

# Mississippi Forestry Commission 451-00 5-year Strategic Plan

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Fiscal Years 2025 - 2029

7/5/2023

**MISSISSIPPI FORESTRY COMMISSION  
5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN  
FISCAL YEARS 2025 - 2029**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) is to provide active leadership in forest protection, forest management, forest inventory, and effective forest information distribution, which is necessary for Mississippi's sustainable forest-based economy.

**PHILOSOPHY**

The MFC is committed to the continual management and protection of the state's forestlands and natural resources from wildfires, natural disasters, forest pests, and diseases. The philosophy of the Commission is to adhere to the highest professional standards in managing the state's forests on both private and public lands. The agency works in a sustainable manner to provide expertise, information, and support to keep Mississippi's 19.2 million acres of forestland healthy, productive, and profitable.

**RELEVANT STATEWIDE GOALS AND BENCHMARKS – Natural Resources**

- (1) To manage public timberlands efficiently and effectively to provide resources for school districts.
- (2) To protect the public's safety, by providing timely and appropriate responses to wildfire emergencies and natural disasters.
- (3) To ensure that current and future generations have access to the state's abundant natural resources through reforestation, protection, and conservation.

All three of these methods are incorporated within the Commission's related program goals, objectives, and strategies.

**OVERVIEW OF THE COMMISSION'S 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN**

The Commission is responsible for several programs that are essential in protecting and managing Mississippi's valuable forest resources. The agency took a new direction to streamline main program delivery areas and improve the management efficiency for primary functions and associated budgets. The Commission uses a tracking system for monitoring accomplishments and expenditures based on our two primary program areas: Forest Protection/Information and Forest Management.

The Commission, as the state's primary wildfire suppression and prevention agency, will continue its dedication to reducing the impact of unchecked wildland fire. Since most wildland fire is human-caused, the Commission will continue to look for innovative and relevant ways to communicate the dangers of wildfire to the public.

The information and outreach department supports all the Commission's program areas. Outreach not only provides information on wildfire, but also provides resources on forest management, forest health, rural fire assistance, urban forestry, wildfire prevention, and other forestry and natural resource-related issues. The Commission continues to bring forestry's message to the public through tools funded by federal grants, such as mass media, social media, related expositions/events, and school/library programs.

Mississippians have a strong connection to trees and forests. The Commission's urban and community forestry program continues to expand with the growth of developed areas and the fragmentation of forestland. Sound urban forest management mitigates the increasing threats to community trees and the environmental, economic, social, and human health benefits they provide to the large percentage of the population living in developed spaces. The urban and community forestry program helps enhance professional training, tree care ordinances, advisory and advocacy groups, tree inventories, and tree risk assessments for furthering sustained urban forest management by municipalities, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and tribal communities. The urban and community forestry program will continue to expand its reach to public audiences as funding permits.

The Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA) Program is designed to continually re-inventory the state's timberland, with the goal of completing the entire state over a five-year cycle (accomplishing twenty percent of the state per year).

In FY 2017, the Commission began the process of updating the forest management plans for the 485,000 acres of the State's School Trust (16<sup>th</sup> Section) Lands. The 5-year management plans are updated by 20% on an annual basis, and created within the ArcGIS system, which allows for increased reporting capability and consistency among plans. The Geographic Information System (GIS) plans assist in the development of annual harvest schedules, which can be used to create five-year projections on timber sales revenue. Over the next five years, the Commission's goal is to continue to maximize timber sales revenue in a sustainable manner on School Trust Lands. The process will require the development of annual harvest schedules and to assess timber values of scheduled sales.

The Commission also administers the Forest Resource Development Program (FRDP). The agency is responsible for coordinating the technical assistance components and financial elements of this cost-share program. Approximately \$1.98 million is distributed every year to private forest landowners in Mississippi to assist them in reforestation and managing their forestland. Since 1975, the FRDP has assisted landowners in forest regeneration and management, which supports Mississippi's forest industry and has a \$12.79 billion economic impact on our state.

Employee training is a key element in improving the overall efficiency and staff retention of the agency. We are actively working to integrate the training system with an online and on-demand component that will streamline education and provide employee-driven components.

## **INTERNAL/EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT**

- Any significant change(s) in market conditions affecting the demand for forest products would impact our ability to accomplish many of our key planned forest management activities.
- Many of our planned accomplishments rely on federal grant funding for support. Any significant reduction of these funds or changes in procedures could negatively impact our ability to carry out our stated goals.
- Environmental factors and responses to emergencies and natural disasters (such as hurricanes, tornadoes, extreme droughts, and elevated wildfire occurrences) could all have significant impacts on goal achievement.
- Reduction in training opportunities and federal class offerings would negatively affect preparedness.
- Insufficient General Funds, including funds to provide a sustainable source for the replacement of aging dozer/transport units essential to wildfire protection would negatively impact goals and objectives.

The dashboard created by the Commission shows performance results and can assess accomplishments in real-time. The Commission holds monthly leadership meetings and quarterly Board of Commissioners meetings, which allows the agency to adjust its processes as needed to accomplish the established goals and responsibilities.

## **SUMMARY OF STRUCTURE**

### **PROGRAM 1: Protection and Information**

**GOAL A:** Protect the life, property, and natural resources of the state by taking action to prevent, control, and extinguish wildland fires.

**OBJECTIVE A.1.** Maintain a trained and skilled workforce, supplied with proper and effective equipment, for the control and suppression of wildland fires statewide.

***Outcome:*** Change in Response Time

**A.1.1. STRATEGY:** Operating a centralized dispatch center to facilitate efficient resource logistics when responding to wildfires.

**Output: Average response time**  
**Efficiency: Number of minutes from detection to arrival**  
**Explanatory: Environmental factors and/or reduction in funding**

**A.1.2. STRATEGY:** Maintain capable and productive wildfire suppression equipment/fleet through regular maintenance and a sustainable, efficient replacement schedule.

**Output: Number of dozer/transport units replaced every year**  
**Efficiency: Reduction in breakdown occurrence and repair costs**  
**Explanatory: Insufficient funds for purchase and/or elevated wildfire occurrences**

**OBJECTIVE A.2.** Support wildland firefighting partners at the local, state, and federal levels.

**Outcome:** Suppress fires at 100 Acres or Less

**A.2.1. STRATEGY:** Provide wildland firefighting equipment to local fire departments through federal excess property programs.

**Output: Pieces of equipment/vehicles provided to wildland firefighting partners annually**  
**Efficiency: Annual total dollar amount of equipment sent to Volunteer Fire Departments**  
**Explanatory: Reduction of federal funding, changes in acquisition procedures, availability of federal equipment**

**OBJECTIVE A.3.** Conduct wildfire mitigation and prevention practices to help reduce the occurrence of wildfires.

**Outcome:** Educate the general public through wildfire prevention programs.

**Outcome:** Protect forestland and property in the wildland-urban interface, and enhance wildlife and forest habitat, through wildfire mitigation programs.

**A.3.1. STRATEGY:** Provide information to the public through various outlets, such as mass media, public outreach events, and outreach and education programs.

**Output: Number of programs/events conducted annually**  
**Efficiency: Average number of attendees per program/event**

***Explanatory: Reduction in federal funding of wildfire outreach and education programs***

**A.3.2. STRATEGY:** Provide prescribed fire assistance to landowners through wildfire hazard mitigation programs and forest improvement programs.

***Output: Number of acres enrolled in a prescribed burn program***  
***Efficiency: Number of acres burned under a prescribed burn program***

***Explanatory: Environmental factors that reduce the number of available burn days***

## **PROGRAM 2: Forest Management**

**GOAL A:** To effectively promote sound forest management practices, which are essential to ensuring the sustainability of the state's natural resource productivity. To provide private forest landowners (with relatively small acreage) forest management services and assistance. To assist Mississippi timber owners with forest pest management by conducting forest pest surveys and evaluations.

**OBJECTIVE A.1.** Provide cost-share funding to landowners for tree planting and forest improvement practices for the purpose of long-term timber production.

***Outcome:*** Provide approximately 35,000 acres of forest stand improvement on an annual basis.

**A.1.1. STRATEGY:** Administer the state's Forest Resource Development Program (FRDP) by providing forest management/technical assistance to qualified forest landowners.

***Output: Allocate available FRDP funding to qualified landowners***  
***Output: Number of acres of stand improvement per fiscal year***  
***Efficiency: Percentage of state's FRDP funds allocated***  
***Explanatory: Availability of FRDP funds based on Severance Tax***

**OBJECTIVE A.2.** Provide effective technical assistance to nonindustrial private forest landowners (NIPF) in Mississippi.

***Outcome:*** Provide forest technical assistance to approximately 7,945 private forest landowners.

**A.2.1. STRATEGY:** Provide effective forest management assistance to private forest landowners.

***Output: Number of forest landowners that the Commission is providing with technical assistance***

***Efficiency: Number of landowners assisted per forester***

***Explanatory: Competing management priorities; such as wildfires or natural events such as weather.***

**OBJECTIVE A.3.** To assist Mississippi timber owners in forest pest management by conducting forest pest surveys and evaluations.

***Outcome:*** Monitor approximately 19,200,000 forested acres for insect, storm, or disease damage.

**A.3.1. STRATEGY:** Provide aerial detection for insect, storm, or disease damage using GPS technology to map occurrences.

***Output: Number of forested acres monitored by aerial or ground methods***

***Efficiency: Cost of aerial flights per year***

***Explanatory: Competing management priorities; such as wildfires or natural events such as weather.***

**GOAL B:** To provide timely and accurate forest resource assessments to aid in promoting sound forest management practices which maintain the consistency of the environment and provide for our state's natural resource needs. Continually inventory the state's timberland, with the goal of completing the entire state over a five-year cycle (accomplishing twenty percent of the state per year).

**OBJECTIVE B.1.** Promote economic development regarding the state's forest resources, to aid in formulating sound forest policies, and stimulate the forest resource economic sector.

***Outcome:*** Supply forest resource data to MDA, private investors, and Forest Industry partners.

**B.1.1. STRATEGY:** Complete forest inventory on twenty percent of Mississippi's forest resources on an annual basis.

***Output: Inventory twenty percent of the state on an annual basis***

***Efficiency: Cost of completing each inventory***

***Explanatory: Lack of funding***