

BRANCHING OUT

Reimagining the South's Underutilized Wood and Biomass

Too much material. Not enough market.

Our forests — especially in the U.S. South — are overloaded with low-value wood: small-diameter trees, irregular trunks, and mixed-species biomass.

Without innovation, this material is burned, left to rot, or landfilled. Landowners lack viable markets to justify thinning, creating a dangerous feedback loop of unmanaged forests and rising wildfire risk.

We know that buried in this biomass is the opportunity to launch new markets, new jobs, and a new chapter for America's working forests.



FROM WASTE TO WEALTH

A strategic case for Southern Forest product innovation

Southern forests produce more wood than any other region in the country — yet landowners are losing access to reliable markets for low-grade material. Without economically viable options for thinning and biomass removal, forest health and rural livelihoods are at risk. No region is better positioned – or more in need – to turn overlooked material into investable solutions.



245 million acres

The U.S. South holds more than 1/3 of the nation's forests – the largest, most productive wood basket in the country



108% increase in inventory

Since 1953, strong markets and stewardship have doubled the South's wood supply, waiting to be used



\$300 billion in product

Created annually through Southern forest markets – poised for innovation and infrastructure to scale

Rooted in the South. Open to the World.

A two-phase innovation challenge to reimagine what the South's underutilized wood and biomass can become.

From packaging and panels to fuels and materials not yet imagined, **Branching Out** invites bold thinkers and builders to develop climate-smart products that drive market demand and support resilient, working forests.

TWO PHASES, ONE GOAL

Phase 1: Innovation Sprint

A fast-paced, 36-hour event engaging emerging talent - university students and young professionals - in cross-disciplinary teams. Participants will develop product concepts that demonstrate feasibility and early-stage promise, laying the groundwork for what's possible.

2025 | Curated Young Professional Teams

Phase 2: Global Prize Challenge

An open, international competition where teams will develop fully formed prototypes with real market potential. Finalists will compete for prize funding and national visibility - with the goal of attracting partners, investors, or adopters to bring these innovations to scale.

2026 | Public Outreach and Launch

LEARN MORE

Hear from our partners why this challenge matters in this recap video. Scan or click the QR code.



WHY KEEPING FORESTS?

Keeping Forests is a cross-sector coalition working to ensure a thriving future for Southern forests. Our work focuses on expanding markets for the private landowners who steward this important resource. We bring together conservationists, business leaders, forest advocates, and scientists to do what no single entity could or would do alone.

CATALYZE. REPLICATE. SCALE.

Supporting **Branching Out** is about more than this moment or region. It's about building a replicable innovation model that starts in the South with relevance worldwide. Funders and sponsors will help shape a platform designed for real-world impact, national visibility, and long-term market transformation.

GET INVOLVED

We're inviting visionary partners to bring this challenge to life:

- **Sponsors** to fund operations, prizes, and public storytelling
- **Mentors & Judges** to shape and evaluate ideas
- **Collaborators** from research, manufacturing, incubators, and venture capital

CONTACT

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