



Meet the Forest Service

“Caring for the Land and Serving People”

The Forest Service’s 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.

Photo: Sunset on the trail to Hidden Lake on the Mount Baker-Snoquialmie National Forest in Washington. Credit by USDA Forest Service.

What is the Forest Service? The Forest Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is the Nation’s foremost Federal forestry organization, providing leadership in the management, protection, use, research, and stewardship of natural and cultural resources on our country’s forests and grasslands. In addition to providing technical and financial assistance to State and private agencies, the Forest Service is a world leader in forest research.

The national forests and grasslands the agency manages are America’s great outdoors. They encompass 193 million acres (78 million hectares) of land—an area larger than Texas. National forests provide opportunities for recreation in open spaces and natural environments. People enjoy a wide variety of activities on national forests, including backpacking in remote 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. In addition, national forests and grasslands support the economic activity of the Nation through marketable products associated with timber production, livestock grazing, mineral production, and other activities.

When and why was the Forest Service established?

President Theodore Roosevelt established the Forest Service in 1905 to manage the lands in its care for multiple uses, including wood for timber and fuel, drinking water, forage, wildlife habitat, and recreation. Multiple use means managing resources for the best combination of uses to benefit the American people while conserving the productivity of the land and the quality of the environment. Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the Forest Service, summed up the agency’s purpose as managing the Nation’s natural resources “for the greatest good, for the greatest number, for the longest time.”

What does the Forest Service do? Service is implicit in the Forest Service’s name and motto, “Caring for the Land and Serving People.” Service is demonstrated in the following activities:

- Managing and conserving natural resources on National Forest System lands. These lands include specially designated wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, national monuments, research and experimental areas, and other unique natural and cultural treasures.
- Operating a network of research units, laboratories, and experimental forests and rangelands to conduct leading-edge research on all aspects of forestry, rangeland management, and forest resource utilization.
- Assisting communities; State, local, and tribal governments; forest industries; and private forest landowners in protecting and managing non-Federal forest and associated range and watershed lands to improve conditions in rural and urban areas.
- Operating Job Corps Civilian Conservation Centers to educate and train America’s youth.
- Helping other nations and international groups manage and conserve the world’s forest resources.
- Building on the deep connection employees feel to the Forest Service mission and conservation ethic and the concept of respecting the diverse backgrounds and abilities of employees, as well as the public, to increase organizational efficiency and cost-effectiveness.



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 across 43 States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The lands comprise 8.4 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.

The National Forest System organization includes:

- **Ranger Districts.** The district ranger and staff may be your first points of contact with the Forest Service. There are more than 500 ranger districts nationwide, each with a staff of 10 to 100 people. Districts vary in size from approximately 11,000 acres (4,455 hectares) to more than 1 million acres (405,000 hectares). Most 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 Forests and Grasslands.** There are 154 national forests, 20 national grasslands, and 1 tallgrass prairie. Each forest is composed of several ranger districts. The person in charge of a national forest is called the forest supervisor. The district rangers within a forest report to the forest supervisor. The headquarters of a national forest, called the supervisor's office, prepares forest-wide plans, coordinates activities between districts, allocates the budget, and provides technical support to the districts.
- **Regional Offices.** There are nine regions numbered 1 through 10 (Region 7 was absorbed into other regions some years ago). The regions encompass broad geographic areas, usually several States. Regional staff coordinates and monitors activities on national forests to ensure quality operations, provides guidance on forest plans, and allocates budgets to the forests.

Forest Service Research and Development. The Forest Service provides the scientific and technical knowledge necessary to protect and sustain the Nation's natural resources on all lands. Research is conducted through a network of research stations, the Forest Products Laboratory, and the International Institute of Tropical Forestry.

State and Private Forestry. The Forest Service cooperates with State and local governments, forest industries, private landowners, and others in the management, protection, and development of forest land in non-Federal ownership. State and Private Forestry work takes place through the regional offices and a Northeastern Area office and includes activities in wildland-urban interface fire management and urban forestry.

Business Operations and Chief Financial Office (CFO).

Business Operations provides leadership, direction, quality assurance, and customer service in carrying out agency business through budget and finance, human resource, Chief Information Office, Job Corps, acquisition management, civil rights, and enterprise programs. The CFO supports the agency's mission by providing timely, accurate, and reliable financial and program performance information.

Who are the people of the Forest Service? The Forest Service has a workforce of approximately 27,000 employees that reflects the diversity of the American people. This includes diversity in culture, discipline, skills, and abilities. In the summer, the number of employees increases to meet the additional need for recreational services and firefighting. If you are a high school or college student, senior citizen, or interested volunteer, there are opportunities for you in the Forest Service.

How can you find out more about the Forest Service?

Write, call, or stop by your nearest national forest office to learn more about the Forest Service. The "Guide to Your National Forests and Grasslands" has a listing of all national forest offices with telephone and TTY numbers. In addition, visit the Forest Service Web site at: <http://www.fs.fed.us>.



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

USDA Forest Service
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Mailstop Code: 1111
Washington, DC 20250-1111

Did you know:

- National forests supply drinking water to more than 60 million Americans.
- Recreating visitors spent about \$10 billion per year in areas around National Forest System lands.
- Visitors to national forests and grasslands sustain over 140,000 full- and part-time jobs.
- In 2016, national forests supplied more than 3 billion board feet of timber valued at nearly \$200 million.

