

Forest Bioeconomy Act

Section-by-Section Summary

Section 1. Entitles the bill the “Forest Bioeconomy Act”.

Section 2. Bioeconomy Research and Technology Transfer.

Subsection (a). Forest Products Research.

- This subsection directs the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), along with the Department of Energy (DOE) to expand research on the uses of low value commercial timber to support new wood products markets, sustain the wood products manufacturing sector, and as a feedstock for sustainable fuel.

Subsection (b). Office of Technology Transfer.

- This subsection establishes a dedicated Office of Technology Transfer at the Forest Service to expand its commercialization of research findings and support the development of products using Forest Service research. This office is modeled after other successful technology transfer offices like the Department of Energy’s Office of Technology Transitions.
- The Office would be run by a Chief Commercialization Officer within the Research and Development arm of the Forest Service. This person would also serve as the representative on interagency coordinating bodies on technology transfer.
- The subsection also establishes a Technology Transfer Working Group to coordinate technology transfer activities and ensure that researchers at the Forest Service have guidance on the how to carry out required technology transfer activities and work with private industry experts.
- Commercialization and technology transfer activities would be required key performance indicators submitted by the Forest Service in its annual budget.
- \$5 million is authorized each fiscal year to carry out this subsection. Because the agency has existing authority to retain 85 percent of any proceeds from licensed inventions, a successful technology transfer program could eventually pay for itself and more.

Subsection (c). National Forest Foundation Activities.

- This subsection amends the charter for the National Forest Foundation to explicitly allow the Foundation to support technology transfer and commercialization program activities. The Foundation, by serving as a conduit to private interests, is well-positioned to ensure that Forest Service inventions are disseminated to private industry actors who may be well-positioned to make use of those inventions.

Subsection (d). Small Business Voucher Pilot Program.

- This subsection establishes an innovation voucher pilot program at the Forest Service modeled after successful programs run by the Department of Energy and the Small Business Administration. Under the program, eligible small businesses will receive vouchers to use Forest Service research facilities for research and development, technology transfer, skills training, or other activities in order to support the commercialization of novel products.
- Such voucher programs can help start-ups traverse the so-called “valley of death” and successful scale-up promising commercial ventures. They also help build ties between federal scientists and private industry by physically co-locating them.
- This pilot program would expire in 2031.

Section 3. Joint Mass Timber Science and Education Program.

- This section establishes a mass timber science and education program under the Forest Service. The program would be specifically targeted at responding to the needs of architects, real estate developers, and the forest products industry. The program would, for example, connect researchers with private industry to make improvements in mass timber construction techniques for improved wildfire performance, structural stability, energy use, and beyond.
 - This research would complement the existing Wood Innovations Grant (WIG) program, supporting a research program whose findings would be implemented through a WIG grant.
- Proposals submitted for consideration under the mass timber science program would be evaluated by a stakeholder advisory group, which would include real estate developers, local governments, forest products experts, and scientists.

- The section authorizes \$4 million from amounts appropriated to the Forest Service for research to carry out this section.