

# Maryland's Family Forests Facing Increasing Risks


~ More than 75% of Maryland's forestlands are family-owned forests! ~

Maryland's family forests are faced with several challenges that threaten to degrade the ecological, economic, and recreational value of the land.


*If these valuable forestlands vanish we all lose!*

## WHAT ARE THE CONSERVATION BENEFITS OF FAMILY FORESTS?

 Drinking Water Supply - Privately-owned forestlands supply more than 2/3 of Maryland's drinking water. Forestlands serve as a natural filter and reservoir for water, helping save billions of dollars in filtration and storm water control costs.


 Endangered Species - Approximately 90% of endangered species depend on forests, including family forests, for the habitat they provide. Other important wildlife species, including aquatic species and many game species, reside in family forests as well.





 Clean Air - For every ton of wood a forest grows, 1.47 tons of carbon dioxide are removed from the air and replaced with 1.07 tons of oxygen. A single mature tree can absorb 13 pounds of carbon dioxide a year.


### **Key Facts About Maryland's Family-Owned Forestlands**

- Total Forest – Maryland has 2.56 million acres of forest land covering almost 43% of the total land area.
- Significant Acreage - About 76% of Maryland's forestlands are family owned covering more than 1.8 million acres.
- Many Owners - There are 130,600 family forest owners in Maryland.
- Small Tracts – 75% of Maryland's 130,600 family forest owners, own tracts that are less than 10 acres in size, with an average tract size of just 17 acres.
- Near Urban Centers - A large portion of Maryland's family forestland is located near densely populated areas.
- Ownership Objectives Are Diverse - Family forest owners often cite scenic beauty, wildlife enhancement, preservation, privacy, and family legacy as the primary reasons for owning land.


 Healthy Rural Economies & Working Forests - Thriving family forests in Maryland result in jobs and healthy economies in rural areas. Recreation, hunting, fishing, and forest products bring income to family landowners and the communities in which they live. In return, these communities supply the workforce and infrastructure needed to maintain working family-owned forests.


 Forest Products Companies Depend on Family Forests for Jobs – Maryland's forest products industry processes approximately 2.5 million green tons of roundwood annually, providing 14,000 jobs in both rural and urban communities.


 Recreation - Family forests provide countless recreation opportunities including camping, hunting, fishing, birding and hiking.


 Hunting – There are approximately 135,000 licensed hunters in Maryland. According to a 2001 survey, hunters spent \$127 million on hunting related expenses in Maryland.


## WHAT THREATENS MARYLAND'S FAMILY FORESTS?


 Maryland's Growing Population – Maryland is this country's fifth most densely populated state with an estimated 5.5 million people. That population has more than doubled in the last fifty years.


 Increasing Development Pressure - Forests are lost forever once they are converted to development. Maryland has lost more than 350,000 acres of forestland, or an average of more than 7,000 acres per year since 1950.


 Protecting Forests from Development – In 1991 Maryland passed a Forest Conservation Act to protect forests and their ecological function during the development process. Over the last 10 years Maryland's Forest Conservation Act has resulted in the retention of 79,174 acres of forest and the planting of 13,611 additional acres, while allowing 42, 902 acres to be cleared for development. This was out of a total of 128,630 acres of existing forest coming under development review under the Act, resulting in 65% of the forest being protected from development.

 Shrinking Size of Forested Tracts – Maryland's Forest Conservation Act has done little to address the shrinking size of forest tracts. As the tracts of family forestlands become smaller and more fragmented, their ability to provide important ecological services, such as clean water and suitable wildlife habitat, decreases. Further as the number of landowners grows the resources available to help family forest owners become increasingly scarce. The average age of family forest owners is 60+. Consequently, a significant portion of family forests will soon change hands, from current owners to heirs or new owners-- often splitting forests among several heirs or causing the division into smaller parcels and subsequent sale.

 Minimal Land Management Planning - Management planning helps families make a long-term commitment to the land. Foresters from the Maryland Forest Service assist 400 family forest owners each year by writing Forest Stewardship Plans on more than 15,000 acres. Yet current estimates suggest that only 3% of family forest owners nationally have a written management plan.

 Harvesting without Professional Advice - Without professional management advice, family forest owners may engage in management practices that degrade the quality and productivity of their land for years to come. Only 22% of family forest owners have sought professional advice prior to timber harvesting on their lands.

 Declining Forest Health & Ecological Values - Unhealthy forests can lead to degraded water quality and wildlife habitat and limited opportunities for recreation. Family forests are threatened by invasive species, insects, diseases, and wildfire threats. Family owners often lack financial and technical resources needed to treat their land and minimize these problems.

 Reduced income opportunities - Without income from their lands, families find it difficult to resist development pressures. Today, globalizing markets and other factors reduce opportunities for families to sell products and get income from their lands.

### What are the Solutions?

- Targeted educational, technical, and financial assistance that addresses priority societal resource concerns while meeting landowner objectives.
- Implementing a Landscape Approach in assistance programs so investments in family forestland make a difference on the landscape scale.
- Integration of assistance programs to address a broader national strategy for family forest conservation with locally identified priorities.
- Monitoring and evaluation of programs to show improvements on the ground and how these efforts are meeting stated goals and objectives.
- Market-based approaches to forest conservation that allow for both public and private investment in public goods from family forests.
- Continued Scientific Advances and their application from universities, agencies, and other partners that help continue good stewardship and economic benefits from family forests.

