



Outdoor News Bulletin

A Sustainable Future at the 2025 SBP Americas Forum

By Leopoldo Miranda-Castro | August 2025 | Volume 79, Issue 8

On June 25, 2025, Atlanta, Georgia, served as the backdrop for the inaugural [2025 Sustainable Biomass Program \(SBP\) Americas Forum](#), a landmark event that convened 45 stakeholders from the United States and Canada, representing 38 diverse organizations. Detailed in the [comprehensive report](#) available at [sbp-cert.org](#), the forum fostered dialog on sustainable biomass production and its role in a low-carbon future. Among the distinguished speakers was Leopoldo Miranda-Castro, Executive Director of the [Conservation Without Conflict Coalition](#), who delivered a compelling presentation on building trust to achieve collaborative conservation and keeping working lands working. His insights highlighted how this approach can support the sustainable biomass forestry sector, ensuring that working lands thrive as both productive landscapes and vital wildlife habitats.

The 2025 SBP Americas Forum: A Hub for Collaboration

Held under the Chatham House Rule to encourage candid discussions, the SBP Americas Forum brought together a diverse group of participants, including SBP Certificate Holders like CM Biomass, Drax, Enviva, and Highland Pellets. Other organizations included academic institutions such as Auburn and Clemson Universities, nonprofits like Forest Landowners Association, Ducks Unlimited and the Forest Stewards Guild, and state agencies like the Georgia Forestry Commission. The presence of certification bodies like SCS Global Services and trade associations like the Alabama Forestry Association underscored the forum's role as a melting pot for ideas and solutions in the biomass sector.

The forum's keynote address set a powerful tone, emphasizing stakeholder engagement as a cornerstone of sustainable biomass production. The keynote speaker declared, "Stakeholders are not obstacles to manage, but partners in a journey and as such they should be engaged early and listened to deeply." This message resonated deeply with Miranda-Castro's presentation, which showcased how the Conservation Without



Conflict Coalition leverages trust and collaboration to align economic and conservation goals with different industries like forestry biomass.

Conservation Without Conflict: A Model for Partnership

As Executive Director of the Conservation Without Conflict Coalition, Leopoldo Miranda-Castro presented a vision for conservation that unites private landowners, public agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders to protect fish, wildlife, and plants while maintaining the productivity of working lands. In the United States, where 60% of land is privately owned, the stewardship of these lands is critical for the survival of threatened, endangered, and at-risk species. Traditional conservation often relies on stringent regulations, which can burden landowners. Miranda-Castro advocated for a different approach: one rooted in voluntary collaboration, incentives, and trust-building to create mutually beneficial outcomes.

His presentation drew on two key publications from the Wildlife Management Institute's Outdoor News Bulletin: "Private Lands are the Key to Success in Conservation" (February 2025) and "Conservation Without Conflict: A Persuasive Step-by-Step Guide to Achieving Collaborative Conservation" (August 2023). These articles articulate a framework where conservation enhances rather than hinders the productivity of forests, farms, and ranches. Miranda-Castro illustrated how this framework aligns with the SBP's mission to ensure sustainable and legal feedstock sourcing, particularly in the Americas, a region identified as critical for woody biomass certification.

Building Trust: The Foundation of Collaborative Conservation

Miranda-Castro emphasized that trust is the bedrock of effective conservation. He highlighted the importance of understanding the local context: social, economic, cultural, and historical factors that shape communities and landowners. By engaging stakeholders early through open dialog, workshops, and field trips, the Conservation Without Conflict Coalition fosters relationships that promote mutual respect and shared goals. This approach mirrors the forum's focus on stakeholder engagement as an ongoing practice that drives innovation and resolves conflicts early before they become barriers.



During his presentation, Miranda-Castro underscored the need to involve landowners as partners rather than adversaries. This strategy taps into their local knowledge and fosters a sense of ownership in conservation efforts. The forum's interactive group discussions echoed these challenges, identifying barriers for small private landowners, such as limited access to information, market entry difficulties, and high certification costs. Miranda-Castro's approach directly addresses these issues by promoting education, technical assistance, and inclusive dialog.

Incentives Over Regulations

The central theme of Miranda-Castro's presentation was the shift from regulatory-heavy conservation to incentive-based models. While regulations provide essential protections, they can create an "us vs. them" mentality among landowners. The Conservation Without Conflict Coalition advocates for incentives that make conservation financially and practically appealing. For example, programs like the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program offer payments for maintaining wildlife habitats, while tax reductions reward biodiversity-friendly land management. Flexible guidelines allow landowners to innovate, tailoring practices to their land's unique conditions.

Miranda-Castro connected these incentives to the biomass sector, where SBP certification requires sustainable sourcing practices. By integrating conservation incentives into biomass production, landowners can maintain economically viable operations while protecting species and habitats. The forum's discussions on the biomass market's role in filling gaps left by declining pulp and paper industries further supported this point, highlighting how certification programs can prioritize sustainability and social equity for small landowners.

The SBP Report: A Blueprint for Collaboration

The SBP Americas Forum report, available at sbp-cert.org, underscores the event's success, with 100% of survey respondents agreeing it met their expectations. Participants praised the diversity of speakers, networking opportunities, and engaging agenda. Miranda-Castro's presentation contributed significantly to this success, illustrating how the Conservation Without Conflict model supports SBP's mission to expand sustainable woody biomass certification in the Americas.



The report details key discussions, such as the development of Regional Risk Assessments (RRAs) and alignment with the EU's Renewable Energy Directive (REDIII). These technical topics complement the coalition's adaptive management strategies, which emphasize flexibility and continuous improvement. The report emphasizes working with stakeholders, just like the Conservation Without Conflict Coalition wants, so we can see landowners as partners and build trust in the forestry biomass industry.

The 2025 SBP Americas Forum highlighted the potential for sustainable biomass production and conservation to coexist. The Conservation Without Conflict approach showed how trust and collaboration can empower landowners, strengthen local economies, and protect biodiversity.

As the SBP report concludes, forums like this are essential for moving beyond an "us vs. them" mentality toward solutions-focused collaboration. By embracing Conservation Without Conflict's vision, stakeholders can ensure that America's working lands remain productive while serving as havens for its remarkable species, creating a strong future for all.

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