

## **Section 9**

### **Proposed Forest Legacy Areas**

#### **9.1 Process for Identification of Forest Legacy Areas (FLA)**

The State Forest Stewardship Advisory Committee determined that in addition to other selection criteria, potential FLAs would coincide with county lines to facilitate data collection, area description, government jurisdictions and program implementation.

The initial requirement of exceeding the state average of 30% forest cover was used as a primary filter. This eliminated nearly three-fourths of the state from consideration, based on forest cover alone. Those counties meeting the 30% threshold were identified and then over-laid with data on the change in the number of housing units during the past ten years and a review of factors that may continue or enhance the potential for development/conversion such as infrastructure development. In addition, threats of conversion from surface mining were also included in this filter.

Data on significant plants and animals from the Ohio Natural Heritage Database and Important Birding Areas was used as the primary environmental filter. Also considered was data on stream quality.

Timber production and the dependence on the timber industry was included by plotting the location of primary forest product businesses, that would serve as the first step in producing value added products. No data is available on specific dollar amounts or quantities of timber or other commodity level timber products on a county/regional basis.

Recreational land and opportunities were determined based on site maps of public and private lands open to the public for recreation.

After evaluating available data sources, only two factors proved to be effective filters for identifying FLAs,. Forest cover greater than 30% and a change in the number of housing units less than 20%.

#### **PROPOSED FOREST LEGACY AREAS**

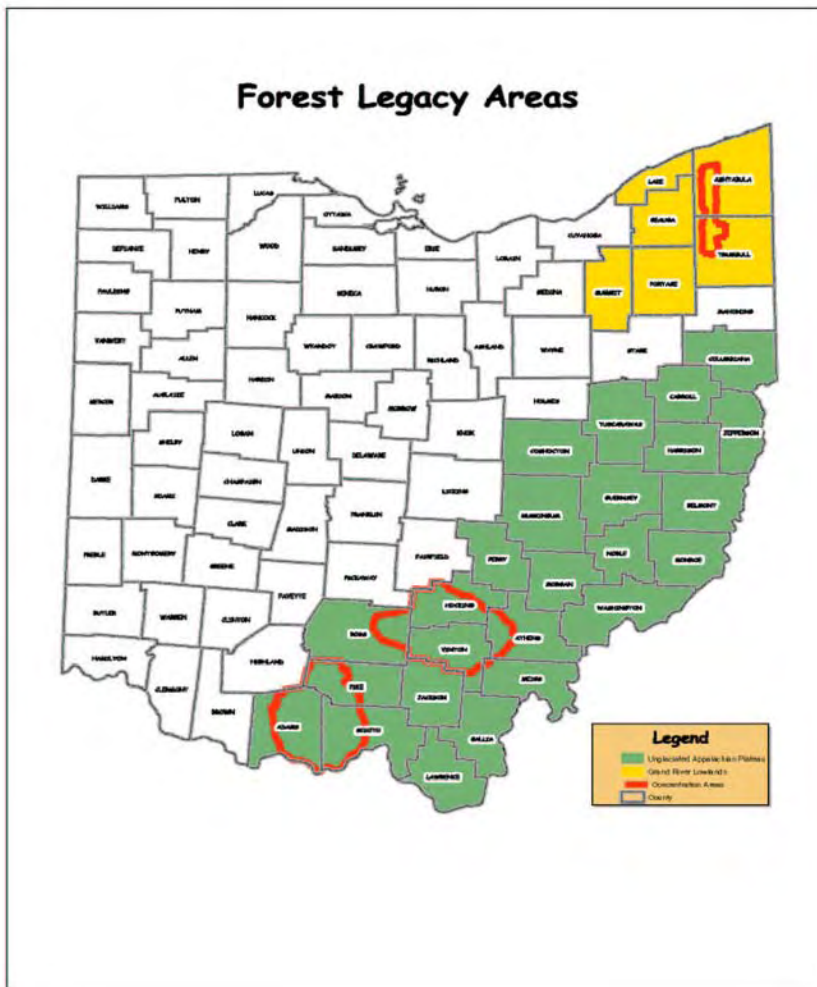
Based on the eligibility criteria listed above, two areas emerged as meeting the criteria and are recommended as Forest Legacy Areas.(map 25a.). The two areas are quite similar from the standpoint of meeting FLA criteria, but are different ecologically, geologically, and demographically. Although both FLAs contain non-forested areas, the Unglaciaded Appalachian Plateau FLA is by far more rural, less populated, contains more public lands, and has a greater potential for protecting larger contiguous areas of private land.

The FLAs vary in size with the Grand River Lowlands encompassing six counties (Lake Ashtabula, Geauga, Summit, Portage and Trumbull) of 1.8 million acres and the Unglaciaded Appalachian Plateau comprised of twenty-five counties (Columbiana, Carroll, Coshocton, Tuscarawas, Harrison, Jefferson, Muskingum, Guernsey, Belmont, Perry, Morgan, Noble, Monroe, Washington, Hocking, Athens, Vinton, Meigs, Ross, Jackson, Gallia, Pike, Adams, Scioto, and Lawrence) of 7.9 million acres.

Both FLAs meet the criteria of exceeding the state average of 30% forest cover: Grand River Lowlands has 38% and the Unglaciaded Appalachian Plateau FLA has 59% forest cover.

The amount of public land also varies greatly between the FLAs. The Grand River Lowlands contains 115,00 acres or just over 1% of the total forested area, while the Unglaciaded Appalachian Plateau contains 810,000 acres of public land or 11.2% of the total forested area. Except for the Wayne National Forest in the Unglaciaded Appalachian Plateau and a portion of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park in the southwest portion of the Grand River Lowlands, nearly all public land is owned and managed by the State of Ohio.

Map 24. Forest Legacy Areas



### **Identification of the Government Entity Assigned Management Responsibility:**

The Forest Legacy Program in Ohio will be implemented through the State Grant Option. The State of Ohio will hold title to all conservation easement and any land that may be acquired in fee from willing sellers. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry is the lead agency for the program in consultation with the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee.

### **Means for Protection of Forest Legacy Area Projects:**

1. Acquisition of parcels of forestland will be accomplished primarily through the use of conservation easements. However the State may consider fee acquisition as an additional method but only from a willing seller.
2. Acquire development rights on all parcels. Those rights include but are not limited to the right to construct buildings and other improvements, removal of forest and other vegetative cover for non-forest uses and control all utility right-of ways. All future utilities shall be placed underground.
3. The management of timber rights retained by the landowner shall be managed under the terms of a Forest Management Plan as prescribed by the Ohio Division of Forestry.
4. Forest land must be enrolled in and meet the requirements of the Current Agricultural Use Valuation program.
5. Restrict mineral exploration, including oil and gas, to the extent that it will not impact the land surface in a manner that would negate the intent of the program.
6. Prohibit the disposal of solid, hazardous or construction and demolition waste on the property.
7. Prohibit the use of signs or billboards, except those signs necessary to identify the area as being part of the FLP, to designate easement boundaries or to promote the forest products or management associated with the property.
8. Existing dams or impoundments may be allowed but all new structures or impoundments shall be mutually agreed to by both the grantor and grantee.
9. Each conservation easement shall contain appropriate clauses to address the goals and objectives of the Forest Legacy Area.

## **9.2 Forest Legacy Area Descriptions**

### ***Forest Legacy Area 1 –Unglaciaded Appalachian Plateau.***

The Unglaciaded Appalachian Plateau FLA consists of 25 counties making up the southeastern and east central regions of Ohio and includes the following counties: Columbiana, Carroll, Tuscarawas, Jefferson, Coshocton, Harrison, Belmont, Guernsey, Muskingum, Noble, Monroe, Washington, Morgan, Perry, Hocking, Athens, Meigs, Vinton, Ross, Pike, Jackson, Gallia, Lawrence, Scioto, Adams.

This is a region of deep valleys, and high hills representing the most “rugged” portion of Ohio topographically, with some hills-tops reaching 1,400 feet above sea level. This area represents one of the most scenic regions of the state due in large part to the sandstone bedrock outcroppings throughout the region forming cliffs, caves, high-walls and scenic gorges.

The Unglaciaded Appalachian Plateau is comprised of three predominant forest types, associated with the elevations and geology of the region; Lowland forests, Mixed Mesophytic forests and Upland mixed oak forests. The severe topography, infertile soils, inaccessibility and variety of forest types has resulted in this region being relatively undeveloped and the predominant region in the state for forest related industry and recreation.

This FLA encompasses an area of 7.9 million acres. The area possesses public land holdings of 810,000 acres, represented primarily by the Wayne National Forest, several state forests, state parks, state nature preserves and wildlife areas. But, private ownership still accounts for 89.8 percent of the landholdings within the region, creating a significant potential market for the Forest Legacy Program. This combination provides an excellent opportunity to develop larger contiguous tracts of protected forestland through Forest Legacy easements in combination with public land already protected. This proposed FLA has 59.3 % forest cover and represents the highest forest cover region in the state, nearly twice the state average.

No data is available to document the county-by-county economic importance of the forest products industry of this region or any county in Ohio. Traditionally and anecdotally this area has served as a primary source of forest products, timber and the location of related businesses, such as sawmills and wood products manufacturing. As indicated on Map 5, a majority of Ohio's major sawmills are located within or in close proximity of this FLA.

Two areas of preference have been designated within this FLA. These areas of preference will connect groups of state owned working forests and support a forest habitat strategic plan created by the ODNR-Division of Wildlife. These areas are wholly contained in the Unglaciaded Appalachian Plateau FLA and can be described narratively as: 1) **Pike, Brush Creek, Shawnee State Forests Concentration Area** - Starting at the intersection of SR 41 and the Ross-Pike County line, proceed west along the Ross-Pike County line to its intersection with SR 772, proceed southerly on SR 772 to its intersection with US 32, proceed easterly on US 32 to its intersection with SR 104, proceed southerly on SR 104 to its intersection with SR 239, then proceed southerly on SR 239 to its intersection with US 52, then proceed westerly on US 52 to its intersection with SR 247, proceed northerly on SR 247 to its intersection with SR 770, proceed northeasterly on SR 770 to its intersection with SR 73, proceed northerly on SR 73 to the Adam-Highland County line, proceed easterly on the Adam-Highland County line to the Pike County Line, proceed northerly along the Pike-Highland County line to the intersection with the Pike-Ross County line, proceed east along the Pike-Ross County line to the point of origin, and 2) **Hocking, Zaleski, Tar Hollow State Forests Concentration Area** - Starting at the Hocking County Line, proceed southeasterly on US 33 to its intersection with SR 682, proceed southerly on SR 682 to its intersection with US 33, then proceed southerly on US 33 to its intersection with US 50, then proceed southwesterly on US 50 to its intersection with SR 32, then proceed southwesterly on SR 32 to its intersection with the Vinton-Jackson County Line, follow the Vinton-Jackson County line to its intersection with the Ross County Line, follow the Ross-Vinton County Line north to its intersection with US 50, proceed west on US 50 to its intersection with US 35, then proceed northwesterly to its intersection with US 23, then proceed north on US 23 to its intersection with SR 159, then proceed northwesterly on SR 159 to its intersection with SR 180, then proceed eastwardly to its intersection with the Ross-Pickaway County line, proceed east along the Ross-Pickaway County line to its intersection with the Hocking-Pickaway County line, proceed north along the Hocking-Pickaway County line to its intersection with the Hocking-Fairfield County line, follow this line north, then east to the point of origin.

## Important Environmental Values

The Unglaciated Appalachian Plateau is one of the most ecologically significant and diverse regions in Ohio. This region serves as an “ecological mixing zone” of both southern species such as the Big leaf Magnolia as well as northern species, Hemlock, which can be found growing in the same ravine.

Three primary watersheds make up this region, The Muskingum, Hocking and Scioto. Unfortunately, even with limited industrial discharges, these primary watersheds have been impacted primarily through non-point pollution as well as acid mine drainage. Significant improvement in water quality has been made in the last ten years. Protecting riparian and up-land forested areas will help in the effort to improve water quality for these main stems as well as their tributaries.

The Ohio Audubon Society has designated eight major areas within the proposed FLA as Important Birding Areas (Map 10). These areas are primarily forested areas and provide important breeding areas as well as stopover areas for migrant species. Map 8. Shows the concentration of Unique Plant and Animal Communities for this region as collected by the State Natural Heritage Program.

This area provides the greatest opportunity for the protection of large, contiguous tracts of forest land.

### Public Benefits:

The public will benefit from this area being designated as an FLA in a number of ways.

- Maintain the state’s largest and intact forestland properties currently held in private ownership.
- Conserve tracts with high or potentially high timber resource productivity and other forest related product potential to enhance the local and state economy.
- Protect those forested areas that support critical ecosystems, important birding areas, and habitat for rare, endangered or threatened species.
- Protect those forested areas that are adjacent or in close proximity to public or privately protected forestland in an effort to establish a large critical mass of protected working forests.
- Protect forested riparian corridors within the Muskingum, Hocking and Scioto river watersheds, especially in the headwaters and higher quality tributaries to maximize water quality.
- Enhance potential recreational opportunities by working with private landowners to provide some public access (by permission only) to forestlands under an FL easement.

### FLA Objectives:

The Unglaciated Appalachian Plateau Forest Legacy Area has specific objectives as follows:

1. **Foster and connect large and intact forestland tracts.**
  - a. FLA Specific Objective: connect large existing tracts of working public forest land;
  - b. FLA Specific Objective: contribute towards ODNR-Division of Wildlife forest habitat focus areas.

2. **Protect areas of social, recreational, cultural and historical significance.**
  - a. FLA Specific Objective: foster a range of forested habitats on private lands that may be accessible for hunting or passive pursuits such as wildlife viewing.
  - b. FLA Specific Objective: foster working forest land that provides a backdrop to recreation/tourism in the area.
3. **Focus on the most ecologically significant areas of the state.**
  - a. FLA Specific Objective: support The Nature Conservancy efforts in the Allegheny Plateau due to its ecological significance.
4. **Support communities by focusing on conserving the most economically significant areas for forest related industries.**
  - a. FLA Specific Objective: protect and expand the working forest resource.

#### **Means for Protection:**

The primary means of protection will be the acquisition of conservation easements from willing sellers that will include the previously mentioned Means of Protection for FLA projects. Fee acquisition of properties from willing sellers will be considered on a case by case basis.

#### ***Forest Legacy Area 2- Grand River Lowlands***

The Grand River Lowlands Forest Legacy Area is comprised of six counties in the northeastern corner of Ohio: Ashtabula, Lake, Geauga, Trumbull, Portage, Summit.

In contrast to the Unglaciaded Appalachian Plateau FLA, the Grand River Lowlands is located within the glaciaded portion of Ohio, characterized by a gently rolling to relatively flat, poorly drained landscape. Several counties within this proposed area make-up the shoreline for Lake Erie.

The Grand River Lowlands FLA consists of 1.8 million total acres. The area encompasses several highly populated counties yet over 684,000 acres or 38% is forest. Of these, approximately 115,000 acres or just over 1% are under public ownership. This represents a significant opportunity for the protection of private woodlands.

In addition, this proposed FLA is the primary maple syrup producing region of the state. This culturally and economically important forest industry is dependent on the numerous “sugar bushes” prominent throughout this region helping Ohio rank fourth in the nation for maple syrup production. This area supports an important forest product and value-added wood industry, Map 5-6. There is a significant Amish population in portions of this region operating sawmills as well as furniture manufacturing, and woodcrafts businesses serving as an important economic driver and tourist attraction in this area

An area of preference has been designated within this area. The area of preference encompasses an area of interest to The Nature Conservancy and the ODNR-Division of Wildlife and will support their efforts to link other “protected” properties in the Grand River Lowlands. This area is wholly contained in the Grand River Lowlands FLA and can be described as: Starting at the intersection of SR 534 and SR 307, proceed easterly on SR 307 to its intersection with SR 45, proceed south on SR 45 to its intersection with SR 87, proceed east on SR 87 to its intersection with SR 46, proceed southerly on SR 46 to its intersection with SR 88, proceed west on SR 88 to its intersection with SR 45, proceed south on SR 45 to its intersection

with SR 305, proceed westerly on SR 305 to its intersection with SR 534, proceed north on SR 534 to the point of origin.

### **Important Environmental Values**

While there are numerous streams and rivers in the region, the Cuyahoga, Chagrin, Grand, Conneaut and Ashtabula are the major watersheds containing a higher percent of wooded areas. Three of the streams have been designated by ODNR as State Scenic Rivers (Cuyahoga, Chagrin, and the Grand). Map 8 shows the significant number of Unique Animal and Plant Communities as determined by the Ohio Natural Heritage Program, located throughout the proposed FLA. In addition there are seven Audubon Society Important Birding Areas located within the six county FLA.

A portion of the 33,000 acre Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area and the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor is within the FLA along the Cuyahoga River. This is the largest tract of forest cover in the region being permanently protected. The city of Akron Division of Water is another primary landholder in the region. Over 3,000 acres of predominantly forested land is protected around LaDue Reservoir to help protect the watershed and water supply for the city of Akron and surrounding municipalities.

This FLA also serves as the shoreline for Lake Erie. While much of the shoreline has been developed, the Water quality of Lake Erie can benefit from the protection/restoration of timbered stream corridors. Privately held, wooded tracts often associated with the riparian corridor of the region's streams characterize the Grand River Lowlands.

### **Public benefits:**

The public will benefit from this area being designated as an FLA in a number of ways:

- Establish an initial "foothold" of protected working forestlands to serve as a catalyst for developing larger tracts of protected forestland.
- Complement the coordinated effort to connect public land and existing conservation easements in the Grand River watershed.
- Complement and expand through protected private land, existing large tracts of public owned forestland such as the Cuyahoga Valley Recreational Area, LaDue Reservoir and state owned land adjacent to the Grand River.
- Conserve tracts that provide or have the potential to provide high quality timber resources, and other forest products to support local forest products businesses, Amish businesses/tourism and the statewide economy from forest related products.
- Ensure continuation of the culturally and economically important maple syrup industry through the protection of "sugar bushes" prevalent in this region.
- Protect and enhance high quality streams with particular focus on the Grand, Upper Cuyahoga, Chagrin, Conneaut and Ashtabula Rivers that will provide additional water quality benefits to Lake Erie.
- Protect significant ecosystems and Important Birding Areas through the expansion of protected working forests and other privately held land owned and managed by local land conservancies and other land protection organizations.
- Coordinate with local land trusts and other land conservation entities seeking partnership opportunities to protect working forests.

**FLA Objectives:**

The Grand River Lowlands Forest Legacy Area has specific objectives as follows:

1. **Foster and connect large and intact forestland tracts.**
  - a. FLA Specific Objective: connect large existing tracts of working public forest land;
  - b. FLA Specific Objective: contribute towards ODNR-Division of Wildlife, et al efforts to connect protected land in the Grand River riparian area.
2. **Protect areas of social, recreational, cultural and historical significance.**
  - a. FLA Specific Objective: maintain quality stream and near stream habitats to support forest and river recreation in the FLA.
3. **Focus on the most ecologically significant areas of the state.**
  - a. FLA Specific Objective: support ODNR-Division of Wildlife efforts in the Grand River Lowlands due to its ecological significance.
4. **Support communities by focusing on conserving the most economically significant areas for forest related industries.**
  - a. FLA Specific Objective: protect and expand the working forest resource.

**Means for Protection:**

The primary means of protection will be the acquisition of conservation easements from willing sellers that will include the previously mentioned Means of Protection for FLA projects. Fee acquisition of properties from willing sellers will be considered on a case by case basis.