



## CONSERVING FOREST IN THE DEVELOPING LANDSCAPE



### Introduction:

Significant changes in the natural forest ecosystem occur at the urban-rural interface, the "growth" fringe of most communities. How development is carried out can determine the future health of urban forests and the larger ecosystem, as well as the character and long-term sustainability of these communities. Water quality, habitat, streams, and wetlands all suffer when highly consumptive patterns of growth occur and natural functions are fragmented or altered. Also, many watersheds reach critical thresholds in these developing environments.

Local government is on the front lines in efforts to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay and other natural resources in developing areas. Today, watershed plans, forest protection, greenways, and other activities supplement the traditional planning and zoning functions. These provide more focus than ever before on the protection of environmental values and water quality. Although initiatives demonstrate that local governments have great capacity for innovation, the range of issues they face today and will face tomorrow continues to broaden. Gary Allen, Mayor of Bowie, MD and the Chair of the Bay Program's Local Government Advisory Committee, said recently "Local government is the appropriate agent for accomplishing these objectives, but local governments need the information and technical assistance, provided by State and Federal agencies, concerning how their efforts can support Bay restoration objectives."

We can help by providing models that exemplify successful approaches, facilitating regional coordination and communication, and assisting in developing clear "visions" for the future. By helping state and local governments solve the critical issues facing forest conservation in developing areas, the U.S. Forest Service's, Northeastern Area, State and Private Forestry assists by building more conservation leaders for management of future resources.

### Issues Related to Forest Conservation:

- ✓ Economic Viability - The economic returns directly attributable to the regions forests are large.
  - \* VA - Produces over \$9.8 billion in revenues and is second largest industry in state.
  - \* MD- Employs over 41,000 people and is fifth largest industry in state.
  - \* PA - The nations largest hardwood producer. Forest products sales exceed \$4.5 billion annually and accounts for over 10% of states work force.

- ✓ Quantity vs. Distribution
  - Gross forest acreage statistics may miss the real story of potential impacts on a watershed and its wildlife/fish habitat. Forests are unevenly distributed, so is loss; some watersheds have lost over 85% of their forests while others are almost completely forested.

- ✓ Riparian Forests - Forested wetlands and forests located along rivers, streams and shorelines are one of several potentially critical forest resources.

- ✓ Forest Retention in Land Use Planning - Planning for our "green infrastructure" as well as our grey infrastructure in rapidly growing portions of the watershed needs additional consideration.

- ✓ Regional Perspective - Although examples of resource conservation programs can be found, it is rare for local decision-makers to consider regional implications in their land use decisions.

### What's Being Done?

Individual states have taken a number of actions to retain forests. The Critical Areas Law (MD) and Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act (VA) include provisions for retention of forests in areas nearest the Bay. In MD, the Forest Conservation Act, requires consideration of forests in land

### The Issues

- \* Growth Management
- \* Distribution and Fragmentation
- \* Integration in Land Use Planning
- \* Regional Perspective
- \* Riparian Forests
- \* Economic Viability

development, restricts some forest clearing, and in some cases mandates afforestation as mitigation. Growth legislation in Maryland and Virginia has initiated planning for sensitive areas such as forests. Some local governments have taken additional steps to protect trees and forests specifically. Increasing educational efforts are beginning to increase the level of awareness of local planners, engineers, and regulators about the importance of retaining forests during the development process.

Over 80% of the forest land is held in private ownership in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, and most land use decisions are made at the local government level. The funding and capability of state forestry agencies to provide technical assistance to landowners for planning and managing forests in the Bay states is severely limited. Even so, Urban and Community Forestry programs have initiated work with local communities in some areas for assessing their natural resources, setting up neighborhood stewardship programs for trees and open space, restoring riparian and other habitats, establishing greenways, training youth, and providing urban forestry-based jobs.

### **Key Points**

- 1. We are continuing to lose forest.*
- 2. Forest loss/retention is a water quality and living resource issue.*
- 3. Forest conservation is a part of growth management. Forest retention must be integrated with development planning.*
- 4. We should continue to track and evaluate forest status.*

### **The Forest Service Role: An Emerging Issue**

The Forest Service has an important role in providing services and transferring technology to our state and private customers. We can act as a *Conservation Leader* to protect our urban and

rural forests during growth and development for the provision of forest goods and services for the future.

**We are facing an issue of national as well as regional concern.**

✓ The country's coastal areas house 2/3 of the nation's development and 80% of the country's population.

✓ Forest conservation at the urban /rural fringe is important because of the impacts that forest loss and fragmentation can have on the vitality, resilience, and sustainability of our natural resources

**The Chesapeake Bay is similar to other parts of the Northeastern Area and around the country.**

✓ What is happening here resembles many places along the 1500 or so miles of eastern shoreline, the entire nation's coastal regions and on our cities developing fringe.

✓ This issue is not being addressed. There is no governmental agency responsible for conserving forest during growth and development.

**What is the Forest Service or Federal role?**

✓ Conservation Leadership - Give the states support to develop better planning tools; act as partners to help them create and implement approaches to solve problems. Act with an entrepreneurial spirit to generate and support innovative ways to conserve forests for both environmental and social values.

✓ Regional Perspective - The federal role in regional and ecological-based planning is an emerging issue. We may act as a catalyst for change. We can help fill a void when state organizations are unable to focus beyond their jurisdictional boundaries, and provide a regional perspective and offer technical and financial assistance to participate at the regional level.

✓ Building a Link to Local Government - We can reach local governments (where change is most likely to occur) by assisting grass roots efforts, developing education and information tools, and by providing vehicles to assess their resources. Also, by finding ways to interact at the local level in a non-intrusive, non-threatening way.