

 **TRANSCRIPT**

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AGRICULTURE SECRETARY VILSACK PRESENTS NATIONAL VISION FOR AMERICA'S FORESTS

Audio

SEATTLE, August 14, 2009 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today outlined his vision for the future of our nation's forests. In his first major address regarding the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Vilsack set forth a new direction guided by the principles of conservation, management, and restoration of these natural treasures.

Below are excerpts from Secretary Vilsack's speech as prepared for delivery:

"A healthy and prosperous America relies on the health of our natural resources, and particularly our forests. America's forests supply communities with clean and abundant water, shelter wildlife, and help us mitigate and adapt to climate change. Forests help generate rural wealth through recreation and tourism, through the creation of green jobs, and through the production of wood products and energy. And they are a national treasure – requiring all of us to protect and preserve them for future generations.

"The President has made clear his interest in conserving our natural environment. I intend to take that responsibility very seriously and to devote the time and attention it deserves. I also know that Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell shares that commitment.

"The Forest Service must not be viewed as an agency concerned only with the fate of our National Forests, but must instead be acknowledged for its work in protecting and maintaining all American forests, including state and private lands. Our shared vision adopts an 'all-lands approach,' requiring close collaboration with the NRCS and its work on America's private working lands.

"Our shared vision begins with restoration. Restoration means managing forest lands first and foremost to protect our water resources, while making our forests more resilient to climate change. Forest restoration led by the dedicated people at the Forest Service opens non-traditional markets for climate mitigation and biomass energy while appropriately recognizing the need for more traditional uses of forest resources.

"Emerging markets for carbon and sustainable bioenergy will provide landowners with expanded economic incentives to maintain and restore forests. The Forest Service must play a significant role in the development of new markets and ensuring their integrity. Carbon and bioenergy aren't the only new opportunity for landowners. Markets for water can also provide landowners with incentives to restore watersheds and manage forests for clean and abundant water supplies. These markets can also create jobs in rural.

"Why restoration as a driving principle in forest policy? There is no doubt that we are facing a health crisis in our forests. Climate change places them under increasing stress that exacerbates the threats of fire, disease, and insects. Throughout the West – but in other parts of the country as well – a legacy of fire suppression has resulted in forests that are over-stocked and much more susceptible to catastrophic fire and disease. Restoring forest ecosystems, particularly in fire-adapted forests, will make forests more resilient to climate-induced stresses and will ensure that our forests continue to supply abundant, clean water.

"The threats facing our forests don't recognize property boundaries. So, in developing a shared vision around forests, we must also be willing to look across property boundaries. In other words, we must operate at a landscape-scale by taking an 'all-lands approach.'"

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