Delaware Forest Service

STRATEGIC PLAN
A Vision for the Future

Mission Statement
To conserve, protect, and enhance Delaware’s forests through education, management, and professional assistance.

Principles
Every member of the Delaware Forest Service commits to:

- Treat everyone with fairness, honesty, equity, and respect
- Work as a team
- Provide full-service forestry expertise
- Proactively address natural resources and land use issues
- Improve our management, personal, and professional skills
- Demonstrate proper forest management and provide forestry education

Vision
Delaware’s urban and rural forests are healthy and ecologically diverse resources whose many benefits are fully valued and appreciated by the public.

Forests thrive under the stewardship of Delaware landowners who enjoy ample access to a wide range of markets.
Critical Issues

The public must understand the importance of our forests and forest management. While most citizens appreciate our forests, many do not understand the wide range of benefits forests provide – from wood to wildlife habitat to water quality protection to carbon sequestration. Furthermore, most Delawareans do not understand the need for professional forest management to ensure that our forests continue to produce the many benefits we enjoy and require.

The health of our forests is threatened by fragmentation, parcelization and invasive species. Delaware continues to lose forests to development – from 2002 to 2007, developments that included over 14,000 acres of forestland were approved throughout Delaware. This rate of loss cannot continue within a state that only has 380,000 forested acres. Furthermore, our remaining woodlands are owned by more and more landowners – this increased parcelization (more landowners owning smaller forested areas) also hinders our ability to manage our forestland.

Invasive species – such as chestnut blight and the gypsy moth – continue to degrade Delaware’s forests and other invasives are found in our region. These introduced pests, with no natural enemies to control them in their new environment, can wreak havoc on our forests and reduce the forests’ capacity to provide the many benefits we enjoy.

There is a need for diverse, stable forest markets. Landowners must have the ability to generate income from their forestland; otherwise, they are much more likely to convert their forestland to other uses (such as development). Many of the traditional wood products markets (sawmills and pulp mills) in Delaware and the surrounding states are suffering due to a weak economy and global competition; this has reduced the income that forest landowners receive. Other potential markets, however, are emerging, such as carbon and wetland mitigation (ecosystem services). A combination of traditional and new markets is needed to provide landowners with sufficient income opportunities.

Many rural and urban forests are not sustainably managed. Most private forest landowners do not seek professional forestry assistance for their woodlands. Furthermore, many landowners only consider their short-term, financial return when they sell their timber – even if this option produces a poorly stocked forest. This practice results in poorly managed forests that cannot be sustained for future generations. Additionally, many cities and towns do not utilize (or cannot afford) professional assistance for their forests, which affects the long-term viability of these forests.

Staffing and funding resources are limited within the Delaware Forest Service. The DFS is a small organization and consequently career opportunities are limited; this can impact morale and limit the Department’s ability to retain highly qualified staff. Furthermore, with ongoing state and federal funding constraints, it is difficult to maintain the staffing and programs necessary to provide a full range of services to Delaware’s forest landowners and address the other critical issues facing our forests.
Goals and Objectives

Goal #1  Public Awareness
The public recognizes the importance of both Delaware’s forests and the Delaware Forest Service and willingly advocates for them.

Objectives:
Objective #1  Increase public awareness and appreciation of forests
Objective #2  Increase educators’ and students’ understanding of forests and forest management
Objective #3  Promote forest stewardship
Objective #4  Increase number of students in the forestry profession

Goal #2  Healthy Forests
Delaware has a sufficient, protected healthy forestland base to ensure the perpetual production of forest outputs (lumber, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, water quality protection, etc.)

Objectives:
Objective #1  Increase the amount of forestland permanently protected
Objective #2  Prepare for invasive species infestations
Objective #3  Maintain forestland base and reduce further forest parcelization and fragmentation

Goal #3  Forest Markets
There are adequate and diverse forest markets for forest landowners to earn a satisfying return on their investment.

Objectives:
Objective #1  Maintain and improve existing markets - including markets for low-value timber
Objective #2  Encourage new markets for forest products, including wood energy
Objective #3  Develop funding sources for forest investments

Goal #4  Sustainable Management
Delaware’s rural and urban forests are sustainably managed.

Objectives:
Objective #1  Increase use of professional forestry assistance - rural and urban
Objective #2  Establish urban tree canopy goals

Goal #5  Maximize Resources
The Delaware Forest Service is recognized as the source for forestry expertise in Delaware and has sufficient funding to implement its programs.

Objectives:
Objective #1  Maintain a well-trained, professional staff
Objective #2  Delaware's State Forests are the premier example of sustainable forest management
Objective #3  Viable and stably funded rural and urban forestry cost share programs
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