

History & Overview of the Forest Service



History

The founding of the US Forest Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has its roots in the last quarter of the 19th century. The national forests began with the Forest Reserve Act of 1891, which allowed the United States President to establish forest reserves on timber-covered public domain land. Several early leaders and visionaries, along with willing presidents (particularly Theodore Roosevelt), conservation organizations, and newly-trained forestry professionals led the successful effort in conserving millions of acres of Federal forest land for future generations.

In 1905 Congress officially established the Forest Service to manage these lands for the provision of 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 uses* means managing natural resources under the best combination of uses to benefit the American people while ensuring the future productivity of the land and protecting the overall quality of the environment. *Sustainable yield* means that resources are managed to provide services and products at a supply level as high as can be sustained without harming the land's ability to produce.

The US Forest Service mission is “to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”

Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the Forest Service, stated that the mission of the Forest Service was "to provide the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people in the long run." The Forest Service motto, "Caring for the Land and Serving People," captures the spirit of our mission, which we accomplish through five main activities:

1. Protection and management of natural resources on National Forest System lands.
2. Research on all aspects of forestry, rangeland management, and forest resource utilization.
3. 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.
4. Achieving and supporting an effective workforce that reflects the full range of diversity of the American people.
5. International assistance in formulating policy and coordinating U.S. support for the protection and sound management of the world's forest resources.

Structure

Today, the Forest Service manages 193 million acres of land, including 154 national forests, 20 national grasslands, 7 research stations, and 81 experimental forests and ranges, as well as other special areas. The agency is divided into 4 levels:

- | | |
|---|--|
| Headquarters: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commonly called the Washington Office• The Chief, a federal employee, reports to the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture.• The Chief's staff provides broad policy and direction for the agency, works the President's Administration to develop a budget to submit to Congress, provides information to Congress on accomplishments, and monitors activities of the agency. |
| Region: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Forest Service is composed of 9 geographic regions numbered 1 through 10. Region 7 was absorbed into other regions some years ago.• A regional forester oversees forest supervisors.• Regional office staff coordinate activities between national forests and grasslands, monitor activities to ensure quality operations, provide guidance for forest plans, and allocate budgets to the forests. |
| National forests and grasslands: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Forest Service currently manages 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands, each with several ranger districts.• Forest supervisors direct the work of district rangers, coordinate activities between districts, allocate the budget, and provide technical support to each district. |
| Ranger district: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are more than 600 ranger districts, each with a staff of 10-100 people• Districts vary in size from 50,000 acres to more than 1 million acres.• The district ranger and staff are often the first point of contact between the Forest Service and public. They coordinate local activities such as trail construction and maintenance, campground operation, and habitat management. |

Within the Washington Office, there are 4 program units:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| National Forest System: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manage public lands, known collectively as the National Forest System, in 44 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. |
| Research and Development: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide scientific and technical knowledge necessary to protect and sustain the nation's natural resources. |
| State and Private Forestry: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cooperate 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. |
| International Programs: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with international partners to collaboratively address the world's most critical forestry issues and concerns. |

The Forest Service continues to carry out its mission, motto, and purpose of serving the American people today with pride and professionalism. Since its founding, the Forest Service has evolved into a 30,000 employee agency that manages the national forests for a number of uses, including recreation, timber, wilderness, minerals, water, grazing, fish, and wildlife. More people than ever before depend upon their National Forest for recreation and other uses. For more information on the agency's history and impact, see: <https://www.fs.fed.us/>