

Women's Forest Congress

The [Women's Forest Congress](#) is a forum to develop strategies and solutions for forests through a female lens. Women throughout the forest space have come together to share personal and professional experiences, connect with other women in the sector, shape the latest innovations, and consider how actions informed by the female perspective can profoundly impact the future of forests.

History and Background

The first American Forest Congress was held in 1882, with over 50,000 people attending. Subsequent American Forest Congresses have been held periodically to tackle the issues of the day, including the establishment of the U.S. Forest Service and major legislation like the National Forest Management Act. Additionally, since 1926, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization has hosted the World Forestry Congress every six years, focused largely on knowledge sharing of forestry's latest science and practice.

The Women's Forest Congress builds on this rich history while taking a different approach: one focused on the importance of diversity and inclusion and bringing the voice of women to shape the future of our forests. It is an open and inclusive group – trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming participants are welcome, as are women of all ages, perspectives, cultural backgrounds, professional levels and education.

The first-ever Women's Forest Congress brings together women within the sector who collectively have **DEEP EXPERTISE IN THE FOREST SECTOR** and are passionate about the health and future of forests, forestry, and our sector. These women have come together to tackle the significant issues we're facing – climate change, diversity and inclusion, workforce development, social acceptance of forestry, and more.

Planning Summit & Results

This is truly a grassroots effort and is currently not under any one organization's umbrella. It was formed together by women in the for-profit, non-profit, public agency, and academic sectors.

In July of 2020, we gathered 70+ women leaders in our sector over Zoom and dug deep into what it would take to host a real Women's Forest Congress, what would we address, how would it work, who should be there, how would we fund it and much more. It was well-received and an honest, candid, and thought-provoking virtual event. Many participants shared that they rarely, if ever, have an opportunity to participate in a forum with only women in our sector.





The primary outcome of the planning summit was the overwhelming support to move forward and host a full Women's Forest Congress – at some point in the future, post-COVID.

Post-summit survey results were extremely positive and bode well for engagement moving forward – over 90% of survey respondents rating the Summit very or extremely valuable, as well as meeting or exceeding their expectations. In August, we issued a [press release](#), which reached an audience of more than 100 million and officially launched the Women's Forest Congress. The Women's Forest Congress is gaining momentum on social media: [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#), with new followers joining every day.

SINCE THEN, MEASURABLE STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO ADVANCE THIS IMPORTANT INITIATIVE. Working groups have formed. A project management and event planning firm has been hired to manage the logistics, communications, and staffing of the working groups. The Steering Committee is putting together a new structure for the effort, including forming an Advisory Council and putting the wheels in motion to increase the fundraising efforts. It truly is a collaborative effort, with participation from many female leaders in our sector.

What's Next?

Working Groups are planning the activities of the Women's Forest Congress for 2021 and 2022. A short description of each working group is noted below.

- **Content Development** – Goal: Set our agenda. Identify core topics to tackle and work through subcommittees to develop recommendations, build, and expand women's role as change agents in the forest and conservation community. These could include recommendations for external engagement (women talking about forests' role in climate change) or engagement internal to our sector (recommendations on how forestry organizations can support women in their ranks).
- **Stakeholder Engagement** – Goal: Ensure engagement and participation of diverse representation (e.g., *age, career, region, background, race*, etc.) across the forest and conservation community.
- **Fundraising** – Goal: Obtain funding from diverse sources interested in growing women leaders and sustainability to include in-kind support, sponsorships, exhibition, etc.
- **Communications & Marketing** – Goal: Promote the Women's Forest Congress and engage partners in supporting the movement.
- **Meeting Design & Logistics** – Goal: Design dynamic, engaging, accessible events (e.g., virtual, regional, in-person) that inspire and empower women to be the change agents they are, supporting outcomes from each of the WFC Working Groups.

These working groups meet approximately one hour each month. Work includes refining the stated goals, determining objectives and action items for moving forward in the planning process, and making recommendations to the Steering Committee for approval and subsequent implementation.



Opportunities to Engage & Support

Making the inaugural Women’s Forest Congress a reality will require tremendous support from a variety of sources. Principal actors and influential organizations in the forest sector can support diversity, equity and inclusion in the sector and the Women’s Forest Congress in a variety of ways, including:

1. Encourage employees to join the working groups and/or serve on committees and allow them the bandwidth/ flexibility to do so.
2. Encourage employees to attend and participate in the congress events (full in-person event as well as the smaller virtual events).
3. Be intentional about the advancement of women, and men and women of color, within membership organizations and make visible to our sectors.
4. Develop a set of guiding principles to address diversity, equity, and inclusion within your organization and member companies.

While financial support for the effort will certainly be needed, the above actions are a necessary first step for true engagement. Any financial support will be paired with a set of expectations/shared goals that align with and support the overall goals of the Women’s Forest Congress.

We look forward to hearing and learning how your organization is thinking about and addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion, why now, and how the organization’s influence can be leveraged to explore the complex topics facing our sector and community. This includes workforce diversity, leadership advancement for women as well as employees from diverse backgrounds, racial and social justice, and equity issues, and supporting the new faces of forest owners to create sustainable wealth for families and communities.