

# Forest Conversion

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# Forest Conversion

- Discussions have been occurring for several years about forest conversion – primarily in the Turtle Mountains – appears to be increasing
- ND Game and Fish wanted to get this in front of this group as its should be an important issue for NDFS, NDGF and others
- Forest Action Plan and State Wildlife Action Plan both emphasis importance of native woodlands and associated species

# Forest Conversion

- What options exist currently?
- What options could we develop for the future?
- Is there an appetite from this group to work on this?
- If so, this will need to be a partnership and will involve funding, grants, programs, policy, legislation, data analysis, planning, etc....
- A big lift, but its worth it

# Private Forest Options

- Forest-Climate Working Group is pushing for another “arm” of the Ag Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) for forests.
- Currently, ACEP only has a Wetland Reserve Easement and an Ag Land Easement. Adding A Forest Easement would provide a great opportunity.



# Private Forest Options



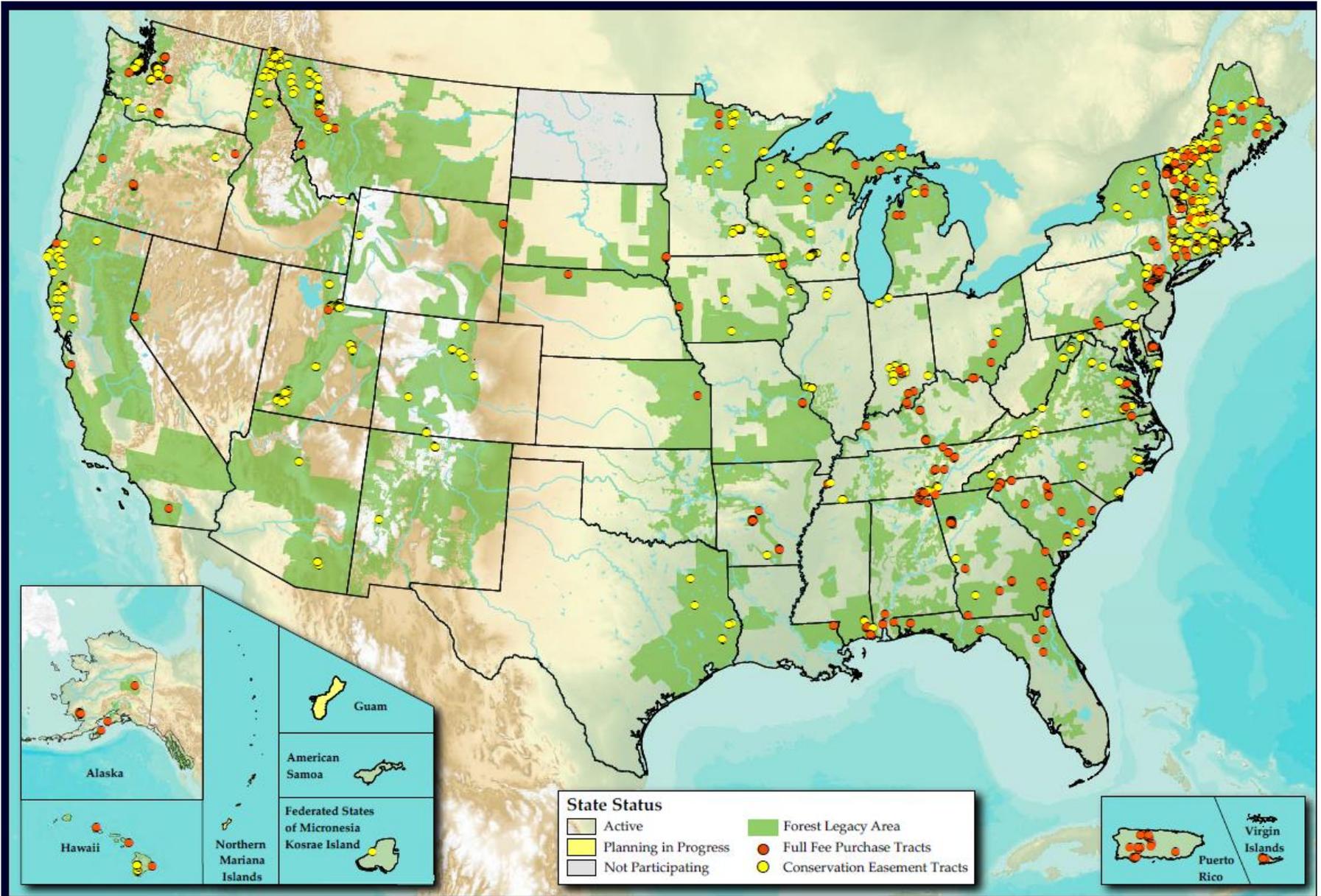
- We propose that the Farm Bill Conservation Title (or another legislative vehicle) expand and fund a new Forest Conservation Easement Program (FCEP) with mandatory funding at \$100 million annually that is in addition to funds for existing agriculture and forest easement programs.
- This program would consist of two components, entity-held easements and U.S.-held easements, as a forest-focused “sister program” to ACEP. We recommend merging the Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) into this program to implement U.S.-held easements (similar to ACEP’s WRE), and a second sub-program be created to implement entity-held easements (similar to ACEP’s ALE). We recommend merging this concept with HFRP for several reasons but one in particular is that HFRP already has enhancing carbon sequestration as a priority, which should be maintained as a priority in FCEP.

# Private Forest Options

- Forest Legacy Program (FLP), administered by the US Forest Service. ND is not participating because of our easement laws.
- A change to the FLP statute, similar to how USDA Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) language is written could be a solution for North Dakota.
- Change would require language: easements can be perpetual, or “as allowed by state law”.



# The Forest Legacy Program: Keeping Working Forests Working



# Private Forest Options

- Outdoor Heritage Fund
  - Potential to be used in the near-term to develop a pilot project for a private forest conservation easement/agreement while long-term strategies are being worked on for a more permanent fix with ACEP, FLP or HFRP.
  - What would this look like?
  - What would a payment be based on?
  - Where would a pilot project area make sense?

# Next Steps

- Expand the discussion at June meeting, stand up a working group to stay on the issue
- Data analysis to assess how much conversion has taken place, rate of conversion, fragmentation, etc...
- Planning? Landscape Stewardship Plan for Turtle Mountains
- Needs and feasibility document
- Landowner interest
- After all of this....then pursue a program