Umaine launches the forest economy, sustainability and technology (forest) initiative
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The University of Maine has established the Forest Economy, Sustainability and Technology (FOREST) initiative, a universitywide multi-disciplinary effort to bring together university, industry, government, and community collaborators for the advancement of forest-based economy in Maine. Comprised of representatives from more than two dozen departments, colleges and organized research units within the UMaine, FOREST is working to coordinate, communicate and collaborate across the University of Maine System (UMS) with local, state, federal and international partners to develop and deliver integrated research, education and outreach solutions that enhance the economic and ecological sustainability of forest-based communities.

"UMaine FOREST is part of a series of recently launched universitywide initiatives that are strategically linked to University of Maine System's Research and Development Plan, and are supporting the realization of an innovation-driven Maine economy for the 21st century and, as part of this, addressing the workforce, and social and economic needs," says Kody Varahramyan, vice president for research and dean of the Graduate School.

Maine's forest resource is unique in many ways. Measuring over 17 million acres and covering nearly 90% of the state, it forms the largest contiguous block of undeveloped forestland east of the Mississippi.

Largely privately owned and naturally regenerated, this economic keystone for many of our rural communities has been continually managed for wood products since before our nation's founding. It remains the highest percent forested state in the country through resource management and sustainable harvesting practices rooted in prevailing scientific understanding.

Understanding, quantifying and optimizing the increasingly complex interconnected relationship between resource management, harvesting practices, utilization, forest health, wildlife habitat and rural economic prosperity is a concept known as the forest bioeconomy. It bridges current forest-based businesses and policies with visionary thinking on sustainability, product applications and resource utilization.

To further advance this transformation, a better understanding of the trends and drivers within the global forest bioeconomy is needed. A combined knowledge of technological advances in concert with economic, social, political and environmental aspects of forest resource usage are paramount to the long-term success and prosperity of Maine's forest bioeconomy.

Several recent activities within the state have focused on various facets of the forest bioeconomy. These include:

- Forest Opportunity Roadmap/Maine (FOR/Maine), a cross-sector collaboration founded in 2017 between industry, communities, government, education, nonprofits and UMaine to ensure the state strategically adapts and capitalizes on changing markets to maintain a leading role in the global forest economy and support prosperity in the state.
- The Maine Climate Council, founded in 2019 to develop a statewide plan to reduce emissions by 45% by 2030 and at least 80% by 2050 with strong involvement and leadership from UMaine faculty.
- The state of Maine 10-year strategic economic development plan created in 2019 to foster collaboration among the public, private, nonprofit, and education sectors to grow and diversify Maine's economy.
- The Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan, outlining the state's COVID-19 recovery strategy to improve the lives and livelihoods of Maine people, to make investments in solving Maine's long-term challenges, to develop strategies for new opportunities, and to strengthen Maine's future.

- The "2019 Statewide Economic Contribution of Maine's Forest Products Sector," an analysis of the economic impact and trends in Maine's forest economy developed by the UMaine Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center.

To support these complex interconnected challenges and opportunities, the FOREST Initiative will serve as a platform for available resources across UMS to advance the following strategic goals:

1. Conducting responsive research among all disciplines and fields that touch the forests, land they occupy, and people and technology they support
2. Preparing tomorrow's workforce across all aspects of how we engage, serve and live with the forests
3. Delivering relevant services to all who rely on our forests and their land for work, life and prosperity.
4. Meaningfully engaging all stakeholders to increase opportunities for scientists, businesses, communities and individuals to have an impact, and
5. Clearly communicating outcomes and opportunities across technical and non-technical audiences to increase overall awareness and understanding of forest-related topics.

For more detailed information about the initiative visit the UMaine FOREST website.

Source:https://umaine.edu/news/blog/2021/10/04/umaine-launches-the-forest-economy-sustainability-and-technology-forest-initiative/