



Declaration for Shared Stewardship

Between

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, DIVISION OF FORESTRY

and the

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,

FOREST SERVICE

Introduction

The Ohio Division of Forestry (ODOF) and the USDA Forest Service (USFS), collectively referred to as the “Parties” have developed this declaration to advance Shared Stewardship in Ohio. The pace, scale, quality and effectiveness of our respective forest management can be improved through a shared vision and a mutual commitment to work together. Shared Stewardship provides a framework that unites state and federal land managers in addressing landscape-scale resource needs while respecting individual direction and commitments. This document:

- Supports the national vision and framework for Shared Stewardship,
- Represents a lasting commitment to partnership and collaborative approaches to management, and
- Reaffirms the Parties’ existing close working relationship in managing Ohio’s forest resources.

This document is not an authorizing tool. Rather, the Parties will rely on all available authorities to implement priority projects (including, but not limited to, Good Neighbor Authority, Farm Bill Authorities, and the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act). The Parties will identify specific authorities for actions prior to project development and implementation and based on availability of appropriations.

Federal, state, tribal, county and private land managers alike can realize benefits through an all-lands Shared Stewardship approach to conserving and managing forested landscapes. Most forest threats cross ownership boundaries and are best addressed through partnerships at the right scale. Forest product markets, forest industry infrastructure, financial resources, and information exchange between resource professionals and private woodland owners are all critical to effective cross boundary forest management. This all-lands effort is supported by individual and landscape level Forest Stewardship Plans, Ohio’s Forest Action Plan, Ohio Smart Agriculture: Solutions from the Land, Ohio Interagency Forestry Team Business Plan, Wayne National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and cross-ownership risk assessments and agreements.

Background

Ohio was more than 95% forested in prehistoric times and today has a forest cover of 30%. Most of that forest resource, 43%, occurs in 17 counties in Southeast Ohio where oak forests have dominated the landscape for thousands of years. Oaks as a group form the foundation for the forest matrix in this very species rich region with 90 species of trees recorded through Forest Inventory and Analysis. Southeast Ohio lies within the Southern Unglaciaded Allegheny Plateau terrestrial ecoregion and the Upper Ohio River Basin freshwater region. Both are a part of the greater Appalachian Mountains Ecosystem which contains the oldest and most biologically diverse forest and freshwater systems in North America.

These oak forests are still here today but are at a tipping point – regeneration is not keeping up with changing conditions and forest structure and age class distribution are not in balance. Land ownership patterns are dominated by family-owned woodland holdings, public forest lands are a checkerboard of ownership, and forest landscapes are fragmenting into a wildland- urban interface more rapidly here than anywhere in the country. Historically this region was settled, harvested, farmed, and mined in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and has undergone boom and bust economic cycles. The region is challenged by poverty, is historically underserved, and impacted by the opioid epidemic, yet is rich with the long-standing cultural traditions that characterize Appalachia.

The forest industry in Ohio generates \$27 billion in total economic activity. Ohio also ranks in the top ten nationally for employment in the hardwood industry ranking third for pallet production, eighth and ninth for cabinets and millwork, and is among the top states for hardwood furniture production. However, the 70% of forested lands managed by family woodland owners are under-supported with only three forestry extension specialists and 22 service foresters to provide technical assistance to 88 counties and over 100 thousand forest landowners.

National Woodland Owner surveys show that woodland owners in Ohio value their natural resources and recognize that these resources contribute to a high quality of life and a healthy standard of living. The State of Ohio recognizes the important benefits and services that Ohio forests provide. Land managers are developing a wide range of forest management plans that reflect the diversity of ownerships, management approaches, and public interests across the state.

Purpose

In August 2018, the Forest Service released a document outlining a new strategy for land management called *Toward Shared Stewardship Across Landscapes: An Outcome-Based Investment Strategy*. This new strategy responds to the urgent and growing challenges faced by forest managers and owners across the nation, such as catastrophic wildfire, invasive species, forest industry that needs wood fiber to remain competitive in the global economy, drought, and epidemics of forest insects and disease.

Ohio has a history of shared stewardship under established partnerships between state and federal government agencies. Ohio established a state-level joint forestry team in 2008 with the Wayne National Forest, Ohio Division of Forestry and Natural Resources Conservation Service State office, and more recently implemented a Joint Chief's Restoration partnership with the same partners on collaborative oak management (2015-2017). Beyond the oak management accomplishments, a major outcome from Ohio's Joint Chief's partnership was an updated MOU and charter for a state-federal partnership of forestry agencies now called Ohio's Interagency Forestry Team. Through this Shared Stewardship Declaration, the Parties affirm their commitment to continue to work together to set landscape-scale priorities, implement projects at the appropriate scale, co-manage risks, share resources, and learn from each other while building long-term capacity. This approach helps meet the most pressing short-term needs and

builds upon opportunities toward long-term desired outcomes. Shared Stewardship envisions an outcome-based investment strategy that has three core elements:

1. determine management needs on a state level;
2. do the right work in the right places at the right scale; and
3. use all available tools for active, outcome-focused management.

Management Needs in Ohio

The following list identifies the greatest needs for all-lands forest management in Ohio. Implementing Shared Stewardship strategies in the following areas could increase forest management capacity at the landscape level and promote rural economies.

- Sustainably manage Ohio's working forest landscapes on all lands
- Maintain and enhance public benefits from Ohio's forests
- Conserve soil and water resources
- Conserve and enhance wildlife habitat and plant diversity
- Protect and enhance the health and vitality of Ohio's forests
- Manage and reduce impacts of forest fragmentation

Statement of Mutual Benefit and Interest

To demonstrate our commitment to advancing Shared Stewardship in Ohio, the U.S. Forest Service and Ohio Division of Forestry will:

- Take a more integrated approach to prioritizing investments where they will have the greatest impacts;
- Pursue opportunities to cooperatively fund and accomplish projects and research of mutual benefit and interest;
- Focus on the 17-county oak management priority forest area where most state forests, numerous state wildlife areas, and Ohio's only national forest, the Wayne National Forest, occur;
- Continue to implement projects identified in the Ohio Interagency Forestry Team Business Plan while working under an interagency model defined by the following elements:
 - Team structure and process
 - Regional science framework
 - Coordinated communication
 - Landscape scale conservation strategies
 - Collaborative or participatory leadership
 - Adaptive management
- Exemplify, through our actions, our interdependence by respecting the diversity of our missions, and work cooperatively to deliver services to Ohio's landowners and communities;
- Engage a broad range of stakeholders and partners (e.g., Tribal governments, other federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, communities, industrial and private landowners, and educators and academia) in identifying land management priorities and desired outcomes using all available authorities and active management tools;

- Use cross boundary coordination and mutually agreed upon projects, at a meaningful scale, to best benefit communities and landscapes; and work jointly with stakeholders, partners, and other landowners to carry out projects.

The parties celebrate the long-standing and successful relationships we have built and recognize that Shared Stewardship will further advance our collaboration to the benefit of forestlands and the people of Ohio.


Authorizing Representatives:

Ohio Department of Natural Resources

Date: 12/18/2020 

Daniel Balsler
State Forester and Chief
Ohio Division of Forestry
Designee for Mary Mertz,
ODNR Director

United States Department of Agriculture

Date: Dec. 18, 2020 

Victoria Christiansen
Chief
Forest Service