first met Salem more than 15 years ago, as he bounded through the AFF office halls giving warm hugs to all friends, old and new," said Christine Cadigan, AFF's Executive Vice President who oversees the carbon program, but who got her start on the policy team, reflects. "He was in town for our ATFS Congressional fly-in and was genuinely excited to be representing the interests of family forest owners. He took his job very seriously and listened intently in our training sessions. He never once made these meetings or interactions about him; it was always about the people—or the critters—he represented on his quest. He was selfless, committed, passionate. But even more than that, Salem was kind. He treated everyone he met with warmth and respect. He remembered the details of your life, he took the time to check in, and he cared deeply about your response. He listened, he learned, he supported. It's rare to find someone who can so easily surround you in comfort and love in an instant."

Salem and Dianne both have been engaged in AFF's policy work, but their initial engagement was through the ATFS network, and they have continued their commitment to incredible stewardship throughout the southeastern United States and beyond. You'll rarely hear anyone speak about Salem and not talk about longleaf pine. AFF's former CEO, Tom Martin, said of this "one (of his) lasting legacies will be the evolution of longleaf pine as more than a curiosity, to be both an ecological and economic part of the landscape."

"I met Salem as one of his Inspectors for the National Tree Farmer of the year and we selected him as the Southern Tree Farmer of the Year and, of course, he was then selected as the National Tree Farmer of the Year," said Bob Bauer, a long-time volunteer leader for ATFS and a southern forestry leader who recently retired as the head of the Executive Director of the Kentucky Forest Industries Association. "It was obvious on the initial regional inspection that he had a great passion for Tree Farm and was willing to get involved in volunteering his time. His tremendous leadership qualities truly came through as he eventually was appointed to the AFF Board. His legacy in addition to being a great leader was his willingness to always be available to volunteer in many areas to improve the Tree Farm program including taking the time to do regional inspections over the past 5 years which required travelling all over the country."

"Salem Saloom came into my life early in my career as I conducted a Tree Farm inspection on his farm," said Chris Erwin. Chris is now the Executive Vice President of the Alabama Forestry Foundation, but he worked for more than a decade for AFF as the Southern Conservation Director and oversaw the ATFS for several years. Chris and Salem shared a very close relationship.



Saloom's beloved Longleaf Pine trees



Salem Saloom's forest, Saloom Properties

"He gave his full attention and support to all the people in his life, myself included. We spoke weekly and almost never about forestry. He cared about me as a man, husband, and father and I am better in all aspects as a result of my friendship. In the wake of his passing, a dear friend told me the world is a darker place without him in it and in the moment I agreed. Upon deeper reflection, the world is significantly brighter than it was before he came into this world, and I am forever grateful for my time with him."

Across the many stories shared about the Salem, the common theme was his love for the natural world. Nathan Truitt, AFF's EVP of Climate Funding said, "My favorite memories of Salem are when we were in the woods together, but not his woods—when we were on a tour of other landowners' properties. I had the pleasure of being with him on these tours in several states and even internationally. Given his incredible conservation accomplishments, you would have forgiven him for assuming the mantle of an expert, but to the contrary, he had an endless curiosity to understand what others were doing, and why, and to squeeze every drop of learning he could from those visits. He always asked the most and the best questions, and not only about the forestry but about families and the land's history. He taught me the power of curiosity; it is a lesson I will never forget."

A celebration will take place at the family farm, including Salem's final burial, on November 1st, which is a follow up to his memorial service on August 7th. Memories and photos to be included in the service may be sent to Tree Farm Network Manager, Parks Brigman at *pbrigman@forestfoundation.org.*

Beyond Carbon:

Financing Water, Health, Biodiversity and Economic Outcomes of Carbon Projects

BY NATHAN TRUITT, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF CLIMATE FUNDING

Your donations to the American Forest Foundation (AFF) enable us to engage thousands of family forest owners each year, many of whom have never spoken to a professional forester or received any kind of advice or assistance about managing their woods. The support you provide helps us enroll those landowners in programs like the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP) or the American Tree Farm System, and through those programs landowners implement better forest management, which results in certified wood products or carbon credits that companies are willing to pay for. In this way, we turn your donations into a much larger impact—on the forest itself, on the families that manage them, and on the communities that depend upon those forests.

Certified wood products and additional carbon sequestration aren't the only things your contributions produce, however. They're the outcomes we verify and sell to bring more resources into the program—but they're far from the whole story. This year, we partnered with the Sorenson Impact Institute out of the University of Utah to assess the other impacts of AFF's programs. Using the FFCP as their "laboratory," they identified four main areas where your contributions to AFF are driving positive change: water quality, biodiversity, human health, and rural economic development. In upcoming issues of *Woodland*, we'll explore each of these impacts in turn, highlighting Sorenson's key findings.

None of those impacts likely surprise you. If you manage a woodland yourself, or if you care enough to support others that do, you already know that the that sustainable management of forests creates a huge amount of benefits. But what might surprise you is the sheer scale of these benefits, and the potential economic value they represent to the communities around them and to the country at large. Today, we'll begin by looking at the link between one of AFF's main programs, FFCP, and water quality.

VALUE ACROSS WATERSHEDS

Acres Enrolled in Improved Forest Management 211,834

Pollutant	Lbs Per Acre	Total Lbs	Value Per Lbs	Total Value
Nitrogen	6.5	1,376,921	$45.85	$63,126,532
Phosphorous	0.26	55,077	$58.31	$3,211,403
Sediment	168	35,588,112	$0.09	$3,194,457
			Total	$69,532,392

First, a quick reminder of the basics of FFCP: with the help of your contributions, AFF reaches out to landowners in 20 states, providing them with technical assistance in the form of a relationship with a forester and the development of a forest management plan. Nearly 80% of FFCP enrollees have never engaged with a professional forester, in any way, to manage their woods. These landowners agree to implement the plan and to avoid destructive harvesting practices like highgrading (in which the healthiest, biggest and most productive trees are harvested, leaving the "junk" behind), and in exchange, FFCP provides them with stable, guaranteed incentive payments to help cover costs while their forests mature and

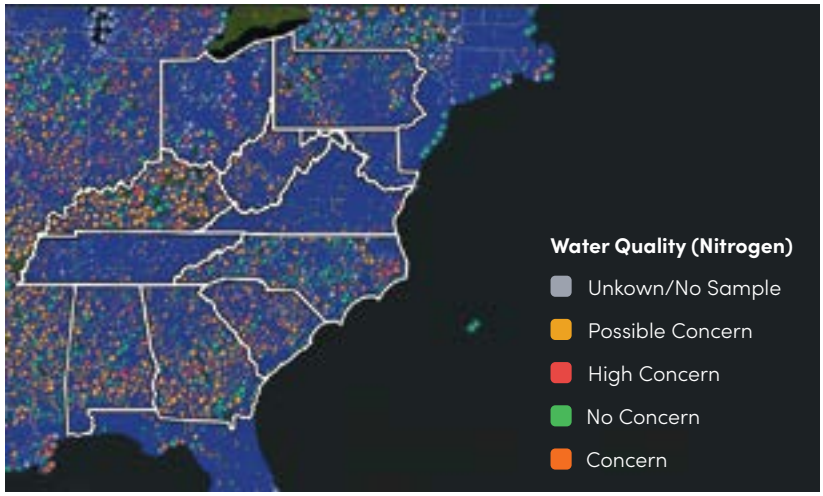
increase in timber value. It turns out this process also results in much more carbon being sequestered from the atmosphere, and stored in the woods and the wood products that, decades from now, will result. Companies are willing to pay for that service in the form of carbon credits, which they use to address their ongoing emissions while they implement plans to reduce those emissions over time. With that system, we take the contributions of donors like you and turn them into tens of millions of dollars from U.S. companies working to improve the health of our forests and the lives of the people who manage them. To date, over 1,500 families, managing over 215,000 acres, have enrolled in FFCP.

Sorenson's research shows those same contributions are driving huge impacts on water quality, too. This is not surprising—after all, the role of forests in providing clean water is well known. Despite covering about 36% of the land area in the continental U.S., forests generate half of the nation's surface water supply. What may be surprising is all the different ways forests enrolled in FFCP produce water benefits, and the size of the benefits they produce. Here are the main sources of that benefit:

- **Flood and drought mitigation:** forests absorb heavy rains and act as natural sponges, taking up water from heavy storms and slowly releasing it into streams and rivers. FFCP preserves a healthy, full forest canopy, which reduces runoff from storm events by as much as 240%. The flip side of this is that the water from those storm events is released over time, maintaining a regular flow that downstream communities and manufacturers depend on for clean drinking water and to run their businesses.
- **Reducing pollution and sedimentation:** forests serve as a natural filter, catching harmful pollutants like nitrogen and phosphorous, as well as sediments. This reduces the cost of treating water for downstream communities. For every 10% of forest cover in a watershed, water treatment costs decrease by approximately 20%. By providing landowners with annual income and a long-term plan to increase the value of their woodlands, FFCP helps landowners keep their forests as forests, so they can continue to provide this critical service.
- **Maintaining stream temperature:** mature and healthy forests shade streams, keeping temperatures cool and preserving habitat for fish and other species. FFCP helps landowners keep streamside forests healthy and intact, providing landowners with guidance on how to treat invasive species, and limiting streamside harvesting activities.
- **Vital to our drinking water supply:** Almost as important as how FFCP landowners help water quality is where those woodlands are located: 61% of FFCP properties are in areas of "very high" importance to drinking water, and another 30% are in areas of "high" importance, per the U.S. Forest Service.

Of course, FFCP helps landowners improve the water impacts their woodlands are already generating, so the question is: how much additional value the program is creating? Answering that means making a couple of conservative assumptions—starting with how to put a price on water quality in the first place. We can look specifically at one state, Maryland, where a water quality credit market is operating, in order to estimate a price for at least some of the value FFCP provides. We will take lower observed water credit values from Maryland to be conservative. Second, we also need to estimate how much of a difference FFCP makes. We will conservatively assume that FFCP, through helping landowners improve the long-term management of their woodland, improves these water services by just 10% over time. With these assumptions in place, we can estimate that FFCP:

- Keeps **35.5 million pounds of sediment, 55 thousand pounds of phosphorous,** and **1.4 million pounds of nitrogen** out of streams and rivers.



Map of nitrogen levels in Central Appalachian watersheds. Appalachia is the first and most popular region for FFCP.

- Through just the above—and not including the value of flood or temperature regulation—FFCP provides almost **$70 million in value—every year**—in avoided treatments costs for downstream communities.

Of course, this value will only grow over time, as your contributions help us reach and enroll more landowners!

NEXT STEPS

We're at the beginning of our journey to understand the ways that FFCP landowners promote water quality. As a next step, we're working with water quality experts to identify the specific practices which FFCP families could implement that would most benefit water quality, and we're looking for companies who would partner with us to support landowners in implementing and measuring the results of those practices. As we become better at quantifying the impact of FFCP, we hope to be able to secure investment from downstream water users and share that revenue with landowners to help them improve their management even more.



Pond in a forest

None of this work, none of this impact, would be possible without the generous and loyal contributions of donors like you. So the next time you take a drink of cold, clean, pure water, remember to thank a forest, thank a forest landowner—and don't forget to thank yourself, too!



Five Years of Measurable Impact:

How Chemours and the American Forest Foundation Are Delivering Climate and Community Benefits

BY EMA JOHNSON, DIRECTOR OF PHILANTHROPY

In 2021, Chemours partnered with the American Forest Foundation (AFF) to expand the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP) to West Virginia, launched in Pennsylvania. The collaboration committed to advancing practical climate solutions while investing in communities where Chemours operates and many employees live.

The goal was straightforward: enroll 50 family forest owners and 6,500 acres in sustainable forest management. The results exceeded expectations.

Today in West Virginia, 217 landowners are managing more than 35,000 acres through the program—more than 5x the original acreage target. AFF also provided forest management guidance to 819 landowners, extending the partnership's impact well beyond enrolled participants.

Over the next 20 years, participating forests are projected to store an additional 540,000 metric tons of CO_2e—the equivalent of removing over 125,000 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles from the road for one year.

AFF and Chemours focused on counties experiencing significant economic hardship, including Logan, Wyoming, Boone, Fayette, and Kanawha counties. By investing in family forest owners in these communities, the partnership demonstrates how climate action strengthens local economies.

This work also supports the state's sustainable forestry economy. Over the life of the current contracts, enrolled forests are expected to produce an additional 59 million board feet of timber, supporting an estimated 138 forestry-related jobs while maintaining healthy, working forests.

For Chemours, delivering measurable environmental outcomes comes with meaningful local impact, too. Employees and stakeholders can see investments benefiting neighboring communities, strengthening forests, and creating economic opportunities close to home.



Foresters, Isaac Slone (left) and Ian Forte (middle) with West Virginia Landowner, Wayne Strader (right)

For AFF, the collaboration advances its mission to help family forest owners address some of the nation's most pressing environmental challenges, including carbon storage, water quality, and sustainable wood supplies.

There's also a broader lesson here for corporate leaders. Companies pursuing comprehensive net-zero strategies increasingly recognize the need to address residual emissions while creating broader environmental and social value. The FFCP offers a scalable, science-based solution that combines verified carbon benefits with healthier forests, stronger rural economies, and lasting support for American families.

Five years after its launch, the West Virginia partnership demonstrates what is possible when corporate philanthropy is grounded in real outcomes and genuine partnership. Together, Chemours and AFF have created a model that delivers lasting value for people, forests, and the climate.

To learn how your company can support family forests while achieving measurable climate and community impact, contact Ema Johnson, Director of Philanthropy, at *ejohnson@forestfoundation.org.*

Birding in the Lehigh Valley

BY MATT LEVY, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER AT AFF

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EMA JOHNSON

Birds are the best animal, and it's not particularly close. They fly. They're colorful. They're literally dinosaurs (it's true, look it up.) They're everywhere, perched on electric lines, soaring above us, hopping on the pavement, soaking in bodies of water big and small, and, of course, nestled among the trees leading private, honest lives.

This past summer, the American Forest Foundation (AFF) held its annual staff retreat at a small town in the Lehigh Valley surrounded by lush forests. A small group of intrepid AFFers decided to take advantage of our time in this new landscape and go birding in the nearby Brenner-Penfield Macungie Mountain Preserve. On the van ride over, we saw a dozen red-winged blackbirds scattered alongside the road, an auspicious sign for the expedition ahead.



Red Eyed Vireo

Some of us had never intentionally looked for a bird, others were experts with life lists in the quadruple digits. As we quietly file onto the trail, eyes peeled and knocks loaded, we're beset on all sides by a cacophony of chirps, tweets, squeaks, and shrieks. We're in their territory now. Despite the auditory confirmation of their presence, finding birds in dense forests like this, especially in the summer when the canopy is brimming with leaves, is notoriously difficult. It only takes a few layers of trees in front of you before your visibility is completely blocked.

Birding is all about being in the right place at the right time, but patience helps, too. If you're willing to crane your neck to scan branches high and low, that moment often finds its way to you.

That's when we see a lightly-colored mass dart across our line of sight. We track it with our naked eye, it's gone, there it is again, hidden, hidden, hidden. For the first time we engage our knocks, poring over the foliage in its last known spot. Our investigation is complete when we see a head peek out from the other side of a trunk. As if rewarding us for our patience, it moves along an extended branch to give us all a great look. White belly, olive back, rounded feathers, sparrow sized, and those unmistakable and piercing red eyes. We are in the presence of a red-eyed vireo.

This bird (vireo being the Latin word for olive) is extremely chatty, sometimes chirping for over 12 hours and singing over 20,000 songs a day. On a summer day like this, their singing is nonstop as they hope to attract a mate.

No sooner had we processed this gem of the forest than we were graced by another avian gift: the veery. Similar in size to a vireo, the veery has a light caramel back, and spots of the same color dot its throat.

"Birding is just one element of the retreat, but it was an impactful one."



Red Winged Blackbird



Veery

The veery, whose name is derived from its unique descending song, is here in Pennsylvania for summer breeding. It thrives in this dense understory and nearby stream where it can feed on insects and berries. The veery has been known to construct nests out of dozens of plant species, where it lays sky blue eggs.

Both birds feel right at home in this nature preserve, with a gentle stream, plenty of insects, and great trees to nest. They're here to breed for the summer, and when the weather starts to cool, they'll start the long journey back to South America for the winter.

The trail winds for miles more, but it's time to head back. Birding is just one element of the retreat, but it was an impactful one. For these first time birders, this afternoon opened their eyes, literally, to the abundance of life in everyone's backyard and gave them a crash course in the art of searching it out.

This birding trip also affirmed the importance of AFF's mission to empower family landowners across the country to keep their forests healthy, because healthy forests mean healthy birds. And what's the world without birds? Not a world this group wants to live in.

From Doubt to Direction

BY MEGAN O'CONNELL, COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING MANAGER

Returning to Chester County, Pennsylvania after a 20-year absence was more eye-opening than I had expected. I grew up in the county, and in the years I had been gone, I became a conservation biologist, so returning to meet a local forest conservation group, French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust, made me ponder my memories of the area.

The Templin Woods Preserve, which is home to over 600 acres of mature woodlands and hosts over 140 species of birds, is one of many properties managed by the trust. Since 2023, the trust had been working with American Forest Foundation's Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP) to move through the enrollment process and develop a Forest Management Plan for their unique property, signing their FFCP contract in June of 2025. Upon walking up to the preserve's system of trailheads, I was struck first by the lushness of the forest canopy above me, then by the realization that I had seen very few intact old-growth forests in this region growing up.

Templin Woods Preserve is the closest swath of contiguous mature woodlands to Philadelphia, with the region's forests historically being over-logged and viewed as an impediment to agriculture. Records indicate that Pennsylvania was almost completely forested before Europeans arrived, but by the early 1900s, its ~28 million acres of forests had been reduced to ~9 million, or about 1/3 of its original forested area. While the state has made huge strides to restore its forests since then, with 53% of the state being reforested, the pastoral scars of Pennsylvania's logging and agricultural history are still very present and were so in my childhood growing up next to corn fields rather than trees.



Executive Director Bill Gladden, Preserve Manager Jim Moffett, and Intern Rowan Rexrode gave AFF staff a trail tour at Templin Woods Preserve in Chester County, PA.

"Properties like Templin Woods Preserve are just the start of French & Pickering's long-term goal to conserve more forests across Chester County," the Trust's Executive Director Bill Gladden noted as he addressed American Forest Foundation (AFF) staff during our June 2026 tour. Gladden and the French & Pickering team are not your typical FFCP family forest owners—they are, after all, a conservation land trust rather than a family. Gladden insisted, though, that the process of getting their board of directors on the same page about joining FFCP felt much like the property debates families go through when deciding the future of valuable family assets like land.

"We had some board members that were very keen on the logging value of the forests, while we had others that wanted to leave these forests untouched



Bill Gladden and AFF's President and CEO Rita Hite welcoming AFF's staff to Templin Woods Preserve–June 2026.

in perpetuity. It took a ton of work to educate and convince both factions that neither of these was the best solution for the longevity of these forests and their ability to sequester carbon." Gladden cites the FFCP team as essential in helping him on this journey with his board members. "I had been investigating ways for smaller-acreage landowners to participate in the carbon market, or to protect our forests while making some kind of profit since 2018, but I just hadn't found the way to do it until FFCP."

Finding that middle ground wasn't just a matter of negotiating bottom lines. It required Gladden and the FFCP team to slowly and patiently shift how this board viewed forest stewardship altogether—moving them past old assumptions about what conservation could look like financially. FFCP offered another way forward. By connecting the trust with expert foresters who grasped both the ecological nuances of Templin Woods Preserve and the financial realities of land ownership, FFCP helped demystify how family forest owners can participate in the carbon market. "The FFCP enrollment team, especially our AFF account manager Cara Dougherty, was so patient with all our questions and helped us understand how carbon markets and FFCP contracts work. This back-and-forth period of asking lots of questions, learning, and being received with such patience by AFF were crucial in building trust and buy-in with our board."

A more recent turning point for Templin Woods Preserve came right before our staff tour of the preserve: Gladden and French & Pickering's preserve manager Jim Moffett had recently been visited by an AFF forester to develop a Forest Management Plan (FMP) for the preserve. This plan lays out a dynamic, tailored roadmap designed specifically for Templin Woods Preserve's unique ecosystem and French & Pickering's goals for their forests. Walking the trail, chatting about the FMP with Moffett, the energy among the trust's leadership was palpable. For Moffett, the plan turned abstract conservation ideals into tangible, daily actions. "We needed to do a lot of education among our stakeholders about what exactly improved forest management can achieve. It's not that we're just leaving these forests idle; there are a number of thinning and invasive species practices that are going to make these woodlands even more of an asset, but people just didn't understand that piece until AFF's foresters lent their credibility and walked us through it."

Seeing the woodlands of my youth being managed so intentionally and with so much fresh energy brought my journey full circle. Standing under that lush, green canopy, just miles from the agricultural fields of my childhood, I saw what is possible when science, financial incentive, and passionate stewardship align. During our tour along the preserve's trails, Moffett described how the preserve used to be in the heart of the hybrid zone for two species of chickadees: the Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees. "We have a longstanding study of these birds with Villanova University, and their work here has been able to estimate that the hybrid zone is moving north at a rate of 0.7 miles per year. These preserved forests have given invaluable insights into how the species' range is shifting. We wouldn't have that insight without intact, longstanding woodlands like this one."

French & Pickering's story isn't just about one 500-acre preserve; it's a blueprint for small forest owners across Pennsylvania and beyond who want to do right by their land but need a clear path forward. As Gladden looked out over the mature forest during our tour, his vision for the future was clearer than ever. "We're really excited about how this preserve is becoming a resource for our community. People are getting used to coming here to hike, and for educational events. I foresee developing programs to teach landowners in the area about how they can participate in FFCP, the value of improved forest management, of all the important benefits these ecosystems provide." Thanks to FFCP, properties like Templin Woods Preserve won't just remain standing; they will flourish for generations to come.

A Partner on Every Step of the Journey

Fostering a Culture of Stewardship, One Landowner at a Time

BY SARAH CONNOR, COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING COORDINATOR

At our recent team retreat, staff members decided to come together to answer one simple question: What do you wish every landowner knew about interacting with the American Forest Foundation (AFF) team?

Their answers revealed a common theme. While the Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP) was created to help leverage the carbon market to support private landowners, the AFF was founded to support family forest owners in any way possible, and that mission continues today. Our staff wants landowners to know they have a trusted partner every step of the way.



Angela Wells

As the Senior Director of Community and Sustained Engagement and the American Tree Farm, Angela leads teams working to shape and implement strategy to support landowners' long-term conservation commitments independently and in collaboration with partners.

Angela loves being able to work with individuals new to sustainable forestry. There are no silly questions for our staff, and there are no "right" or "wrong" goals for your personal property. Every landowner has a unique vision, and AFF's job is to help bring that vision to life through improved forest management.

"It's really a breath of fresh air to interact with forest landowners. It's just wonderful to be in proximity to people who have fresh eyes and perspectives."

Jasmine Brown



As Senior Manager of Landowner Stewardship, Jasmine leads a team focused on building a scalable model for landowner retention by identifying the values and services that strengthen engagement, drive enrollment and re-enrollment, and reduce the risk of reversals. She works closely with landowners and partners to support them in achieving their conservation goals while staying in compliance with their contracts.

"My favorite thing about working with landowners is that landowners are not a monolith. I get to talk to landowners who are in different phases of life, who are interested in doing different things, to hear more about their stories and what their plans are for the future," shared Jasmine.

She wants landowners to know that support from her team doesn't stop at enrollment. They are always happy to be able to interact with family forest owners and give them advice on their stewardship.

"I think something that really sets FFCP apart from other programs is that we do have a dedicated staff whose goal and whole job is to support them. Our whole goal is to support them through all their goals and objectives on their land or with their land."



Parks Brigman, ATFS Network Manager

In his role as American Tree Farm System Network Manager, Parks provides direct support to state programs in their recognition, educational, and peer-to-peer networking activities.

Parks wants landowners to know they do not have to come prepared with all the answers. In reality, many people are just beginning their forest stewardship journey, and that's exactly why AFF programs are designed to serve as a support system while navigating the challenges of forest management.

"It's okay for them [landowners] to feel like they don't have all the answers. Don't be afraid to ask questions and be curious."

Emily Thomas



Emily began at AFF working directly with landowners and has since moved into a role behind-the-scenes as Senior Manager of Systems Operations.

She recalls working with two landowners who both wanted to improve wildlife habitat. One family hoped to create healthier forests to support deer populations for hunting, while the other, a vegan family, wanted to create a wildlife sanctuary. Their reasons were different, but they took the same path forward.

"The way they're both going to achieve that goal is through the same methodology and the same forest management practices, and how our landowners get where they want to go is what gets us as an organization where we want to go."

Across AFF, every team member is working toward the same goal: supporting the people who care for America's family forests while ensuring those forests remain healthy and resilient for generations to come.

The decisions landowners make today can shape their forests for decades. A single conversation about stewardship can have lasting impacts on wildlife, water quality, air quality, and biodiversity.

"You make a decision today, and it's going to have an impact for 20, 30, or 40 years into the future," Emily reflected. "How often do you get to have that kind of power as an individual, to make such a positive impact?"

Biochar:

A Simple Solution That Can Help Forests

BY DANIEL LEATHERS, SENIOR MANAGER OF LEGACY GIVING

If someone told you that burning wood could actually help the environment, it might sound confusing. Most of us think of burning wood as something that creates smoke and pollution. But there is a special process that turns wood and other plant materials into something called biochar, and it has the potential to improve soil, support healthier forests, reduce wildfire threat, improve water quality and supply, and even help fight climate change.

The idea behind biochar is surprisingly simple.

Imagine building a campfire, but instead of letting the wood burn completely into ash, you heat it with very little oxygen. Without much oxygen, the wood cannot burn the way it normally would. Instead, it turns into a lightweight, black material that looks like charcoal. That material is called biochar. The key is stopping the process before the material burns completely to ash, preserving much of the carbon contained in the original wood.

Unlike charcoal used for grilling, biochar is not meant to be burned as fuel. Instead, it can be added to soil, where much of its carbon is highly resistant to decomposition and can remain stored for centuries or longer.

But biochar isn't just a carbon sequestration tool. Think of it as a tiny sponge made from plants. It is full of millions of microscopic holes that hold water, nutrients, and beneficial microorganisms. Those tiny spaces can help biochar retain water and nutrients and provide habitat for soil microorganisms. Much like compost, biochar can be added to soils during the restoration process to help retain soil moisture and rebuild soil microbial communities.



Biochar Up Close

WHERE DOES BIOCHAR COME FROM?

Biochar can be made from many natural materials, including:

- Tree branches
- Dead trees
- Forest thinning projects
- Crop leftovers like corn stalks
- Wood chips
- Yard waste

For family forest owners, one of the most promising options is small-diameter trees, limbs, and other woody material generated during forest restoration and wildfire-risk reduction treatments.

This is especially important in forests.

Many forests today contain too many small trees and dead branches because decades of fire suppression have allowed them to build up. This is particularly important in places like California's Sierra Nevada, where many forests historically experienced frequent, low-severity fire. Those fires not only helped keep forests more open; they also regularly produced charcoal that became incorporated into forest soils. More than a century of widespread fire suppression disrupted both processes.

The question has always been what to do with all those leftover branches and small trees. Biochar offers one answer. Creating biochar from excess forest material can also return carbon to soils that historically have received charcoal from frequent fire. Instead of treating the material as waste, it can become biochar, a product that improves soil and stores carbon.

HELPING THE SOIL

Healthy soil is much more than dirt. It is a living community filled with bacteria, fungi, insects, earthworms, water, air, and nutrients. Biochar helps many of these parts work better together. Its tiny pores act like little storage rooms that hold water after it rains. During dry periods, plants can continue drawing moisture from the soil for a longer time. Farmers often notice that soils mixed with biochar become easier to manage over time. Research has shown that biochar can influence water retention and nutrient availability, although the effects vary depending on the biochar, soil, climate, and application rate. Biochar isn't a fertilizer by itself. Instead, its porous structure can help retain water and nutrients that might otherwise move through the soil more quickly. You can think of it like adding extra shelves and storage containers to a pantry. The food was already available, but now it stays organized and lasts longer.



Collecting Biochar

HELPING FORESTS BECOME MORE RESILIENT

For family forest owners, one of biochar's most promising applications may begin before a catastrophic wildfire occurs. Forest restoration treatments can remove excess small trees, limbs, and other fuels that contribute to severe fire behavior. Converting some of that material into biochar creates an opportunity to return carbon-rich material to the land rather than simply burning the material to ash or hauling it away

A POWERFUL CLIMATE TOOL

One of the most exciting things about biochar is its ability to store carbon. Trees naturally remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as they grow. They use sunlight to turn carbon into wood, bark, leaves, and roots.

Normally, when a tree dies, much of that carbon eventually returns to the atmosphere through decay or burning. Biochar changes that cycle.The heating process converts a portion of the carbon into highly stable forms that resist decomposition. Once buried in soil, that carbon can remain there for centuries.

In simple terms, biochar takes carbon that was in the atmosphere and safely stores it underground for an extremely long time.

LOOKING AHEAD

Interest in biochar is growing around the world. What makes biochar especially appealing is its simplicity. It starts with materials that already exist—branches, wood chips, crop leftovers, and other plant matter. Through a carefully controlled heating process, those materials become something useful rather than waste.

It turns what was once considered waste into a long-lasting resource that benefits the land, supports healthier ecosystems, and helps build a more sustainable future. Rather than treating this material as waste, biochar offers a way to transform it into a valuable product that improves soil while locking away carbon for the long term. It's an example of how innovation can help family forest owners get more value from sustainable forest management while supporting healthier forests.

As researchers continue exploring biochar, AFF is paying close attention to its potential. If markets continue to grow, biochar could become another tool that supports active forest management by creating demand for low-value woody material that often has few productive uses today. AFF is working to develop biochar as yet another tool and pathway for family forest owners to better manage their forests and sustainably monetize the incredible assets they steward.

"It turns what was once considered waste into a long-lasting resource that benefits the land, supports healthier ecosystems, and helps build a more sustainable future."

Biochar won't replace good forest management, nor is it a solution to every challenge facing our forests. But it offers an innovative way to connect wildfire-risk reduction, forest restoration, and long-term carbon storage, while potentially creating value from woody material that is expensive for landowners to manage today.

For landowners who have spent generations caring for their woods, that's an encouraging idea. What was once considered leftover material may someday become part of a healthier forest, a stronger rural economy, and a more sustainable future.

Family Forest Carbon Program Metrics All Time

211,834
Acres enrolled

1,544
Contracts enrolled

$53.49M
Committed to pay landowners over the next 20 years

3.69M
Expected Verified Carbon Units (VCUs) generated over the next 20 years by enrolled acreage

Let's put this into context: this would equate to taking 861,000 gas-powered cars off the road for one year, or 769,000 homes' electricity use for one year!

A Walk in the Woods

BY TOM GRESHAM

GERRY AND LORRAINE FISH

Gerry and Lorraine Fish have found such a sense of peace on their property in the Finger Lakes region of New York that they decided to share it with others.

The Fishes, whose approximately 70 acres are located between Canandaigua Lake and Seneca Lake, have created a campground-like retreat on the land, which today is used by ministers and their families and ministry groups. The property has a cabin and some camping units, and it serves as a place where visitors can spend time in the woods away from noise and disruption. Throughout their efforts, the Fishes have aimed to integrate their retreat center into the woods in a seamless way.

"There's a peacefulness, a calmness, to being in the woods, and I think a fondness for that experience is what led us to try to make it something that's available for others," Gerry Fish said.

Gerry's grandparents originally lived on the property, and he grew up next door. He frequently spent time as a kid playing in the property's woods and creek. He and Lorraine bought the property years later. It includes about 30 acres of woodland that largely had gone unmanaged until recent years.

Fish said he and his family have sought to keep the property feeling natural while taming it as needed, but it could prove challenging without professional input.

"We want it to be a green space to enjoy, but that doesn't usually happen automatically," he said. "Woods left to themselves aren't always the healthiest things."

For that reason, Fish has sought to learn more about how to "help it along"—what to take out, what to add in, where to thin, how to spur targeted growth.



For the Fishes, the woods are a critical part of the retreat setting they are trying to foster, and their health is essential to the mission and vision of The Haven.

The Family Forest Carbon Program (FFCP) was a perfect fit for their needs. Fish said his family has long strived to be good stewards of the land, but knew that they had a great deal to learn about how to do it best. In addition to providing payments for practices that sequester carbon, landowners enrolled in FFCP also receive forest management plans and professional forestry advice.

"It's less about being a property owner and more about being a steward of the land," Fish said. "We want to encourage the right things to happen. We've spent years saving trees from the wild grape vines and poison ivy and poison oak that's growing throughout the whole area."

Fish said it has been refreshing to learn more about their woodland so that they can take appropriate steps to support its health. For instance, the Fishes' ash trees were hit hard by the emerald ash borer.

"It's nice to have a plan through the FFCP to do a better job of making sure things are as resilient and attractive and healthy as possible," Fish said.

Fish, an ordained minister, wanted to provide a place for ministers and their families to go. It became the first to become a pastor's host site in New York State on *pastorstays.com*, a sort of Airbnb for pastors.

Fish said those who stay at the property, dubbed "The Haven," remark on its beauty and tranquility.

"For them, it's a chance to get back to nature—to be out among the trees and to see the beauty and the peacefulness of it," Fish said. "To be able to stand by a creek in the woods—there's something special about that."

LYNN AND BECKY MINER'S 55-YEAR PROJECT' LEAVES A LEGACY OF LEARNING AND CONSERVATION

Lynn and Becky Miner fell in love unexpectedly with a beautiful piece of land when they were just teenagers. Lynn was newly in the Air Force, based in Spokane, Washington, and the young couple decided it would be an adventure one day to drive to Canada.

"As we came down this big hill into the Chewelah River Valley, I said to Becky, 'Wow, this place is beautiful. We ought to live here someday.'" Lynn said.

For the next 25 years, the Miners lived off Lynn's income, first in the military and then as a physicist, and saved every penny that Becky made in her career as a nurse. The place that had captured their imagination was never far from their minds. In 1992, they took the giant step of buying their 100-acre Chewelah dream spot with those hard-earned savings.

"We still thought it was absolutely beautiful, just stunning," Lynn said. "Of course, we knew nothing about forestry, and we had no idea how badly mismanaged it had been and how much work needed to be done."

The previous owners had been dairy farmers, and the land had an array of problems, including a forest that was grossly overgrown. The Miners built a house on the property and got to work.

Becky said she and Lynn already believed strongly in the importance of being stewards of the land, and they each had loved spending time outdoors since childhood.

"Once we found out that there was a lot of work to do, we were like, 'OK, great,'" Becky said. "We like being outdoors, and there's a special pleasure to coming in after working out in the forest—dirty, grimy, our muscles aching but with big smiles on our faces. It was always so rewarding to spend the day out working in the forest."

The Miners got involved with a variety of local and regional organizations, talked to consultants and foresters, and learned as much as they could.

"Becky and I are both lifelong learners," Lynn said. "It doesn't matter if it's forestry, physics, or nursing. We're constantly searching out things that challenge and educate us."

The Miners not only brought inquisitive minds to the property, but they also had a commitment to critical thinking that led them to sometimes question the consensus on best practices. They were willing to test what they were taught on everything from the maintenance and location of bird nesting boxes to what to do about gall rust.



Becky and Lynn Miner were recognized as 2025 Western Region Tree Farmers of the Year for their stewardship of 100 acres of mixed conifer forest in northeast Washington State.

"We did over 30 years of observation and trial-and-error testing," Lynn said. "We really enjoyed that, and over the years we became de facto experts in a lot of this stuff to the point where we were being called upon to give presentations and lectures ourselves."

The combination of curiosity and hard work helped them transform the property from the "mess" they had found into a model of a healthy property. That effort earned them the AFF's Western Region Tree Farm of the Year award in 2025.

Of course, the Miners said, the enjoyment the land brought them was not limited to the work they did on it. They are also avid hikers, snowshoers and cross-country skiers. Becky would pitch a tent at a particularly scenic spot overlooking the valley and conduct bird studies. And they would welcome others, such as hunters and Boy Scouts, to share the property for community education purposes.

"We've always had the attitude that you need to leave the world in a better place than you found it, and having that mentality all the time is what drove us to community involvement," Becky said.

It was also that mindset that inspired the Miners to donate their property last year—including not just the land but a 4,000-square-foot log home, a large shop and a garage—to Washington State University (WSU) Extension Forestry, which is turning it into a research facility. The shop will house classroom and dorm space, and graduate students will have the freedom to spend extended periods of time conducting intensive research, following in the Miners' footsteps.

Lynn and Becky said they explored a variety of options for ensuring all the work they had put into the land would be honored into the future. After all, they had loved it since they were a young couple driving to Canada, suddenly astonished by its beauty.

"This wasn't a 30-year effort—this was a 55-year effort," Lynn said. "We wanted to leave something, a legacy of learning, a legacy of carrying forward the conservation ideals that we planted on that piece of property, and we really feel confident that WSU will do that."

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