200 Leaders Convene in Madison to Advance Markets for Working Forests and Rural Communities

Markets Matter Convening to identify practical actions to strengthen forest product markets and inform a National Action Plan

Scenes from the Markets Matter Convening, where leaders and partners came together to discuss opportunities, challenges and solutions shaping the future of markets and communities.

GREENVILLE, SC, UNITED STATES, May 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- More than 230 leaders from across industry, government, investment, Tribes, research and nonprofits gathered in Madison, Wisconsin, last week for the Markets Matter Convening, hosted by the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities. The three-day convening, held May 19–21, focused on identifying practical actions to build markets for small diameter wood, manufacturing residues and residual wood fiber — findings that will inform a National Action Plan to be developed in the months ahead.

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>
> *Pete Madden, president and CEO of the U.S. Endowment*

The convening comes at a critical moment for the U.S. forest sector. Traditional wood-consuming industries continue to face pressure, and mill closures are already reshaping regional supply chains. Since 2015, more than 40 pulp and paper mills have closed, eliminating an estimated 60 million tons of annual demand for wood from forest regions across the country. A new economic analysis commissioned by the Endowment and conducted by AFRY Management Consulting finds that additional pulp and paper capacity remains at risk in the years ahead.

For working forests and the communities that depend on them, the effects extend well beyond any single facility. When markets for lower-value wood — including chips, sawdust and other byproducts — weaken, landowners have fewer economic reasons to keep forests actively managed, sawmills lose important revenue streams and rural communities feel the strain across jobs, infrastructure and local tax base.

Leaders take the stage at the Markets Matter Convening for a discussion on strengthening markets, supporting communities and advancing shared solutions.

"Working forests depend on working markets," said Pete Madden, president and CEO of the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities. "Mill closures are a reminder that when markets disappear, the impacts reach far beyond one facility. Landowners, sawmills, truckers, rural communities and the forests themselves all feel the strain. The opportunity before us is to build and strengthen markets for the full range of wood products so working forests remain healthy and forest communities remain resilient."

The Markets Matter Convening was designed to meet this challenge head-on by identifying the coordinated action needed to grow reliable demand for wood products, strengthen forest markets and support the communities that rely on them.

Over three days, working groups identified priority market opportunities, barriers to investment and specific actions that can move forward through cross-sector collaboration. The insights and commitments from the convening will inform a National Action Plan to be developed this summer, establishing near- and long-term recommendations across market development, capital investment, policy and workforce.

“Healthy, productive forests are built on strong partnerships and sound, hands-on management,” said U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz. “By expanding markets for wood products, we keep working forests working for the American people. Investments in active forest management create jobs in the forest and energy sectors, support local economies and reduce wildfire risk to local communities. We’re grateful for partners like the U.S. Endowment who help ensure these landscapes continue serving communities across the country.”

The Endowment is committed to bringing additional attention and resources to this critical issue and announced it would be committing $10 million over the next three years to help attract additional investment to the sector and continue to pursue emerging markets to help keep our forests and communities healthy and sustainable. Additional details on the convening's findings and the development of the National Action Plan will be shared in the months ahead.

About the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities
The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities is a not-for-profit public charity collaborating with partners in the public and private sectors to advance systemic, transformative, and enduring change for the health and vitality of the nation’s working forests and forest-reliant communities. To learn more about the Endowment, please visit our website at www.usendowment.org.

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