

Mississippi Forestry Commission 5-Year Strategic Plan

Fiscal Years 2027-2031

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**MISSISSIPPI FORESTRY COMMISSION
5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN
FISCAL YEARS 2027 - 2031**

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 Mississippi Forestry Commission 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 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, including 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.

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

OVERVIEW OF THE COMMISSION'S 5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

The Commission oversees crucial programs to safeguard and oversee Mississippi's valuable forest resources. Recently, the agency embarked on a new strategy to enhance efficiency in delivering key programs and managing associated budgets. A tracking system is utilized to monitor achievements and expenditures within our three main program focuses: Forest Protection, Information, and Forest Management.

The Commission serves as Mississippi's primary agency for wildfire suppression and prevention, committed to mitigating the impact of uncontrolled wildland fires. Given that most wildfires are human caused, the Commission remains focused on exploring innovative ways to raise public awareness about wildfire risks.

The Information and Outreach Department supports all Commission programs, offering resources on wildfire prevention and forest management, forest health, rural fire assistance, urban forestry, and other natural resource issues. The Commission disseminates forestry information through federally funded tools such as mass media, social media, expos/events, and school/library programs.

Mississippians have a deep affinity for trees and forests. The Commission's urban forestry program continues to expand alongside urban sprawl and the fragmentation of forested areas. Functions of our Urban Forestry program include outreach, training, city tree inventories, hazard tree assessments, and site visits, all prioritizing public engagement within budget constraints.

The Mississippi Forest Inventory (MFI) Program systematically re-inventories the state's timberland, aiming to complete the entire state within a five-year cycle (achieving twenty percent of the state's forests annually).

Since FY 2017, the Commission has updated forest management plans for 480,000 acres of the State's School Trust Lands on a rolling five-year basis, utilizing the ArcGIS system for enhanced reporting and plan consistency. Geographic Information System (GIS)-based plans facilitate annual harvest schedules and five-year timber sales revenue projections, aiming to maximize revenue sustainably.

The Commission also administers the Forest Resource Development Program (FRDP), overseeing technical assistance and financial support for private forest landowners in Mississippi. This program annually distributes approximately two million dollars to aid in reforestation and forest management, supporting the state's forest industry, which has a \$15.44 billion economic impact.

Employee training is pivotal in enhancing agency efficiency, personnel safety, and staff retention. Efforts continue as we strive to integrate a streamlined online and on-demand training system to empower employees with flexible educational opportunities.

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 significantly impact goal achievement.
- Reduction in training opportunities and federal classes offered would negatively affect preparedness.
- Insufficient General Funds would negatively impact goals and objectives, including funds to provide a sustainable funding source for replacing aging dozer/transport units essential to wildfire protection.

The Commission has developed and implemented an agency dashboard to display real-time performance results and assess achievements, providing greater situational awareness. Monthly leadership sessions and quarterly board of commissioners' meetings enable the agency to promptly make necessary adjustments to meet 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: Fires Suppressed 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 8,000 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 timber land, 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 Mississippi Development Authority (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