



Making Pennsylvania's Forests Work for People and for Nature

How Your Municipality Can Keep Water Safe and Costs Down by Preserving Forests

By Dylan Jenkins, The Nature Conservancy

Penn's Woods produce heirloom furniture and most of the wooden baseball bats in America. They offer shelter to deer and elk and dozens of rare migratory birds. But few realize that Pennsylvania's forests also provide clean, safe drinking water for millions of people.

New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh all draw from the rivers that flow through our forests. Numerous other towns and cities across the Commonwealth rely on forested watersheds to keep their local reservoirs and wells safe.

A recent federal study warned that forests in Pennsylvania are among the region's most important for protecting the public drinking water supply, yet face intense development pressure.

Municipalities work hard to protect their water, but too often communities can't afford a full-time forester to balance the needs of soil conservation, habitat management, stream corridor protection and the forest product harvests that provide critical income to cash-strapped municipal budgets.

That's why water managers like Stephen Repasch, director of Bethlehem Authority in Northampton County, are considering The Nature Conservancy's Working Woodlands program; a new effort to bring forest landowners in Pennsylvania the benefits of forest land protection, forest management certification and the forest carbon offset market.

"A healthy, working forest has a great amount of value to a watershed," said Repasch. "Forests improve the quality of our drinking water – that's of the utmost importance to us."

Cleaner water that's been filtered by well-managed, healthy forestlands means that less treatment is required, and can reduce operating costs for a water authority, said Repasch, who's seriously exploring enrollment of about 23,000 acres of Bethlehem Authority's forested watershed in the Working Woodlands program.

"Ultimately, that plays back into the pocketbook of the consumer," he said.

As other municipalities consider following his lead, we sat down with Dylan Jenkins, Director of Forest Conservation for The Nature Conservancy, to learn more about how your community can benefit from Working Woodlands:

What are the benefits for municipalities that enroll in Working Woodlands?

You'll have the assistance of Conservancy experts working with your professional forester in responsibly managing your forestlands, receiving a professionally written, science-based plan that tells you how to protect water quality and wildlife habitat and the revenues from the sustainable harvesting of forest products. By following the management plan, your property will be certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the world's strongest environmental, economic, and social endorsement of sustainable forest management. You'll also be able to start selling forest carbon credits, an economic reflection of the important role that your forest plays in addressing climate change, thus creating a new source of income that can help you to resist the pressure to develop these forestlands that are so important to protecting your community's water.

What does all this cost?

There is no out-of-pocket cost to enroll in Working Woodlands. Conservancy foresters and ecologists will conduct an analysis of your forestland, then prepare a 10-year forest management plan and enroll your property in FSC certification in exchange for you entering into a long-term management agreement committing to following the plan. You'll retain 100% of the income from any timber or biomass you sell. You'll also retain at least 50% of any carbon revenue. The remainder of the carbon income will cover the up-front and ongoing costs of forest inventory, planning, and certification.

Will it create extra work for my employees?

Responsible land managers will find that many of the actions you're already taking to protect water quality contribute to forest sustainability. In fact, the long-term work load may be reduced because you'll have a professionally-prepared FSC forest management plan in place and a working relationship with the Conservancy that you can rely on for years to come.

What is forest certification anyway?

Forest certification allows an unbiased professional organization, in this case, the highly respected Forest Stewardship Council, to review your plans for managing and harvesting your forests, and to determine that your current and future actions will result in a healthy forest for wood, wildlife, and water. Your forest management plan and actions will meet a voluntary but highly rigorous standard, similar to the way your current water management actions comply with state and federal water quality regulations. Beyond ensuring a healthy, well-managed forest, the benefits of FSC certification include greater public support for your active forest management, and increased market access and favorable prices for your FSC certified wood.

How does carbon trading work?

In many parts of the world and the US, industries now seek to meet voluntary and mandatory limits on their emissions of greenhouse (GHG) gasses including carbon dioxide. These companies can limit their emissions by reducing GHGs at their factories and by purchasing "offsets" from carbon-sequestering projects such as landfill methane gas capture and improved forest management practices. Through improved forest management practices, such as those under FSC-certification, forests will accumulate

more carbon in living trees, dead trees and harvested wood products relative to unprotected and non-certified forests. By enrolling in Working Woodlands, landowners will have a forest management plan in place that enables carbon gains to be monitored, verified, and sold. The Nature Conservancy is now working with North America's leading carbon development and marketing firm, Blue Source to connect carbon offset buyers with the premium Working Woodlands carbon offsets generated through our landowners' protected and FSC-certified forests.

Am I eligible for Working Woodlands?

The Nature Conservancy is interested in working with landowners who have 250 or more forested acres in areas of the state where large blocks of forestland remain. Talk to our foresters to find out whether you might qualify.

How can I find out more?

Visit www.nature.org/workingwoodlands, where you can read more about the program and request more information from Nature Conservancy experts or call 717-232-6001 extension 123.