The Forest Legacy Program allows landowners to retain ownership, manage the property, and keep the land from development. At the State’s request, the Federal Government may purchase, or grant money to the State to purchase, conservation easements (especially development rights) on private land. The landowner keeps all land rights not purchased by the government. Forests protected are important for key wildlife habitats, water quality, offer outstanding recreation opportunities, outstanding scenic views, historical sites, and for opportunities to continue traditional forest uses, such as timber harvesting.

The Forest Legacy Program is a Federal-State partnership. A State becomes a part of the Forest Legacy Program by completing an Assessment of Need. In this assessment the State tailors the Forest Legacy Program to fit its needs.