

Episode Transcript
How the River Flows Podcast

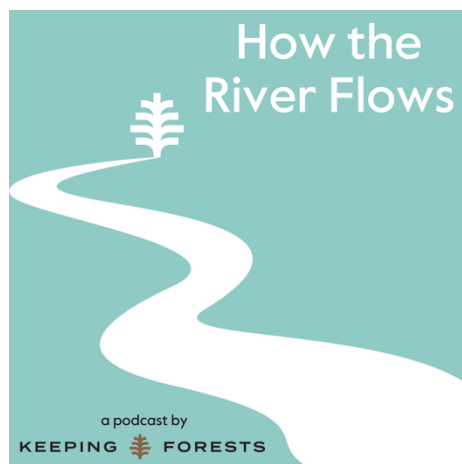
Season I, Episode 2

Keeping Forests: Audacious Goals Require Different Thinking

Carlton Owen, Host
Judy A. Takats, Co-Host

Release Date: 1 April 2021

About the Podcast Series



How the River Flows explores the relationship between healthy forests and clean drinking water.

You'll hear from entrepreneurs and experts who will share their best ideas about conserving local forests while ensuring a lasting, clean supply of drinking water downstream.

In each episode, we'll bring you a new take on how local communities are financing the forest stewardship that is providing our clean water and how landowners can be financially compensated for the tremendous environmental value that their working forests provide to everyone.

How the River Flows is produced by Keeping Forests with Lee Schneider and supported by the USDA Forest Service and US Endowment for Forestry and Communities. The Endowment works collaboratively with partners in the public and private sectors to identify innovative and transformative ways to support the health and vitality of our forests and the communities that rely on them. Music by Chuck Leavell. Executive Producer: Judy A. Takats.

Episode Summary

Ken Arney, Regional Forester for the Southern Region of the USDA Forest Service, Dr. Anne Murray Allen, Senior Consultant at Conversant, and Scott Davis talk to Judy A. Takats about the big thinking that led to Keeping Forests, how others can replicate its success, and the relationship between healthy forests and clean water.

Carlton Owen:

I'm Carlton Owen, immediate past President and CEO of the US Endowment for Forestry and Communities and a proud supporter of Keeping Forests. Keeping Forests is the producer of this podcast called How the River Flows. Keeping Forests is built on a powerful and simple idea to ensure that our regions forest have a future. We're working hard to conserve the 245 million acres of existing forest by supporting private Lando, shedding light on why this land matters and showing what you can do to help. Every episode of How the River Flows, we'll take a close look at the relationship between healthy forest and clean drinking water.

Carlton Owen:

Our experts will share their best ideas along with specific examples about conserving local forest to ensure a lasting clean supply of drinking water to meet local needs. Each time, we'll bring you a new take on how land owners can be compensated for the tremendous environmental value that the working forest provide to everyone. You'll learn how these innovations are finance, managed and even how your local community can join the effort in protecting our precious Southern forest and the many benefits, including plain water that they provide. So sit back and enjoy this episode of How the River Flows.

Judy Takats:

Thanks, Carlton. I'm Judy Takats. In this episode of How the River Flows, we'll be covering how the seeds of Keeping Forests were sown. My guests today are Ken Arney, Dr. Anne Murray Allen and Scott Davis. So we'll start with Ken Arney. He's the Regional Forester for the Southern Region of the US Forest Service. Ken oversees 13.3 million acres of our National Forest System lands across the 13 southern states and Puerto Rico. Before joining the Forest Service, Ken served more than 20 years with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and as the Tennessee State Forester. Ken, thank you so much for joining us.

Ken Arney:

Thank you, Judy. It's a pleasure to be with you today.

Judy Takats:

But let's just jump right in. What makes the forest of the US South so special?

Ken Arney:

Well, I think for me, Southern forest are special because they've been a setting for some of my best experiences in my life. I grew up on a farm that about half of the land was forested. And actually my parents harvest September on our farm to build our house back in the 1960s. And I spent a good bit of time in the forest and was always very inquisitive. On our farm, there were many dead snags of American chestnut trees that had succumb to the chestnut blight. And it made me wonder why this happened and really was one of the reasons I studied and went to school to become a professional forester. So the forest, I've spent many times with best friends in the forest hocking, horseback hunting, hunting, fishing and doing a variety of things that it's just my happy place, so to speak.

Ken Arney:



But I would say in addition the forests are special because they're so important to the rural economies in the South. Forest and product and forest products industry generates over 250 billion in economic output as well as over a million jobs are provided in forest industry. And it's just really important to the forest economy. The Southeast is really considered the wood basket of the world. About 60% of the timber that's used in this country is harvested in the South as well as a substantial percent of wood is exported for the world market. And too just the dependence of the population in the South for water and the fact that the forest provide clean water and forest soils tend to be more porous and capture the rainfall and run off more so than a developed area. Forests are important for many, many reasons.

Judy Takats:

So can you describe some of the biggest challenges that are facing Southern forests right now?

Ken Arney:

Well, let's say one of the biggest threat to Southern forests is the conversion of forest to other land uses. And the Southern Forest Futures Project was really the foundation for the Keeping Forests initiative. And that work that was done by the US Forest Service as well as the state forestry agencies projected a loss of up to 23 million acres over the next 40 years. That's all of a total of 245 million acres of forest land in the Southern region, 13 states in the Southern region. So that's a huge threat. And then too another challenge is the fact that 70% of the forest in the Southeast is privately owned by mostly non-industrial private landowners and the age distribution of those landowners is older than 55 years of age. So a lot of the land is going to change ownerships in the next few years and decades. And there's just uncertainty as to the future owners of the Southern forest and the value that they will place on there.

Judy Takats:

So can we go back and talk a little bit more about Keeping Forests and how the initiative came to be kind of... And how you were involved in that?

Ken Arney:

Well, I was involved as a Forest Service employee and previously, I have worked with the wildlife agency in Tennessee and then with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forest where I was director of the Division of Forestry in Tennessee at one time. So I was very keenly aware, not only in the state that I've worked in prior to the US Forest Service, but just the work that was done by the Forest Service was Southern Forest Futures. And the impacts to change in land use were larger than any one organization or entity. And so I discussed a great deal these findings with Carlton Owen, who is the CEO and President of the US Endowment for Forest and Communities about how do we address this at a scale that can make a difference. And initially, after some discussions with Carlton, I met with the Southern Group of State Foresters as a group, all 13 directors of the Division of Foresters, forestry commissions in the Southeast and talked about doing something large scale that could address the loss of forest land.

Ken Arney:

And we brought together a diverse group of stakeholders and leaders from across the region to talk about the challenges that we face with Keeping Forests and how do we work together on this initiative to accomplish the objectives of each organization or entity, both federal, state, local as well as non-government organizations and even private industry for that matter. And so the initial meeting I think



highlighted the challenges that we faced with loss of forest land as well as started an initiative that really started to build relationships and trust as I think those are key to any successful large scale initiative. And so that was the first meeting. And since that time, I've lost count, but there's probably been six or eight follow-up meetings with this diverse group of stakeholders. We've been meeting and working at it since that time and I think building a coalition that cares and wants to make a difference at scale.

Judy Takats:

What advice do you have for someone who is trying to protect the South forests?

Ken Arney:

Well, if it's a landowner that has an interest or a citizen for that matter, I would say, reach out to the state forestry agency in the state in which they reside and the state agencies can provide, if they're a landowner, technical assistance on forest management or if there are citizens, it's just an interested type citizen in forest, then they can give advice on different initiatives and local opportunities that the citizen may have to be involved in retaining forest and helping to tell the story on the importance of forest. From the landowner's perspective, there are incentives that are available to help offset cost to some of the practices. There are tax incentives, reforestation grant programs and in some cases even easements that can be used useful depending on the circumstances and where the landowners land might be located in the South.

Judy Takats:

Can you kind of talk a little bit more about what the term ecosystem services means to you?

Ken Arney:

Well, ecosystem services are really the benefits that are provided to people by the natural environment and healthy resilient forest ecosystems generally provide more consistent benefits than forest that are not managed. And there's a need to quantify the ecosystem services of forest in the South and provide or create expanded market for those services that would compensate the landowner. So help and understand the ecosystem services that forest provide can generate a good bit of public and private funding that in turn will help with forest conservation.

Judy Takats:

And how do you convince people that Keeping Forests is an important endeavor?

Ken Arney:

Well, I think coordinated communication efforts with state, federal and other conservation partners is one way. Targeted messaging campaigns based on focus groups and polling across the 13 states would be another. And just continue to share the value that forests provide ecologically and economically and raise the political profile of forestry in the South. A good example is the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act or the Great American Outdoor Act that's a nationwide act that was passed by Congress within the last year.

Judy Takats:

So if somebody is trying to decide to work on Keeping Forests or put their time, effort and energy into something else, why should they choose Keeping Forests?



Ken Arney:

Well, because forests are so important to the quality of life. And not only the ecological benefits of clean air and clean water that forests provide, but also the opportunity for recreation and the opportunity to do whatever form of recreation is important to the individual and forests just provide that setting for recreation of ourselves, so to speak physically, mentally and so forth.

Judy Takats:

And spiritually as well?

Ken Arney:

Absolutely.

Judy Takats:

I want to go to a conversation with Dr. Anne Murray Allen. Dr. Allen is an experienced executive whose career has funded high stakes business with the social sciences in doing cross-sector work. Combining her MBA and doctorate, Dr. Allen specializes in building effective collaborations out of complexity and uncertainty. Dr. Allen, welcome.

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

I'm glad to be with you and I'm really happy to be part of this conversation.

Judy Takats:

Seems that you have some serious superpowers.

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

Well, I don't know about that. I have a passion and that is to work with particularly complex projects where multi-stakeholders are involved and really help them find a way to work together that creates extraordinary results.

Judy Takats:

Well, that's an amazing passion. We heard from Ken Arney about the scope of the solution needing to match the scope of the problem. So can you talk a little bit about and maybe help us understand kind of what that means?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

If you're looking at a huge system, something that you're trying to impact for the good, you can't just look at it with the same old tools that help you solve problems or projects so you can get your arms around. You really need to think big in terms of solutions that would be addressing, well, in the face of high-end certainty, how would you create an answer, but you're going to have to do it collectively that will truly scale impact. Very simply. If you think of a system, what is a system? It's an interconnected set of elements that's coherently organized in a way that achieve something.



Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

So some basic examples anyone could relate to would be a process. It could be just a manufacturing process, a business process of any kind. That's a system. An organization is a system. The forest is a system as a whole as you can imagine with many interconnected parts that exists to maintain something. So that's when we talk about systems, those images should come to mind. Then there's what's system thinking and that's anybody's ability to understand these connections in such a way as to achieve a desired purpose. So, so often we're trained to think about isolated incidents. Something happened over here or over there and we're reactive. We're not using our system thinking. So that's why being able to see how things connect over time and distance is very important if we're going to have a system scale impact.

Judy Takats:

When you look back at the most successful initiatives or projects that have used systems thinking, what are some of the key elements that you've seen that's been the key to their success?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

The first thing is that you invite the right people to the process. You get the right, I don't know, sampling of people that know the system work inside it, have a point of view, but maybe come from different disciplines or different types of organizations. That takes some thought upfront. Then you spend the time bringing people together, building a sense of community, learning about systems thinking because almost very few people really understand that. And they're still operating from kind of a linear analytical thought process and not from how do we deal with relationships and complexity over time. Getting comfortable with uncertainty rather than believing you can... We'll find it. If we just analyze this enough, we'll find the answer. It's not the way it works. If you don't take the time to build the right skills for how you're going to interact with each other, then it just turns into an argument.

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

My point of view and the strong or the loud prevail, but you don't have everyone with you then. You just have a few people trying to push their view, which almost always is not the correct view. I mean, I have to say with all the maps we've done with all the groups we've been with, everyone's surprised at what they end up with. It's counterintuitive. This is why... And even if you think, oh, here's a point of leverage, you're usually pushing on it the wrong way. So it takes that coming together to kind of see the broader picture and to be in that mess. And then once you see it, you really see it and you can with confidence. Everyone being enlisted move forward.

Judy Takats:

So for some folks who might be thinking, oh my gosh, this sounds... We're singing together and it's kind of a little bit more squishy than they'd like, what would you say to them?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

Well, what I'd say is what you've done in the past around looking at problems or challenges that might've been a little more straight forward, they have less unpredictability and you're carving out problems that you could wrap your arms around, you can get by with less of an investment in coming together and appreciating the diverse points of view inside of a system. But if you really want to take on



the intractable problems that exist today, you're going to have to work across boundaries, whether it's sectors or different divisions or organizations.

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

No one organization or leader or company or government can solve some of these problems and meet these challenges. So I think the soft stuff is really the hard stuff. By coming together, the image we like to use, I think it's been mentioned before in some other webinars, the blind men and the elephant, we all see a piece. But if we're going to argue about what it is because we're experiencing something differently, you will never come together to make something happen that matters. So it's all about learning to listen to each other, to see it from different angles and ultimately, to align on a single view. That's where the power is.

Judy Takats:

So in addition to those intense and focused conversations, what are some of the other hallmarks of successful projects that you've seen that have gone through this process?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

Well, what we've found over time, and there's a reason with complex challenges that they get frustrated and people give up or it devolves and disintegrates. And that is people don't understand that they really have to spend time together reflecting, creating a shared view, that's what the system map aides you in doing. It creates that kind of, here's a wall chart. Now we can talk about what's in our heads, our collective mental model. And so we find that the first phase is always community building with the group. You have to select, okay, what's the cross section of people that we want to build this map? In the case of Keeping Forests, what you had to do is pick from different sectors who are the people that care about the forests in the Southeastern United States.

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

We want to talk to businesses, we want to talk to government agencies on various levels, state and federal and we also want to be able to talk with non-profits already working on that and communities. So how do you get a cross-section of people committed to the process and then you build their relationships at the same time you're building their abilities to talk together in a different way. And I can't say enough about... I mean, the indication of success is people get excited. They go from arguing with each other, having louder voices try to prevail to we're in this together, we're speaking together, we're excited. And so it builds dedication, energy and focus.

Judy Takats:

Well, that's a really interesting description of the shift that happens in the mindset. Did you see that with Keeping Forests?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

I did. I did. And I have to say Keeping Forests was one of the largest cross-sector initiatives that we worked with. So we entered it not knowing for sure, wow, how are all... There's enough diversity here. How's everyone going to... It was a real test of our assumptions in our process.



Judy Takats:

So you bring people into a room and then what happens? So can you describe the process a little bit because you've talked about kind of having a map, are we looking at a map of the United States? What does that mean?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

Very good question. It's actually called, well, a system map, but what is mapped is done through a series of interviews with a select number of people. So I like the 80/20 rule, which what's 20% of the population of people in this process that if they were interviewed, the 80% would go, well, if you've got their thoughts on what the system looked like, then it's going to be an accurate map. So my colleague, Scott, who does the mapping interviews, I think in this case, it was around 16, 17 people, different disciplines, different organizations, asking them the same questions. And from that, he starts to build a map. He starts to hear some of the same things or put them together in relation, causal loops with each other. He creates that map through software. It is then put up on the wall.

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

I mean, you can project it on a screen bit by bit. Goes through it and the whole group talks about it. They maybe at first feel like, well, there's not something there that I think is important. So there might be a negotiation. Oh, well, let's tweak that a little. But it does take several days before everyone goes, that's it. That's the system. That's what we're all working on and that's what we care about. And I should add one more element is there's a key long range goal in the center of the map that the group has also articulated prior to this meeting. And that is what kind of holds that map together. It centers it. And this is where the 245 million acre statement came from. It came from that group prior to the interviews and putting the map together.

Judy Takats:

Just to try to help visualize this. So you have a goal in the middle that has words and then you have arrows going to and from the goal to other kind of words. And so then that explains kind of the system verbally. So you're not creating a map in the sense that, again, you're not drawing a map of the outline of the United States.

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

It's not a geographical map at all. And it is a mental model map of how the system is interconnected and how it's operating.

Judy Takats:

How do you convince people that systems mapping is an important endeavor?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

Well, the approach to that is to have people realize that in order to act powerfully together, they're going to have to see the system collectively with a shared point of view. And to do that, you needed a tool, a tool that will help you put your mental models, all the individual's mental models together in a way that you can see something bigger than your point of view. And now you have to come to alignment that yes, that is the system we collectively see. Now we can actually pick points of leverage so we can



move on the sorts of things, where if we work in three areas, we'll have an outsized impact on the other areas. So that's why people should care about and be drawn to system mapping.

Judy Takats:

And it seems to me that the power in this type of thinking is really when you're dealing in an environment perhaps where there is this high and predictability, where you don't know what's going to happen. Is that fair?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

Yeah, it is fair. And as you know, people don't like uncertainty and unpredictability.

Judy Takats:

You're not a professional forester. But what did you learn about the South forest by leading the Keeping Forests initiative through their process?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

Wow. Well, I learned a lot because I live in the West. Need I say more, our forests out here are mostly, they're mostly public lands. And so it's a different challenge. When Scott first kind of indoctrinated me to, well, what is Keeping Forests? And what are things look like in this part of the US? I was like, oh my goodness, how are they going to do this? You've got, what, 86% of forests are owned privately. And I know some of those are businesses, some are individuals, but still, how do you get all those stakeholders on the same page let alone bring in government agencies and big business? So it was a challenge just listening to it. I also learned that there's a large coalition of black forest owners or land owners that have forest.

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

And so that kind of socio-diversity in terms of ownership in the South. Then there was, I learned a lot about some very innovative small businesses in the wood products industry that were doing a lot already in terms of sustainable harvesting and working with certification programs for sustainably harvested wood. But the big thing I learned was just how important wood products are. I mean, you should know that anyway, but I guess, you just kind of lose sight of that over time. And I remember when your alternative is plastic products, one of the things I noticed was well, I'd much rather have sustainably harvested wood products any day than more plastic on the planet. So those are some of the things I learned.

Judy Takats:

One final question for you. What does the term ecosystem services mean to you?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

Well, it's interesting. When I first heard that term, I thought I knew what it meant, but I had to dig deeper as the group was talking about it. And I almost think ecosystem services is too wonky to really describe what it is. I almost wish that that wasn't used because I can imagine it's a barrier for some people understanding what you're talking about. But what I realized it was is it's a whole list of services that people benefit from that comes from nature. So, so often we think of wood and wood products, it's



all about the extraction, cutting down of forests and using them for some commercial purpose. But forest standing, just being there and being healthy provides a lot of benefits too.

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

The most obvious is clean water. It's impact on the right kind of soil conditions, the flow of water, the purification of water is important to people, to cities. This notion of water funds is connected to ecosystem services. The wellbeing elements. What do people get through walking through forests and being in outdoors is tremendous in terms of bird watching or other animal observations. There's obviously other recreation forms like fishing and hunting. So it's that whole swath and I'm sure I'm not thinking of all of them. But those are all ecosystem services to humans. And just by leaving forest standing or taking care of them in ways that keep them healthy, it's not just that tree's not worth anything until it's cut down. So that's my understanding of it.

Judy Takats:

So Anne, why are you excited about Keeping Forests?

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

Well, I'm very excited about what I've learned through being part of this process about Keeping Forests and the unique challenges in that part of the country with the private ownership of the vast majority of the forests. I'm excited about the way people have come together around creating a shared view of a very complex system. So often what happens is you can talk about a complex system, but if you don't have a way of looking at it and coming to that aligned view, you end up with 45 things you have to do at once. And it's exhausting. You don't have the resources, people lose energy.

Dr. Anne Murray Allen:

But this group really came together to say, yes, that's the system we're trying to impact. They had to speak deeply with each other. That brought them together in a much closer way than they were before, even though they'd previously known each other and they developed energy around three key points of leverage. And from there, we're able to develop specific actions to take in order to say, let's get to work here and see what we learned. So it's just fun. I mean, taking this approach and committing yourself to working with the uncertainty and the complexity, once you get past feeling overwhelmed, it's really energizing and it unleashes a lot of creativity and a sense of we're in this together.

Judy Takats:

Scott Davis joins us now to talk about how Keeping Forests comes into all of this. Scott oversees all aspects of the initiative's work. He has a long career in conservation having spent most of his time at the Nature Conservancy and has worked in both South America and Asia. Scott, thank you so much for being here.

Scott Davis:

Thank you for having me.



Judy Takats:

So we've heard Ken describe why the forests of the Southeastern United States are so special. And Anne has spoken about the systems thinking and some of the hallmarks of successful projects. How does Keeping Forests bring these two concepts together?

Scott Davis:

Well, I think at the end of the day, it's all about scale. And the only way I think we can really get to the kind of scales that matter are by moving through one of these sort of system approaches. The traditional thinking around conservation, 100 acres here, 1,000, even 10 and 50,000 acres doesn't get us to the scales that we need. So the system level approach, thinking about the economic, social and political drivers that are impacting these forests and impacting these landowners, I think is the only way to really get to a scale of 13 states or 245 million acres. It's not that the other scales are unimportant, they are important and they matter.

Scott Davis:

And we need to think about conservation and resource sustainability at all the scales. But the one that is really missing is this large overarching scale sort of thinking about the entire system, the whole 245 million acres. Keeping Forests is that attempt, is that way of pulling in sort of the system level thinking around the politics and economics and social impacts with the scale of the force that ultimately, I think we're going to need to protect if in fact we're going to be successful protecting them for the values that we've talked about today.

Judy Takats:

So you've mentioned systems a couple of times. Do you mean ecosystems or do you mean something different?

Scott Davis:

In the South. Let's start with the Keeping Forests model. If the center of this system is the private landowner and that person's ability to own and manage that property and can talk a little bit about it. One of the assumptions that we're working with here is that if private landowners are unable to make a living or at least cover the cost of owning and managing those forests, they'll find another use for them. They'll convert them to some other land use. The center of that system is defined as the private landowner. In the system, the way we're looking at it involves all of those. And I've said this before, the political, social and economic drivers that impact that person and impact that person's decision around whether to own and manage these forests anymore. So ecosystems are embedded in this system, but it's the larger collection paradigms and economic, political, social forces that this individual landowner in these forests are embedded in.

Judy Takats:

So you mentioned some of the ecosystem services that forest provide. Can you just talk a little about all of those services or not all of those, but maybe a few of those that you would like to highlight?

Scott Davis:

Sure, services that functional ecosystems provide us. And for the most part, we take these for granted. There aren't markets built around them and I'm talking about things like carbon sequestration, flood



mitigation, the filtration and cleaning up of water. All of those kinds of things are services that functional forest provide us as a society that we really don't pay for. Now if we can find ways of creating markets around those services. When you think about climate change for example. One of the most important things that we can do, find ways of sequestering carbon, finding ways of pulling greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere. Trees do that naturally. Functional forest are essentially mitigating many of the impacts of climate change, but the land owners who own and manage these forests aren't being compensated for that. It's a service that we as a society get from functional forest, but we're not paying for it. It is a way of thinking about the creation of markets that allow for additional income to forest landowners and their families.

Judy Takats:

So I get a water bill and I pay the water bill. Does that money not go to somebody who's growing trees?

Scott Davis:

Probably not. There are a few places where these kinds of markets have been created. But the money you're paying to the water utility is more likely going to cover the operational or maybe even the capital infrastructure costs of creating a water treatment plant somewhere that is cleaning the water before they push it out to the consumers. Now there's a lot of places where the water is pretty clean already and it's clean already because the forests are providing the same service that that sewage treatment plan is providing. So if we can find a way to compensate landowners for managing those forests to keep that water clean, instead of paying your money to a water utility to operate a water treatment plant in order to take pollutants out of the water, maybe we can find a way to pay landowners to own and manage their forest in a way that keeps water clean in the first place. So we don't have to clean it up.

Judy Takats:

When you mentioned landowners, is this mostly government who owns the land? Can you talk a little bit more about the landowners?

Scott Davis:

Sure, different parts of the country have different land ownership patterns. Obviously, out West and the Northwest and even in the upper Midwest, state and federal government own an awful lot of the land. That's not the case in the South. In the South of the 245 million acres of forest lands that we're talking about, the overwhelming majority of this land, 80 some odd percent I believe is privately owned. And most of that privately owned land is owned either by individuals or families. So in the South, a lot of times we think about conservation and conservation of important natural areas and the government takes care of it. And we feel like, well, there's a big national park here. There's a big national forest there. It's kind of done. In the South, we don't have a lot of public land. Most of it is privately owned and most of that is owned by individuals and families.

Judy Takats:

So both you and Ken described this 245 million acres. What time horizon are you looking at or is Keeping Forests looking at?

Scott Davis:

This is a long term initiative. A lot of us enjoy working on a more sort of project level kind of thing because there's a clear beginning, middle and end and it's easy to see how much progress you've made



and where you are in the larger scheme of things. Keeping Forests, I believe our mission statement is talking about finding ways to do this by 2060. This is a decades long approach. 2060 will probably just be a convenient place to look up and evaluate our progress as we continue to work on this well into the future. But this is a long-term effort that will hopefully outlive me and many of the people that are working on this and my own kids and grandkids will be able to look up at some point in the future and understand how important this really was or is over time.

Judy Takats:

So you did mention that 2060 is a long time horizon. So when you think about the South's family forests and other private forests, what do you want your children and grandchildren to see?

Scott Davis:

I want them to be able to experience the same kinds of things that Ken talked about and frankly, the same kinds of experiences that I had as a kid growing up. I want them to be able to access forests that are big enough and healthy enough to get lost there that are encompassing all of the values that we've talked about. The wildlife, the water, the climate mitigation, all of the kinds of things that are important to us. I want them to be able to experience that directly. And that gets to sort of the spiritual connection associated with just being in the woods. But maybe more importantly, I want them to understand the mindset that we're trying to create here. And that is these large systems, the forest of the South are critical infrastructure.

Scott Davis:

They are absolutely essential to the long-term supportive of our country. That if we don't have ways of mitigating climate change, if we don't have ways of keeping our water clean and ways of thinking about wildlife habitat, species diversity that are captured in these forests and we've lost something that's really, really important. So I want them to have the physical experience of being in the woods. But I also want them to be part of that leading edge that has begun to think about forest a little bit differently. It has begun to think about forest as some of the most important natural systems that we have and that deserve essentially our attention, our investment and our protection.

Judy Takats:

You've had a very long career in conservation. Why are you excited about Keeping Forests?

Scott Davis:

I did, I had a long career. I spent 23 years with the Nature Conservancy and I watched the philosophy of conservation change over time where at one point, all we thought about were individual species. And later we began to think about the larger community of species. And then we got into sort of ecosystem level kinds of conservation landscape, level kinds of conservation. What I've come to appreciate and understand is the importance of scale. If we're not careful, all of these conservation forests, all of the projects we put together over my last 20, 25 years will turn into just little tiny green museum pieces and a dying landscape. What we have to figure out is how to protect that larger matrix landscape.

Scott Davis:

What we have to figure out is how to get to scale. And that's something that none of us are very good at because when you get to the scale of the 13 state Southeast, when you get to a scale of 245 million acres, you no longer have complete control over the project. You no longer have a lot of control over the



kinds of impacts that can push you one way or the other. But it's the kind of scale that we just have to figure out if at the end of the day, we're going to protect all of these natural systems and the things that are embedded within them. It's the kind of scale that we just have to get to. And the only way to get to it is through these really large collaborations.

Judy Takats:

Of all the things that you've worked on, where does Keeping Forests rank for you?

Scott Davis:

It's the important thing I've ever done. It really is. So Judy, when I was the state director for the Nature Conservancy, I think in my 12 year career as a state director. Our chapter was responsible for somewhere in the neighborhood of 300,000 acres of land being protected. And I was frankly very proud of that. I will always be proud of that. But it's not enough. It's not near enough. If we can't figure out the bigger picture, the larger scale of this thing, those 300,000 acres will be lost. They won't mean anything. We won't be able to sustain them. We won't be able to sustain the values that make them important. Scale matters, size matters. And if we can't figure out how to get to scale, we're at a risk of losing it all. And so I want people to understand how important scale is, but I also want people to understand how challenging it is to get to scale and how important it is that we build the kinds of collaborations that allow us to get to scale.

Judy Takats:

Thanks to Ken Arney, Dr. Anne Murray Allen and Scott Davis for their part in this episode and for their valuable perspective. This is Judy Takats for Keeping Forests, a diverse coalition conserving the natural, economic and cultural value of Southern forest. The music on the podcast is by Chuck Leavell.

Carlton Owen:

I want to thank everyone for tuning into How the River Flows. Join us next time as we explore the connections between healthy forest and clean water and see how others have built a partnership that benefits all. You can listen to How the River Flows on Apple Podcast, Spotify or wherever you listen to podcast. I'm Carlton Owen.

