

# The National Reforestation Strategy and the REPLANT Act: Growing and Nurturing Resilient Forests

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## Overview:

- The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) mandates prompt reforestation.
- Passage of the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) included the Repairing Existing Public Land by Adding Necessary Trees Act (REPLANT Act), which removes the cap on the Reforestation Trust Fund, indefinitely increasing annual funding for reforestation from \$30 million to \$140 million or more.
- REPLANT mandates removing our current reforestation backlog during the next decade.
- We have a 3- to 5-million-acre backlog of reforestation needs that grows each year because of fire. Charting a way forward to address the current backlog plus our new reforestation needs requires a coordinated effort and realization of what limits our ability to meet those challenges.
- Our most limiting factor is professional capacity: we need new, additional on-the-ground professionals and specialized supporting staff. The long-term nature of the Reforestation Trust Fund should allow us to increase capacity.
- Meeting the huge Congressional mandates of the REPLANT Act presents “unsolved opportunities” for the Forest Service, especially the integration of reforestation, post-fire restoration, fuel management, and early stand-tending policies. What are our values, management approaches, and trade-offs?

## Summary:

Management Problem: During the past two decades: (1) harvest activities, which formerly funded most Forest Service reforestation work, continued their sharp decline; (2) the non-fire portion of the Forest Service workforce decreased by 40%, which has negatively affected monitoring and FACTS reporting; and (3) the amount of wildfire increased substantially. The result is that the Forest Service is currently not in compliance with NFMA and a significant amount of reforestation backlog has developed. Our partners are supporting reforestation efforts, but our lack of human capacity is throttling our ability to fully leverage their potential commitments. With passage of the REPLANT Act, Congress has mandated the Forest Service to



alleviate the current backlog of acres requiring reforestation per National Forest Management Plans.

**Management Need:** Given the ever-increasing demands on current staff, a critical need is to increase the number of nonfire professionals within the Forest Service substantially dedicated to reforestation and early stand tending. In addition to hiring on-the-ground professionals in the field and in the nurseries, we also require additional, specialized supporting staff (e.g., HR, budget, engineering, contracting). Paramount to required Congressional mandates within the REPLANT Act is better data collection and entry to ensure timely and necessary interpretation, prioritization, and implementation of reforestation activities.

**Proposed Solution:** In addition to the National Reforestation Strategy that provides a broad framework for Forest Service reforestation work, passage of the REPLANT Act within the 2021 IIJA removes the annual \$30 million cap on the Reforestation Trust Fund. This increases the annual flow of available funds for reforestation to \$140 million or more. Given the long-term status of the Trust Fund, it provides opportunity to increase staffing to support reforestation. This additional capacity, along with a coordinated effort across the Regions and the WO, will lead to successful restoration of our 3- to 5-million-acre reforestation backlog as well as meet our annual new reforestation needs.

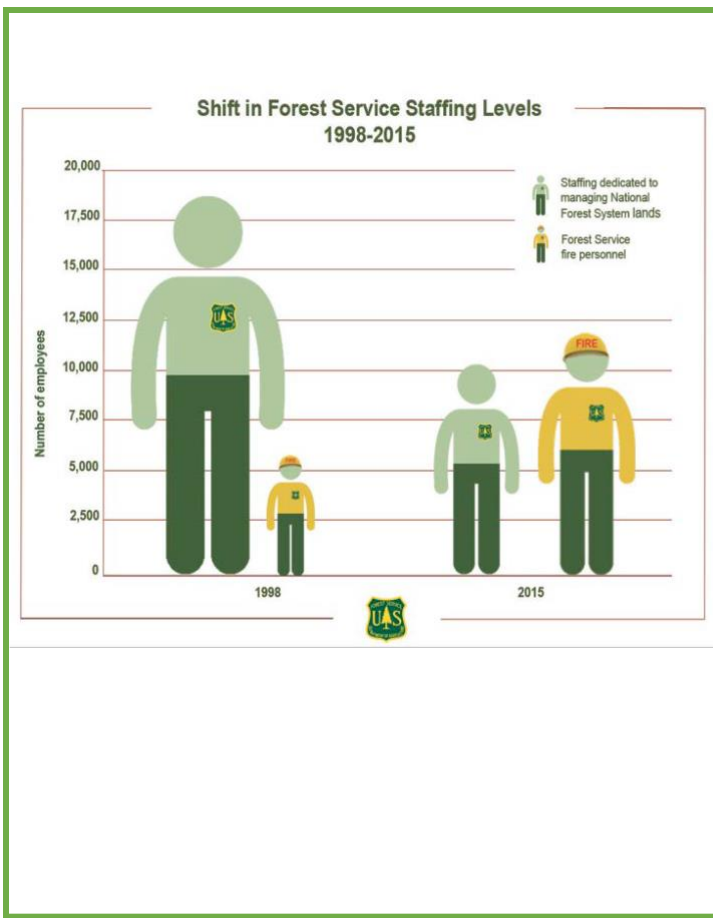
### **Silvicultural Concepts:**

- Reforestation has always been an important function of the Forest Service and is now required by NFMA and the REPLANT Act.
- Reforestation is part of the holistic approach to forest management that helps us manage our national forest assets for multiple uses, including carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation.
- The REPLANT Act presents the Forest Service with a bold opportunity to integrate new approaches to reforestation in response to today's challenges that include changes in fire intensity and frequency, climate change, invasive species, and loss of biodiversity.

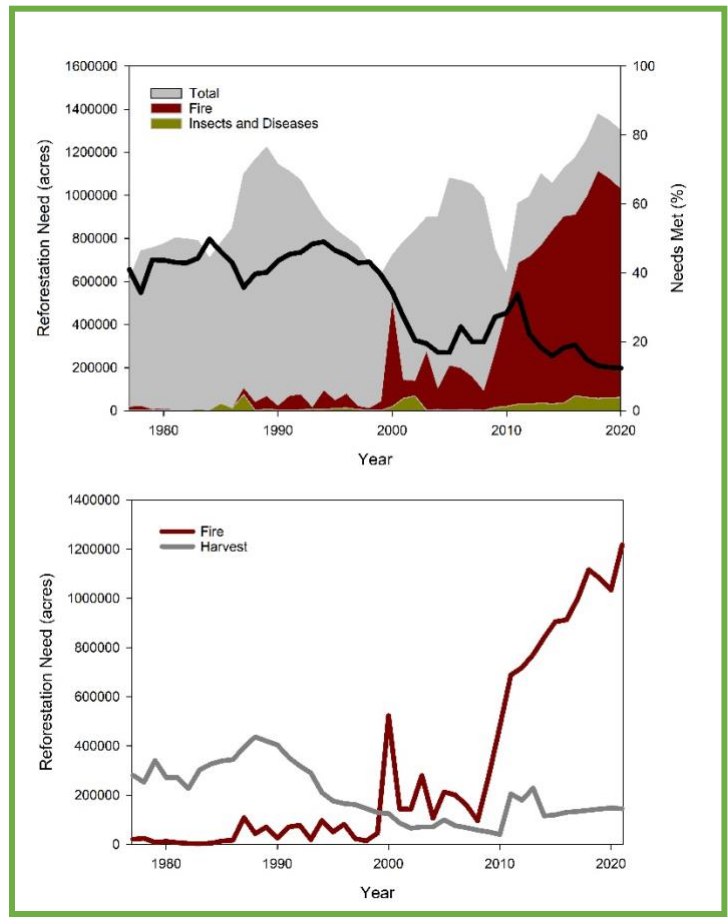
### **Management Applications:**

None provided.





**Figure 1**—The number of nonfire personal has declined 40% since 1995, contributing to the Forest Service’s noncompliance with the National Forest Management Act of 1976. (USDA Forest Service 2015.)



**Figure 2**—Since the late 1970s, reforestation need caused by harvest activities has declined, whereas needs due to wildfire have increased exponentially since 2010. (Based on FACTS data; modified from Dumroese et al. 2019.)

**References**

Dumroese, R.K; Balloffet, N.; Crockett, J.W.; Stanturf, J.A.; Nave, L.E. 2019. A national approach to leverage the benefits of tree planting on public lands. *New Forests*. 50: 1–9.

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