The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its partners are helping landowners conserve, enhance, and restore the Nation’s private forested ecosystems. Healthy forests benefit us all through their functions as wildlife habitat, modulators of hydrologic flow, and protectors of soil. Forests provide a diverse range of benefits including storing carbon, regulating climate, purifying water, and preventing hazards such as floods.

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) has provided additional funding for NRCS to implement Climate-Smart Mitigation Activities through several of its programs and strategies. Additional funding through the IRA will help landowners implement conservation activities on their lands, with a focus on climate-smart mitigation, that may increase storage of carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and some of which may also help to address flooding and other climate-related stressors.

**Climate-Smart Mitigation Activities**

Forest landowners play a critical role in fostering a healthy environment by incorporating conservation activities into a system that provides multiple benefits, including addressing natural resource concerns and responding to climate change. Certain conservation activities, including Tree and Shrub Establishment (CPS 612) and Forest Stand Improvement (CPS 666), are categorized as Climate-Smart Mitigation Activities, because they can contribute to climate change mitigation by increasing carbon storage in soil and plant communities and avoiding, capturing, or reducing greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate climate change in the future.

Trees and forested ecosystems provide many benefits, a major one being their contribution to carbon storage. For example, according to estimates from COMET-Planner, planting just a quarter acre of new trees using Tree and Shrub Establishment could potentially sequester up to two tons of CO2e per year in the Northwest, four tons in the Northeast, and 6 tons in Southeastern areas, the equivalent to reducing the emissions generated from driving an average gasoline-powered car around 5,000 to 14,000 miles. Implementing silvicultural treatments through Forest Stand Improvement can also improve forest health and productivity, and potentially reduce the risk and magnitude of catastrophic wildfire, which can be a large source of greenhouse gas emissions.

While Climate-Smart Mitigation Activities can lead to direct, quantifiable climate change mitigation benefits, additional practices may be needed to facilitate the management or function of these activities to achieve their mitigation benefits. These facilitating practices may not have quantifiable mitigation benefits themselves, but they may be an essential part of the system and provide other co-benefits.

**Conservation Systems Can Increase Resilience and Provide Multiple Benefits**

Using conservation practices on forest land as part of a planned system to achieve multiple desired benefits may require a combination of several conservation practices, including Climate-Smart Mitigation Activities and other facilitating practices.
In addition to contributing to climate change mitigation, these systems may improve other natural resource concerns such as enhancing wildlife habitat, improving water quality, and controlling erosion. They may also support climate change adaptation by increasing forest resilience to a range of climate-induced threats such as extreme weather events, droughts, insects and disease, and wildfire.

For example, a system including Forest Stand Improvement (666), Woody Residue Treatment (384), and Brush Management (314) may help reduce risks of catastrophic wildfire or increase carbon storage by enhancing the health of remaining trees, while also providing improved habitat for wildlife. Similarly, a system with Tree and Shrub Site Preparation (490) and Tree and Shrub Establishment (612) can provide significant mitigation benefits through the accumulation of carbon in woody biomass, while at the same time enabling other forest ecosystem services like water quality improvements, erosion reduction, increased infiltration, and enhanced habitat.

**Boosting Our Work Through the Inflation Reduction Act**

Forests are some of nature’s most productive ecosystems and private landowners play a critical role in their protection, enhancement, and restoration. More than 62 percent of the forest land in the United States is owned and managed by private forest landowners, with 39 percent of that owned and managed by 10 million family forest landowners. Thousands of landowners voluntarily take actions every day to protect, restore, and enhance forests and the ecosystem services they provide.

The IRA is providing unprecedented funding levels for several of the existing programs that NRCS implements including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). This additional funding will help farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners apply new or additional conservation activities, with a focus on Climate-Smart Mitigation Activities that increase storage of carbon and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Activities supported by the IRA for their mitigation benefits can be implemented in systems that provide multiple benefits, including building climate resilience and addressing other resource concerns.

**Ongoing NRCS Conservation Opportunities for Forests**

NRCS and its partners offer a wide variety of financial and technical assistance to help restore, enhance, and preserve the Nation’s private forests. With NRCS financial and technical assistance, states, non-governmental organizations, and tribes leverage resources to achieve maximum benefits.

Recent NRCS investments include:

- The **Joint Chiefs’ Landscape Restoration Partnership** enables NRCS and the Forest Service to collaborate with agricultural producers and forest landowners to invest in conservation and restoration at a meaningful scale to make a difference. In 2023, USDA is investing more than $48.6 million through the Joint Chief’s Landscape Restoration Partnership for projects that mitigate wildfire risk, improve water quality, restore forest ecosystems, and ultimately contribute to USDA’s efforts to combat climate change. In 2022, USDA invested more than $48 million in 41 projects, including 17 new ones, that bring together agricultural producers, forest landowners, and National Forest System lands to improve forest health using available Farm Bill conservation programs and other authorities.

- The **Healthy Forests Reserve Program** (HFRP) helps landowners restore, enhance, and protect forestland resources on private and tribal lands through easements and financial assistance. Between 2009-2019, NRCS improved forest health on close to 11,000 forested acres through the Healthy Forests Reserve Program.

- Between 2015 and 2022, NRCS invested over $215 million to restore forest health and productivity, mitigate wildfire risk, improve water quality, and improve wildlife habitat on nearly 816,000 acres of private forest land.