

# NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SPECIAL FOREST PRODUCTS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Purpose and Definition

This strategy sets forth Forest Service strategic goals and suggests key actions for managing renewable resources associated with special forest products (SFP) within the framework of ecosystem management. It sets forth principles and priorities that serve as a foundation for developing and action plan. Its purpose is to provide guidance and direction for the Forest Service to manage SFP resources on National Forest System lands and provide assistance to state and private forest managers. "Special forest products" are defined for the purpose of this document as products derived from biological resources collected in forests, grasslands, and prairies for personal, educational, commercial, and scientific use. Special forest products exclude sawtimber, pulpwood, cull logs, small roundwood, house logs, utility poles, minerals, animals, animal parts, rocks, water, and soil.

### Discussion

Hundreds of plants, fungi, and microorganisms are being collected and harvested for personal and commercial use. While gathering of many forest products for a variety of uses has been an enduring historic practice, new uses are constantly being discovered. Increasing markets and public demand for access to SFP resources are challenging the capabilities of forest land managers to adequately respond.

We need more knowledge of how harvesting and collecting SFPs affect species and ecosystems. With this knowledge we can better integrate SFP species management into ecosystem management on National Forest System lands and assist state and private forest managers. Many of these species do not appear in monitoring and inventory databases. We need more ecological information including the distribution and abundance of SFP resources; better information on the nature and extent of their harvesting, processing, and utilization; and for commercial products, their markets, economic value and pricing mechanisms.

State and private landowners and communities are now assuming greater responsibility for commodity and amenity resources. The Forest Service takes an active role in assisting local communities in the integration of economic development and enhanced quality of living with resource conservation and environmental protection. The Agency has been involved in natural resource activities linked to rural economies for many years. We should include SFPs in our efforts to assist these communities in finding ways to diversify and strengthen their economies through partnerships and community-based and community-led efforts.

We must also consider the rights of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and others associated with treaties, other agreements, and traditional, customary use. We must recognize all peoples' historic and cultural ties with the land, and address the challenges associated with diverse languages and cultures.

We need adaptive management strategies compatible with the principles of sustainable forest management that produce goods and services while protecting, enhancing, and restoring our forests, grasslands and prairies so that future generations will have the full array of options.

The goals of this strategy link the goals for sustainable community development with those for managing sustainable ecosystems.

**Our first priority is to maintain healthy and functional ecosystems so that the needs of the present are met without compromising the needs of the future.**

### Five strategic goals:

1. SFP resources are available within the limitations of ecosystem sustainability for people to pursue their economic, social, and cultural well being.

2. Management of SFP resources integrates into Forest Service resource and land management and coordinates with land management outside the Agency.
3. Forest Service policies and plans are consistent with laws, treaties, and regulations that influence management of SFP resources.
4. Inventory, monitoring, and research provide the information needed to manage SFP species and resources for sustainability, and to ensure their ecosystem roles and functions are maintained.
5. Education, training, and technology transfer are provided collaboratively to public and private stakeholders.

### **Implementation**

The Forest Service will carry out the actions outlined in this strategy at all levels of the Agency. Participation and integration across staff areas will be needed. Where feasible, this strategy will be implemented in partnership with other public land management agencies, tribal, state, and local governments, and organizations and individuals in the private sector.

## NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SPECIAL FOREST PRODUCTS

### Purpose

This strategy sets forth Forest Service strategic goals and suggested actions for managing and assisting in the management of renewable resources that provide special forest products (SFP) within the framework of ecosystem management. Its principles and priorities are intended to provide a solid conceptual foundation for an action plan. It was developed in response to public concerns about these valuable natural resources on National Forest System lands throughout the United States, as well as for the conservation of all healthy and productive forests, grasslands and prairies.

This strategy is intended to be used by the Forest Service as a guide and as an effective working tool in partnership with public and private land managers. It is also intended to ensure that policies on SFPs are developed in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.

### Special Forest Products - Background

"Special forest products" are defined for the purpose of this document as products derived from biological and genetic resources collected in forests and grasslands for personal, educational, commercial, and scientific use. Special forest products exclude sawtimber, pulpwood, cull logs, small roundwood, house logs, utility poles, minerals, animals, animal parts, insects, worms, rocks, water, and soil. Use of these products is diverse, but generally falls under five general areas: foods, herbs, medicinals, decoratives - including floral greenery and dyes - and specialty items, including aromatic oils and certain value-added wood products. Gathering and use of SFPs provide a variety of benefits to individuals and communities. Species used for SFPs number in the hundreds; many have been collected and used for thousands of years.

Commercial trade in products harvested from the wild has contributed to the economy of this country throughout its history. In the Pacific Northwest, ferns, tree boughs, and other plants have contributed to the commercial floral and Christmas greens industries for over 60 years. In 1989 these industries employed over 10,000 people and contributed an estimated \$128 million to the economies in Washington, Oregon and southern British Columbia. Sugar maple products in the Northeast, and ginseng and pine straw from eastern and southern United States have strong markets. Nationally, the cooking wood industry is estimated at \$18 to \$20 million.

Expanding world markets for SFPs from the United States highlight their role as contributors to the domestic forest-based economy. The resurgence of interest in biodiversity as a source of medicinal products is evident in the growth of phyto-pharmaceutical screening programs, health food businesses, and alternative and ethnic medicine. However, commercial expansion of SFPs is coming increasingly into conflict with the traditional, cultural or folk use of certain species. Harvesters may be finding new markets for their products, but are also experiencing increased competition for these finite resources.

SFPs support a variety of cottage industries in rural communities throughout America, and those products with value-added potential offer some of the most promising opportunities. Economic development specialists believe that new jobs and small-scale businesses can be created in rural communities by focusing community development efforts on these SFP resources.

SFPs also provide critical cultural and subsistence benefits for many groups and individuals. Their non-market contributions to livelihoods include food, medicine and decoratives for personal use and gift giving. These uses of SFPs are often especially important to households where employment opportunities in the mainstream economy are limited. They help to reinforce social and cultural bonds that are central to rural community life.

### Scope

The strategy puts forth a framework for developing policies and actions that will lead to improving the management of SFP resources cooperatively with other land managers, and to integrating SFP resource management into agency planning and decisionmaking. It does not establish resource management policy nor make resource management decisions for regional, forest or district programs. It is compatible with Agency policy and direction.

### **The Need for a Strategic Plan**

A number of administrative, legal, social, and environmental concerns must be addressed to ensure that SFP resources are managed equitably and sustainably on federal lands and to encourage the same on state and private lands.

As we seek a sustainable approach to managing SFP resources, we are only beginning to understand their social importance as well as their ecological role and function. To have sufficient knowledge to properly manage these resources, we need to acquire and integrate biological, cultural, and economic information. Whether we use new or existing knowledge, sound science should provide the basis for decision making. Where information is lacking, we need guidelines for administrative and management procedures that ensure harvest is sustainable.

Many National Forests, Grasslands and Prairies have varying policies and procedures governing their management of SFP resources. National Forest System policies concerning SFP resources should be clear, comprehensive and fair, and provide for a consistent and equitable approach to law enforcement, and administration of commercial and non-commercial harvests. Personal, subsistence, commercial, scientific, and recreational use on National Forest System lands should be clearly defined and should include, for example, standardized terminology and units of measure.

We should address how public land management decisions affect private landowners (particularly those on adjacent lands) and those in other jurisdictions. We should share what we learn with the private sector and devise State and Private programs to encourage adoption of sustainable management of SFP resources on state and private lands.

We need to adequately address those rights retained through treaties and other agreements of American Indians and Alaska Natives. We should recognize and understand historic and cultural ties with the land by communities and ethnic groups that gather and use SFPs.

Various cultural and ethnic groups collect SFPs for social, spiritual, cultural, and subsistence values, as well as market values. We need to cooperate with these groups to develop and implement consistent, fair, and socially and ecologically responsible policies for SFP resource management.

There are costs associated with the administration, including law enforcement, inventory, and monitoring of SFP resources on National Forest System lands. Funding for these activities must be accounted for in any SFP resource management plan and integrated into agency-wide budget planning.

We must provide leadership and cooperation as we work with our partners in carrying out adaptive and integrative management. We need a management strategy that is operationally effective and is accountable for achieving its goals. Where appropriate SFPs should be integrated into inventory, monitoring, and other activities that address criteria and indicators used to measure long term sustainable forest management.

### **Our Guiding Principles**

Our management of SFP resources provides social, economic, cultural, aesthetic, and other values to our publics and seeks to increase its effectiveness by collaborating with other Federal, state, tribal and private land managers.

- We are good land stewards charged with the task of caring for National Forest System lands.
- We partner with state and private landowners in applying sound forest practices on their lands.
- We support research, development, and application of results to increase our management effectiveness.

## **Priorities for Special Forest Products Program Areas:**

### **Ecosystem Management**

- Ensure healthy and viable ecosystems to provide the foundation for all life.
- Lead the way in using an ecosystem management approach. We have set forth a bold framework for ecosystem management to ensure that National Forests, Grasslands, and Prairies retain all their values for present and future generations.
- Use the best scientific knowledge available in making decisions that affect ecosystems.
- Use research to find better ways to manage and use natural resources in an ecologically sustainable manner.

### **Strengthening Rural Communities**

- Help rural communities diversify and strengthen their economies.
- Be a source of technical expertise in utilizing, marketing and recycling forest products.
- Provide linkages among other Federal and state agencies and the private sector to build the broad base of partnerships and alliances essential to successful rural community assistance.
- Assist forest-dependent communities in using their natural resource-based assets consistent with sound ecosystem management principles.

### **Partnerships and Collaboration**

- Encourage building partnerships in the management of SFP resources on public and private lands.
- Value and trust one another and share leadership.
- Listen and respond to the diverse needs of our publics before making decisions that affect the management of National Forest System lands, and respect the prerogatives of state and private landowners in the management of their lands.
- Cooperate and collaborate with state and Federal agencies, communities, tribal groups, and other stakeholders to facilitate technology transfer, information sharing, and problem solving.
- Work with our partners to develop policies and practices so that SFP resources are managed in an ecologically sustainable manner on National Forest System lands in collaboration with other Federal and state agencies, tribal governments, and private landowners.

### **Inventory, Monitoring and Research**

- Seek and use needed research, and base our management on the best available information.
- Implement and coordinate inventory, monitoring, and research.
- Develop and share information through partnerships, and coordinate our efforts with those of other Federal and state agencies, tribal governments, and the private sector.

## **Public Involvement**

- Actively seek public involvement and respond to our public's concerns and issues.

## **Strategic Goals and Actions**

This strategy has five major program goals; actions follow each of the goals. These goals and actions will require a substantial commitment of resources to achieve. The need is especially great in inventory, monitoring and research. It is understood that adequate resources will be needed to accomplish them.

### **Goal 1 Special Forest Products resources are available within the limitations of ecosystem sustainability for people to pursue their economic, social, and cultural wellbeing.**

Use clear, effective policies and practices, and timely information to manage SFP resources on National Forest System lands, so that people and communities are encouraged to understand, participate in, and support the ecosystem-based approach to management.

Assist communities in evaluating and realizing development potential for SFPs.

Use collaborative planning - both internally and externally - as the tool to help link community needs to Forest Service land management activities. Work within the Forest Service, with other Federal and state agencies, tribal governments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals to address public needs.

Collaborate with state and private land managers to develop policies and procedures for responsible management of SFP resources, and provide assistance for implementing them where feasible.

Implement SFP management programs that recognize the traditional, cultural, and spiritual values of all cultural groups. Honor American Indian treaty rights and Alaska Native subsistence rights, and fulfill our legally mandated responsibilities.

Link technical and financial assistance with planning for sustainable ecosystem management.

Provide timely information and technical assistance to communities and businesses developing business and marketing plans.

### **Goal 2 Management of Special Forest Products resources integrates into [Forest Service] National Forest System resource and land management, and coordinates with land management outside the Agency.**

Coordinate with, involve, and assist other public and private organizations and individuals in the management of SFP resources.

Develop standards and guidelines for Forest Land and Resource Management Plans that are based on ecologically sound principles. Outline harvest practices and regulations that foster sustainability and a conservation ethic.

Use our best scientific information to better manage for the maintenance of biodiversity, sustainability, and protection of species and to ensure their ecosystem roles and functions.

Integrate into SFP resource-management decisions and policies an understanding of the effects of harvest and collecting activities on the resource and ecosystem.

Develop and make accessible information to better educate and guide users and stakeholders, and inform the public.

**Goal 3 Forest Service policies and plans are consistent with laws, treaties and regulations that influence management of Special Forest Products resources.**

Review statutes, regulations, and Forest Service policies to determine if authorities and management guidelines are sufficient for implementing SFP resources management.

Develop needed policies and direction for managing SFP resources.

Include SFP resources in the Forest and Rangeland Resources Planning Act (RPA) process.

Provide guidance for SFP resources management that honors treaty rights, fulfills legally mandated trust responsibilities, and is sensitive to traditional native religious beliefs and practices.

**Goal 4 Inventory, monitoring and research provide information needed to manage Special Forest Products resources for sustainability.**

Establish and develop with other research institutions coordinated Research, Development and Application (RD&A) programs that are directed toward SFPs.

Ensure that national inventory and monitoring includes SFP species.

Involve public, private, and tribal stakeholders in developing monitoring strategies.

Broaden our acquisition of knowledge of SFPs to include a variety of traditional and non-traditional sources.

Encourage multidisciplinary research that integrates social, economic, biological, and ecological aspects of SFP resources.

Develop information on existing and potential uses, markets and value-added potential for SFPs.

Develop research that addresses SFP resource sustainability and species conservation as well as use.

Develop better means of tracking the buying, processing, and selling of non-timber commodities, as is done for agricultural commodities.

Use the latest information technology including electronic database systems for sharing information as efficiently and broadly as possible.

Pursue information-sharing and exchange opportunities with other public and private organizations including schools and libraries.

**Goal 5 Education, training, and technology transfer is provided collaboratively with partners to public and private stakeholders.**

Expand networks and provide forums for information exchange nationally and internationally.

Develop and conduct workshops for technology and information transfer.

Transfer technologies related to SFPs.

Develop and conduct training programs for Forest Service employees and partners in SFP resource management.

Develop and conduct public education programs targeted to a variety of audiences, including particular focus on programs to:

- 1) Reduce conflicts among stakeholders,
- 2) Create a realistic understanding of SFP species and their relationship to ecosystems.
- 3) Improve communication among user groups.

Increase our collaboration with partners in providing education, training and technology transfer.

### **Strategy Summary**

The national strategy establishes the framework for managing SFP resources while fulfilling our mission of caring for the land and serving the people. The strategy encourages the use of the best science and knowledge to ensure management actions are ecologically responsible, economically viable, and socially acceptable. It recognizes that people's needs are diverse and must be addressed when we carry out resource management responsibilities.

It embraces the idea that, working with our partners and concerned citizens, we can provide a range of benefits, with emphasis on those that our nation's public and private forests and grasslands have special advantage to provide, so long as their use does not outstrip their capacity to remain healthy and productive.

This strategy points the way for the Forest Service to take action in carrying out its stated goals and offers to others a model of sound SFP resource management.