

File Code: 1300	Date: November 20, 2009
Route To:	
Subject:	Responding to Climate Change: Developing Integrated Plans for Landscape Conservation
To:	Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Area Director, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Directors

Responding to the challenges of climate change in providing water and water-related ecosystem services is one of the most urgent tasks facing us as an agency. History will judge us by how well we respond to these challenges. Climate change is dramatically reshaping how we will deliver on our mission of sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands for present and future generations. The most vulnerable and pivotal ecosystem services being affected by climate change are related to water. U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack's vision for the Nation's forests and grasslands directs the Forest Service to deal assertively and collaboratively with climate change and water on high priority landscapes. Addressing climate change and water through integrated landscape conservation must become a fundamental part of our leadership and must shape how we work with others to sustain forests and grasslands.

In October 2008, you received the Forest Service's Strategic Framework (the Framework) for Responding to Climate Change (version 1.0). The Framework provides the vision, guiding principles, goals, and recommended actions for pursuing the Agency's mission in a rapidly changing climate (<http://www.fs.fed.us/climatechange/>). The Framework guides the integration of climate change into the programs, policies, processes, and partnerships of the Agency.

We will use the Framework to guide the development of landscape conservation strategies and action plans. Our task now is to translate the Framework into our day-to-day operations. We need to do this in a coordinated way, so that we can most effectively use the strengths of our dispersed management system to engage our publics and partners in collective efforts that will make a difference.

We need to develop, document, and pursue aggressive and well-coordinated landscape conservation action plans for specific geographic areas and major landscapes. I am asking Regional Foresters, Station Directors, and the Northeastern Area (NA) Director to work together to prepare joint Area-specific action plans. Most Regions and Stations have already been working together on climate action strategies. I am asking you to expand these efforts into full-blown Regions, Stations, and Area (R/S/A) action plans for landscape conservation, organizing them around the goals and actions contained in the Framework and around the all-lands concepts of landscape conservation, addressing water and water-related services as a fundamental outcome set.

Strategies and plans should include collaborative landscape scale efforts already underway including those in Secretary Vilsack's priority landscapes. We suggest the following R/S/A partnerships:

Eastern - Northern Station, Region 9, NE Area, and Forest Products Lab (FLP) (Note: As a national lab, FPL could be a part of other R/S/A strategies)

Southern – Southern Station, Region 8, and IITF

Interior West - Rocky Mountain Station and Regions 1, 2, 3, and 4

Pacific Northwest - Pacific Northwest Station and Regions 6 and 10

Pacific Southwest and Pacific Islands - Pacific Southwest Station and Region 5

These plans should include desired outcomes, strategies, and specific actions for each of the seven Framework goal areas and a description of the joint governance structure for the partnership including points of contact who will work with the Washington Office. The draft plan at this stage should be no more than 20 pages in length, although it may contain appendices.

These plans should, at a minimum, articulate how elements and actions of the Agency's Framework and principles of watershed restoration and protection will be addressed together in the geographic area and how they will be integrated into land management plans, unit business plans and performance management systems. A range of ecosystem services can be considered or even emphasized, but water should be treated as a fundamental outcome of every plan. The Agency's Framework should be used as a guide, but your R/S/A partnerships should develop integrated plans based on what is feasible and appropriate to the Regional and local challenges and opportunities of the changing climate.

The plans should seize opportunities to integrate activities and be innovative. They should become blueprints for integrating climate change and watershed management. They should use climate change as a theme under which to integrate and streamline existing national and regional strategies for ecological restoration, fire and fuels, forest health, biomass utilization, and others. They should also address priority landscapes and consider the use of "model landscapes" or "model watersheds" to create showcases for integration, innovation, experimentation, demonstration, and collaboration. These plans should address how you will work with other agencies, organizations, and other partners in these landscapes and throughout the area to tackle climate change and watershed restoration issues. They should also articulate how science and management will interact to adapt to changing conditions and apply newly created knowledge in the future.

A Climate Change Executive, soon to be named by me, will work with the Executive Leadership Team and the National Leadership Council to guide the overall implementation of the Framework through the landscape conservation plans. In the meantime, please consult with David Cleaves, current Executive Sponsor from the Climate Council, on help you will need from the Washington Office in developing these climate/water strategies and landscape conservation action plans.

Submit a draft of your joint R/S/A landscape conservation action plan by March 1, 2010.

If you have questions about the action plans outlined in this memo or have suggestions for other R/S/A partnerships, please contact David Cleaves, Associate Deputy for Research and Development, at dcleaves@fs.fed.us or 202-205-1702.

<i>/s/ Thomas L. Tidwell</i>
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Chief