

## Mid-Atlantic Business Plan Executive Summary

“Prior to widespread European colonization, fires set by Native Americans and settlers, and to a lesser degree, lightning strikes, played a major role in creating and sometimes perpetuating forest conditions dominated by shrubs and small trees. Herbivores (e.g., beaver, bison, and elk), topography, soil conditions, and storm-related events (e.g., floods, ice storms, and tropical storms) also played significant roles. **Together, these agents of change maintained a shifting mosaic of early successional habitat embedded within a landscape that was likely dominated by old growth forest and a variety of grassland, shrubland and wetland habitats.** The degree to which these factors affected the landscape varied by region and with local conditions such as soil type, forest type, slope, and aspect.”

### Maryland’s 2020 Forest Action Plan

#### 1. Current Condition: What are the problems we are trying to solve?

- Historically, we have lost extensive forestland. The Chesapeake watershed, which comprises a significant percentage of the Mid-Atlantic region, was 97% forested before settlement but is only 57% forested now.<sup>1</sup>
- Largely because we’ve suppressed natural disturbances, our remaining forest landscapes are dominated by an unnaturally single-aged, century-old forest (many of which have been high graded or had the best timber removed for sawtimber), which wildlife biologists describe as a ‘sea of sameness,’ esp. lacking older, younger, and open-canopy stands.
- The lack of habitat diversity has dire consequences for forested wildlife, with golden-winged warblers, wood thrush, ruffed grouse, and American woodcock all considered species of greatest conservation need.

#### 2. Desired Conditions

- Healthy, resilient forests have more structural and age-class diversity, with good ‘*interspersion*’ or co-mingling of age classes.
- Forest wildlife need 20-30% of forests to be mature, with old forest conditions, created by time or management
- Forest wildlife need 15-20% of forests to be young, thru managing existing forests or reforestation thru management and/or ecological succession.
- Forest wildlife need more forests to have open-canopy conditions, through prescribed fire or active management.
- These desired conditions are combined in the concept of dynamic forest restoration blocks (DFRBs) or dynamic forest blocks (DFBs).

#### 3. Obstacles

- Lack of forest product markets in some areas (e.g., NE PA, western MD, NJ).
- Lack of coordination and planning of active forest management diminishes habitat benefits, esp. lack of interspersion.
- Opposition to active forest management by certain natural resource agencies and preservationist environmental organizations, and public ignorance regarding the benefits of management.
- Lack of capacity in certain agencies (USFS, US Army Corps of Engineers) limits management.
- Lack of engagement in land management of many family forest owners, despite their strong support for wildlife habitat.

#### 4. Priority Actions/Operational plan

- Stewardship agreements with US Forest Service (USFS), starting with the Monongahela NF, and MOUs with agencies, including US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).
- Partnering with consulting foresters to engage private landowners, beginning with our 2020 NFWF grant in PA.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.chesapeakebay.net/state/tree\\_cover](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/state/tree_cover)

- Developing funded partnerships with forest product companies, including Domtar, WestRock, and other companies in other regions.
- Connecting chapters with ongoing landscape-scale habitat work, especially in PA, with the 15 established DFRBs.
- Exploring ways to build support for active forest management and early successional habitat by developing partnerships around DFRB implementation

**5. Staffing plan**

- Supported by the fundraising contained in this plan, we will need to hire 2-3 consulting foresters across the region, with initial foresters in WV and PA.
- We will also explore funding opportunities to support the hiring of part- or full-time coordinator in PA.

**6. Metrics, Evaluation, and Reporting**

- DFRB implementation will be our primary success metric.
- This plan will enable the creation of 13 DFRBs, as outlined below, which will amount to a ten-fold increase in our habitat impact.

Year	Metrics	DFRB goal
'21-	Implement a DFRB through a stewardship agreement with the Monongahela National Forest (WV)	1
	Plan and implement a DFRB that integrates climate resiliency and aquatic habitat restoration on the Mon NF	1
'22-'23	Funded forest product company partnerships to establish DFRBs in VA, WV, and PA	4
	Work with private landowners to expand on habitat mosaic already created on PA Game Lands on Kittatinny Ridge	1
	In eastern NJ, DE, MD and/or VA, develop a woodcock-oriented DFRB	1
	In MD, collaboratively develop and implement 3 DFRBs	3
'24-'25	Additional DFRBs on GW-Jeff National Forest and/or The Monongahela National Forest	2
	<b>Total</b>	13