

NEWS

PROTECTING DRINKING WATER THROUGH HEALTHY FORESTS

U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Greenville, SC

For IMMEDIATE RELEASE (March 17, 2016)

The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (Endowment) hosted a special session at the 2016 Sustainable Water Management Conference to highlight the important role that forests play in protecting drinking water. “Seeing Green: Improving Water Quality and Quantity through Forestry” featured six speakers who highlighted case studies, new opportunities, and successful strategies from across the country. The session was held Wednesday morning, March 9, 2016, in Providence, Rhode Island.

“An estimated two out of three Americans drink water that originates in a forest” said Peter Stangel, the Endowment’s Senior Vice President and session organizer. “Retaining working forests in watersheds, enhancing the health of these woodlands, and creating mechanisms to compensate land owners for providing abundant, clean water is a priority for the Endowment.”

Robert Morgan, of the Beaver Water District in Northwest Arkansas, opened the session with results from a new study supported by the Endowment and the American Water Works Association. Morgan and his co-authors sought to help clarify the relationship between forest cover and the cost of chemicals used to treat raw water. Although there are many variables, the research suggests small but significant savings associated with cleaner water that flows from forested watersheds relative to other cover types.

Laurel Jackson, of the Portland Water District (Maine), emphasized the critical role that healthy forests play in maintaining exceptional quality in Sebago Lake, their water supply. This allows their District to operate under an exemption to the filtration requirements of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, a status that avoids treatment enhancements that could total \$50 million in capital costs. The water district partners with local land trusts to help finance conservation easements for private landowners who wish to protect their land and forests for the future.

Jonathan Yeo, with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, noted that his agency owns and manages more than 22,000 acres of forestland in their watershed. They face many of the same challenges that all forest owners do—invasive pests, public perceptions about timber harvest, and climate change—but they find the benefits to their water supply far outweigh these concerns.

Jerome Ryan, of Conservation Forestry, a conservation-focused Timber Investment Management Organization, discussed several opportunities for forest owners to increase water supply by reducing tree density. In areas where water demand exceeds supply, forest owners might be able to generate income by selling water produced on their lands, as well as continuing sustainable forestry operations.

Katie Henderson, of the Water Research Foundation, and Lynn Williams Stephens, of the consulting firm Brown Caldwell, presented results from a workshop held in San Francisco in 2015. The event brought together more than 40 water and forestry experts to chart a course for future research priorities. Integrating watershed protection into traditional utility Asset Management Plans, assessing the risk-avoidance benefits to watershed protection, and clarifying the triple bottom-line value of forested watersheds to utilities and communities are considered priorities. The workshop was sponsored by the Water Research Foundation and the Endowment.

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The **U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities** (the Endowment) is a not-for-profit public charity working collaboratively with partners in the public and private sectors to advance systemic, transformative, and sustainable change for the health and vitality of the nation's working forests and forest-reliant communities – www.usendowment.org