

About Us - Meet the Forest Service

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What is the Forest Service?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service is a Federal agency that manages public lands in national forests and grasslands. The Forest Service is also the largest forestry research organization in the world, and provides technical and financial assistance to state and private forestry agencies. Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the Forest Service, summed up the purpose of the Forest Service—"to provide the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people in the long run."

Learn about our mission, motto, vision, and guiding principles or read our strategic plan.

When and why was the Forest Service established?

Congress established the Forest Service in 1905 to provide quality water and timber for the Nation's benefit. Over the years, the public has expanded the list of what they want from national forests and grasslands. Congress responded by directing the Forest Service to manage national forests for additional multiple uses and benefits and for the sustained yield of renewable resources such as water, forage, wildlife, wood, and recreation. Multiple use means managing resources under the best combination of uses to benefit the American people while ensuring the productivity of the land and protecting the quality of the environment.

National forests are America's great outdoors. They encompass 193 million acres (aprox. 78 million hectares) of land, which is an area equivalent to the size of Texas. National forests provide opportunities for recreation in open spaces and natural environments. With more and more people living in urban areas, national forests are becoming more important and valuable to Americans. People enjoy a wide variety of activities on national forests, including backpacking in remote, unroaded wilderness areas, mastering an all-terrain vehicle over a challenging trail, enjoying the views along a scenic byway, or fishing in a great trout stream, to mention just a few.

What does the Forest Service do?

The job of Forest Service managers is to help people share and enjoy the forest, while conserving the environment for generations yet to come. Some activities are compatible. Some are not. You, as a concerned citizen, play a key role. By expressing your views to Forest Service managers, you will help them balance all of these uses and make decisions in the best interest of the forest and the public.

The Forest Service motto, "*Caring for the Land and Serving People*," captures the spirit of our mission, which we accomplish through five main activities:

- Protection and management of natural resources on National Forest System lands.
- Research on all aspects of forestry, rangeland management, and forest resource utilization.
- Community assistance and cooperation with State and local governments, forest industries, and private landowners to help protect and manage non-Federal forest and associated range and watershed lands to improve conditions in rural areas.
- Achieving and supporting an effective workforce that reflects the full range of diversity of the American people.
- International assistance in formulating policy and coordinating U.S. support for the protection and sound management of the world's forest resources.

Read our strategic plan.

How are the Forest Service offices organized?

There are four levels of national forest offices:

Ranger District: The district ranger and his or her staff may be your first point of contact with the Forest Service. There are more than 600 **ranger districts**. Each district has a staff of 10 to 100 people. The districts vary in size from 50,000 acres (20,000 hectares) to more than 1 million acres (400,000 hectares). Many on-the-ground activities occur on the ranger districts, including trail construction and maintenance, operation of campgrounds, and management of vegetation and wildlife habitat.

National Forest: There are 155 **national forests** and 20 **grasslands**. Each forest is composed of several ranger districts. The person in charge of a national forest is called the forest supervisor. The district rangers from the districts within a forest work for the forest supervisor. The headquarters of a national forest is called the supervisor's office. This level coordinates activities between districts, allocates the budget, and provides technical support to each district.

Region: There are **9 regions**, numbered 1 through 10 (Region 7 was eliminated some years ago). The regions are broad geographic areas, usually including several States. The person in charge is called the regional forester. Forest supervisors of the national forests within a region report to the regional forester. The regional office staff coordinates activities between national forests, monitors activities on national forests to ensure quality operations, provides guidance for forest plans, and allocates budgets to the forests.

National Level: This is commonly called the Washington Office. The person who oversees the entire Forest Service is called the **Chief**. The Chief is a Federal employee who reports to the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Chief's staff provides broad policy and direction for the agency, works with the President's Administration to develop a budget to submit to Congress, provides information to Congress on accomplishments, and monitors activities of the agency.

How does the Forest Service carry out its activities?

National Forest System: The Forest Service manages public lands, known collectively as the National Forest System, located in 44 States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The lands comprise 8.5 percent of the total land area in the United States. The natural resources on these lands are some of the Nation's greatest assets and have major economic, environmental, and social significance for all Americans.

Forest Service Research: The Forest Service provides the scientific and technical knowledge necessary to protect and sustain the Nation's natural resources on all lands, providing benefits to people within the capabilities of the land. Research is conducted through a network of forest and range experiment stations and the Forest Products Laboratory.

State and Private Forestry: The Forest Service cooperates with State and local governments, forest industries, other private landowners and forest users in the management, protection, and development of forest land in non-Federal ownership. Activities include cooperation in urban interface fire management and urban forestry. State and Private Forestry works through the regional offices and through a special Northeastern Area office to provide these services.

Administration: The Forest Service provides leadership, direction, quality assurance, and customer service in carrying out agency business and human resource programs, such as Americorps, Job Corps, the Senior Community Service Employment Program, and the volunteer program. The agency hires, trains, evaluates, and promotes its employees; pays employees and contractors; acquires office space, equipment and supplies; and acquires, supports, and maintains the computer and communications technology needed to ensure efficient and effective operations.

International Forestry: The Forest Service plays a key role in formulating policy and coordinating U.S. support for the protection and sound management of the world's forest resources. It works closely with other agencies such as the Agency for International Development, the U.S. Department of State, and the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as with nonprofit development organizations, wildlife organizations, universities, and international assistance organizations. The Forest Service's international work serves to link people and communities striving to protect and manage forests throughout the world.

Who are the people of the Forest Service?

The Forest Service has a workforce of **approximately 30,000 employees** that reflects the full range of diversity of the American people. This includes cultural and disciplinary diversity, as well as diversity in skills and abilities. In the summer, the numbers increase to meet additional need for services by the recreating public. If you are a high school or college student, senior citizen, or interested volunteer, there are opportunities for you in the Forest Service.

Please enjoy your visit and let us know how we can serve you better.