

# THEME 3

# HOW DO WE SUSTAIN OUR FORESTS?

The concepts within this theme help people understand that our forests are sustained through a rich variety of agreements and collaborative partnerships that span private and public sectors. For people to become participating members of a society that values sustainably managed forests, they must comprehend the role forest management plays in meeting the environmental, social, and economic needs of society and understand how they too can participate.

## A. FOREST OWNERSHIP

Understanding who owns our forests helps people identify the basis for different **forest management** decisions.

1. The size and scale of forest ownership can vary from a small patch of trees in a backyard or urban space to hundreds of thousands of acres (or hectares) in a national forest.
2. Forests, forest disturbances (e.g. fire, drought, pests and disease), and ecosystem functions do not follow ownership and administrative boundaries, such as political borders, city limits and private property lines. They extend across the landscape based on natural laws of ecology and biology.
3. Forests are managed under private (e.g., family, institutional) and public (e.g., municipal, state/provincial, federal) ownership. Each type of ownership may have different management objectives and may be subject to different laws and policies. In the United States, 56% of the forest is owned privately, whereas in Canada, only 4% is privately owned.
4. Many forest landscapes consist of a variety of ownerships, a mix of management objectives, and a blend of forest ecosystems.

## B. FOREST MANAGEMENT

People manage forests for a variety of ecological, economic, and social outcomes. Understanding the reasons that forests are managed helps people think critically about forest management methods and enables them to engage as knowledgeable voters, consumers, and environmental stewards. Sustainably managed forests achieve a variety of outcomes that make a positive difference to people and the environment.

1. A variety of individuals, companies, organizations, communities and government agencies manage forests. Forest management decisions may involve some or all of these entities working collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes.
2. The type and intensity of forest management, depends on landowners, objectives, and forest type. Examples of management objectives might include conservation, recreation (hiking, hunting), or profit.

3. The types and methods of silvicultural (growth and management of trees) practices differ depending on the forest system. Some silviculture methods aim to mimic ecological conditions created by natural disturbances (e.g., fire, wind, natural succession) so that the resulting forest approximates historic conditions. In other systems, silvicultural methods might aim to maintain a high growth capacity, while maintaining habitat for species and providing other ecosystem services. As a result, harvesting plans and replanting may look very different in a boreal forest than in a temperate rainforest.
4. Forest managers prepare forest management plans based on landowner goals and objectives, the natural potential of the forest itself, laws, and available management tools (e.g., planting, harvesting, and using prescribed fire).
5. Sustainable forest management pays attention to natural processes. It involves goal-oriented decisions and actions to achieve a variety of desired outcomes, including ecological (e.g., wildlife habitat), economic (e.g., timber production), and social (e.g., recreation) outcomes. Many outcomes are interrelated and are often managed simultaneously.
6. Public demands and expectations for the forest, as well as unanticipated events (e.g. wildfire, pest infestation), affect decisions about forest resource use. Sustainable management must be based on scientific research, economic analysis, and public involvement.
7. Urban forest management, like all forest management, considers **canopy cover** in addition to species diversity, age distribution and inclusion of native vegetation to promote healthy and more resilient urban forest, that increase livability of communities and help to mitigate climate change.
8. Sustainable forest management involves respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Forests are a renewable public resource that exists on Indigenous Peoples' territories, and they should be included in decision making and consulted as the original caretakers of the land.

## C. FOREST MANAGEMENT POLICY

By understanding that many individuals and groups are involved in forest management, people will recognize that the responsibility of forest management is shared.

1. Governments play an important role in conserving, maintaining, and sustaining forest resources by enacting laws, creating policies, establishing agencies, creating public lands, and providing management guidelines and, in some jurisdictions, ongoing education for forest landowners.
2. Forest management includes actions employed over a long term to purposefully guide tree species composition, size, and age of trees in the forest. Forest management plays an important role in maintaining forest health and resilience.
3. Forest management ranges from **active management** (e.g., planting, thinning, harvesting) to **passive management** (e.g., stewarding **parks** and **wilderness** areas) to grow, restore, maintain, conserve, or alter forests.
4. Forest management is regulated by state/provincial and federal laws that sustain forestland for timber production and the other benefits forests provide, including clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreation. These laws must be compatible with other governing laws, including Species at Risk Act and Canadian Navigational Water Act in Canada and the Endangered Species Act and EPA Clean Water Act in the United States, among other laws.



5. Forest management plans are required on all provincial/state or federal lands.
6. Government has a role in actively engaging organizations, businesses, communities, and individuals in forest management and policy decisions, especially for publicly owned and urban forests.
7. Businesses in the forest products sector (manufacturers, forest investment entities, harvesting professionals, etc.) also have legal and ethical responsibilities to manage natural resources to provide benefits to the public.
8. As human populations and global demand for forest resources increase, forest management methodologies and advances in research and technological systems help ensure that forest resources are maintained or improved to produce desired values and products.
9. Strategic urban forest improvement programs offer financial and other incentives (such as free-tree program or community tree planting opportunities) and other motivating factors. These programs are often part of long-term sustainable urban forest management plans.



## D. PERSPECTIVES ON FOREST MANAGEMENT

Examining the different perspectives involved in forest management helps people understand the complexity of forest management decisions.

1. People have differing perspectives about forest management, that can be affected by politics, science, economics, values, perception, culture, and experience.
2. Forest management can be controversial because of these diverse perspectives, as well as the complex nature of forest ecosystems.
3. Ensuring that multiple perspectives are involved in decision-making can lead to more effective problem-solving, greater acceptance of solutions, and more sustainable outcomes for our forests.
4. Respecting Indigenous Peoples' rights and incorporating their traditional ecological knowledge are essential to ensuring a sustainable future for our forests.



## E. FOREST MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION

Understanding the process of sustainable forest management and the standards that govern third-party certification will help people to recognize the value of this system, as well as showing them the role they can play in promoting sustainability through purchasing practices.



1. Forest certification standards include measures to ensure social, economic, and ecological dimensions of sustainability. These measures include maintaining forest and ecosystem health (e.g. biodiversity, wildlife, water, soils), productivity, and diversity; and conserving a forested land base for the needs of present and future generations.
2. Many forest owners and operators choose to certify their operations by an objective standard for sustainable forest management. Third-party independent auditors certify the land and provide assurance that legal, sustainable forest practices are being followed.
3. Forests are certified on public lands, private lands, Indigenous and Tribal Lands, university lands, conservation lands, and community lands.
4. There are four main certification systems used in the United States and Canada: Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Canadian Standards Association (CSA), and the American Tree Farm System (ATFS). SFI, CSA, and ATFS are endorsed by an international organization called the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).
5. Certified forests generate products that often carry a label to help consumers recognize the product as originating from a sustainable source. You can find SFI, PEFC, and FSC labels in North America and globally.
6. As a consumer, seeking out and purchasing products with a certification label ensures that those products were generated in a sustainable way that is beneficial to forests. It also helps to increase demand and generate economic incentives for more sustainable forest management in the future.
7. Certification standards continuously improve to reflect new knowledge and best practices in sustainability.
8. Forest management certification practices create a global space for collaboration and implementation of best practices across a greater landscape scale – that crosses political and ownership boundaries.

