

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



An All-Lands Approach to Restoration: The Role of the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests

**Jay Jensen, Deputy Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the
Environment**

**National Roundtable on Sustainable Forests Meeting
Washington, DC—October 14, 2009**

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here. The Roundtable on Sustainable Forests is vital to sustaining our nation's precious forest resources for the benefit of future generations. It is an honor to be here among so many knowledgeable professionals, and I commend you for the work you do.

And our work is certainly cut out for us if we are to sustain America's forests for future generations. You better than anyone else know the challenges we face: invasive species of all kinds ... loss of working landscapes to development ... growing fire seasons and wildfire severity, plus devastating outbreaks of insects and disease, all

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



symptomatic of declining forest health across millions of acres ... and, compounding every challenge, the overarching threat of climate change.

To meet these challenges, our nation needs a clear and compelling vision for the future. In August of this year, in Seattle, Washington, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack delivered a speech outlining his national vision for America's forests. The Secretary's vision is based on a few simple truths: that forests are vital to the future of our nation, and that America's forest stewards, the farmers, ranchers, and others who own and manage the nation's forests, are key to sustaining the ecosystem services that Americans get from their forests.

Perhaps the most elemental of those services is water. Americans tend to take their drinking water for granted, yet none of us would last more than a few days without water, and most of our drinking water comes from our forests, farms, and ranches. In fact, our forests, our farms, and

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



our ranches provide 87 percent of the surface supply of drinking water in America.

I can't think of a more compelling reason to manage these lands sustainably. Yet our water supplies, not to mention all the other ecosystem services that people get from forests, are increasingly at risk as we lose our working forests and as the health of our remaining forests declines.

A shared vision can begin with the *restoration* of our nation's forests.

By restoration, I mean not only keeping forest land forested, but also restoring the structure and function of healthy, resilient forest ecosystems—ecosystems that are capable ... even now, even in this era of climate change ... of delivering plentiful supplies of pure, clean water and all the other ecosystem services that Americans want and need.

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



That is a daunting challenge. It will require strategic approaches to climate change based on adaptation as well as mitigation on a landscape scale. No one can do it alone. America’s rich forest tapestries are interwoven across landscapes, across landownerships, and they are at risk of unraveling *unless* landowners and land managers work together across boundaries based on a shared restoration vision. The restoration of our nation’s forests, the realization of our common vision, is predicated on landscape-scale conservation, on an *all-lands approach*.

The Secretary recognizes that the Forest Service has an important role to play in an all-lands approach. The mission of the Forest Service goes far beyond the so-called “green line” of the National Forest System. It is, and I quote, “to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the *nation’s* forests and grasslands,” not just the national forests. Forest Service leadership has explicitly embraced an all-lands approach as one of its highest priorities.

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



In realizing our common vision, in restoring the nation's forests, the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests will be key. With all the stakeholder diversity the Roundtable represents, it is uniquely poised to lead the way. The Roundtable's partnership with the Forest Service, for example, is a template for this all-lands approach—for working with all stakeholders, including State Foresters, conservation groups, forest industry, and others to develop a broad agenda for protecting our privately owned forests and our working lands.

The Roundtable is already practicing many aspects of Secretary Vilsack's vision for the nation's forests. You have always taken a landscape-scale approach across ownerships, including consideration of privately owned forests—and make no mistake: those forests are key. Fifty-seven percent of our nation's forests are privately owned; here in the East, it is 83 percent, and even in the West privately owned forest

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



lands play a critical ecological role in the matrix of federal, state, tribal, municipal, and other ownerships across the landscape. The Roundtable has always understood that, leading the way in cross-boundary stakeholder inclusion.

A barrier to restoration, to a shared vision for the future of America's forests, is the legacy of distrust inherited from the past. Too often, a common vision has eluded our nation. A century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt recognized the public divisiveness that corrodes our common purpose. Then as now, we have ascribed to each other questionable motives, trying to change each other's values, never realizing how corrosive that can be—how futile and counterproductive.

Given the threats to our forests today, Americans must move away from polarization, and we can start by accepting the basic offerings we each bring, the mutual desire to do the right thing. We can work toward a

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



shared vision based on healthy, flourishing ecosystems—ecosystems that can provide all the services that Americans want and need while creating jobs and local economic opportunities, supporting communities of all kinds.

That vision is based on mutual respect. Again, T.R. put it well. He said that the solution was to promote, and I quote, “the mutual respect, the sense of common duties and common interests, which arise when [we] take the trouble to understand one another, and to associate together for a common object.” It’s all about finding common ground in pursuit of a common goal.

Yet even when people share a common goal ... even when they respect each other and trust each other to do the right thing ... people will still sometimes disagree about the right action to take, sometimes passionately, because they care so passionately about their forests.

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



That's only natural, and we should always welcome debate within a framework of mutual trust and respect.

The Roundtable on Sustainable Forests has shown the way. The Roundtable represents a tremendous variety of stakeholders, giving each of them a forum for sharing their perspectives and voicing their concerns. Yet the Roundtable has been remarkably successful in charting new ground and moving forward. It has a proven ability to provide healthy dialogue leading to better decisionmaking on the ground. It is leading the way.

An all-lands approach is embedded in the Roundtable's work. The criteria and indicators developed through the Montreal Process extend across landownerships. Using them, the Roundtable has acquired the trend data needed for a robust public dialogue about the health and productivity of our nation's forests and the threats they face. It's Draft

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



Sustainable Forests Action Strategy and the actions it recommends point the way toward restoration through landscape-scale conservation.

The Roundtable has fostered on-the-ground examples of sustainable forest management at subnational scales. And, before closing, I want to briefly acknowledge a few.

- The Oregon Board of Forestry has used a process of dialogue and inclusion to apply the criteria and indicators to conditions in Oregon.

The *2003 Forestry Program for Oregon* is a strategic plan that sets forth a vision for all of Oregon's forests, public and private, along with goals and objectives to guide the Board's decisions. The plan includes goals and indicators based on the Montreal Process but tailored to Oregon's forests.

- Maryland has conducted a Strategic Forest Lands Assessment based on the criteria and indicators. It used indicators to analyze forest sustainability and GIS computer models to determine ecological,

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



economic, and vulnerability rankings of forest lands as well as riparian restoration opportunities.

- Wisconsin adopted a Forest Sustainability Framework based on the criteria and indicators, but again tailored to conditions in Wisconsin.
- The Northeastern Area of the Forest Service's State and Private Forestry and 20 state forestry agencies are collaborating through the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters to deploy a system for understanding and measuring forest sustainability on a regional basis.
- Finally, Mt. Hood National Forest began a systems-based approach to sustainability during the 1990s using the Montreal Process criteria and indicators as a framework.

In many respects, the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests has led the way toward an all-lands approach to restoring the nation's forests. As we embrace a common vision, as we work together collaboratively to

Draft speech—version 1

U.S. Forest Service
Washington, DC



restore forests across shared landscapes, there is no better model we can look to than the Roundtable. The Roundtable has an ongoing leadership role to play, not least in safeguarding the quality and quantity of the nation's water supply— and the criteria and indicators provide a key mechanism to realizing the Secretary's restoration vision.

In closing, I urge the Roundtable to partner with the Sustainable Water Resources Roundtable, focusing their combined energies on sustaining the nation's forests in connection with the nation's water supply.

Working together, we *can* restore America's forests and waters for the benefit of future generations. I believe we owe our nation nothing less.