

## Economics

# Reply to Comment on Economic Contributions from Conserved Forests: Four Case Studies of the USDA Forest Service Forest Legacy Program

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We appreciate the opportunity to clarify the purpose and scope of our study. The commenter is correct that we did not evaluate the economic impact of the Forest Legacy Program but rather used land conserved through the program as a case study of how intact, conserved forests can contribute to local economies. An economic impact study would have assessed the change in economic contributions caused by the Forest Legacy Program. This study estimates the economic contributions from land that was conserved with FLP funding and other funding sources (Murray et al 2021). The terms “economic contribution” and “economic impact” are often used interchangeably for studies about how spending and production flows influence the economy. However, because we did not analyze consumer behavior or alternative scenarios, we are using the term “economic contribution” to describe our analysis per the definitions outlined in Watson et al (2007).

We did not seek to evaluate the effectiveness of the Forest Legacy Program or to claim that the program is responsible for adding jobs and value to the economy. To do this, we would have compared the Forest Legacy Program to a counterfactual in an economic impact analysis and included other metrics such as ecosystem function, changes in recreation access, and overall program efficiency.

Private forest conservation through easements or fee-simple purchases preserves forests and their associated benefits. The Forest Legacy Program specifically supports conservation of working forest land that is managed for timber, open for

public recreation, environmentally important, and at high risk of conversion to other uses. Through this analysis, we sought to estimate the contributions that conserved forest land can provide to local economies. The commenter aptly mentions that the land might have been associated with similar or larger economic contributions in the absence of conservation, but the absence of the program could also lead to negative impacts from reduced recreation access, poor forest management, or forest conversion. We agree with the commenter that the purpose of forest conservation through programs like the FLP is not to stimulate the economy, but rather to maintain the benefits that forests provide. This study sought to quantify some of these benefits. We note a modification to the last sentence in the “Study Implications” section to clarify this further: “This information illustrates the contributions of FLP-conserved land to local economies and can be used to assess the value of the program and the potential for future funding.”

## Literature Cited

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- Watson, P., J. Wilson, D. Thilmany, and S. Winter. 2007. Determining economic contributions and impacts: What is the difference and why do we care?. *J. Reg. Anal. Policy* 37:140–146.