

Forest Stewardship Program National Standards and Guidelines



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USDA Forest Service
State & Private Forestry
Cooperative Forestry

Forest Stewardship Program

National Standards and Guidelines

Program Purpose

The purpose of the Forest Stewardship Program is to encourage the long-term stewardship of nonindustrial private forest lands, by assisting the owners of such lands to more actively manage their forest and related resources.

The Forest Stewardship Program provides assistance to owners of forest land and other lands where good stewardship, including agroforestry applications, will enhance and sustain the long term productivity of multiple forest resources. Special attention is given to landowners in important forest resource areas and those new to, or in the early stages of managing their land in a way that embodies multi-resource stewardship principles. The program provides landowners with the professional planning and technical assistance they need to keep their land in a productive and healthy condition. The planning assistance offered through the Forest Stewardship Program may also provide landowners with enhanced access to other USDA conservation programs and/or forest certification programs.

The Forest Stewardship Program is authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 2103A. These standards and guidelines are intended to assist State and Territorial partners with the implementation of this authority and to provide supplemental guidance, as appropriate, to achieve intended program outcomes.

State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees

Each State Forester or equivalent State official must establish a State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee, administered by the State Forester or designee thereof (16 U.S.C. 2113(b)). The Committee shall include, to the extent practicable, individuals representing the following:

- The Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), and the Cooperative Extension Service
- NRCS State Technical Committee
- Local Government
- Soil and water conservation districts
- Consulting foresters
- Environmental organizations
- Forest products industry
- Forest landowners
- Land-trust organizations
- Conservation organizations
- State fish and wildlife agency
- Tribal representatives
- Other relevant interests as deemed appropriate

Existing State committees may serve as the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee if their membership includes the interests specified above.

The Committee must be ongoing to address stewardship planning and implementation concerns and overall program coordination, and not convened on a temporary basis. The Committee's primary functions are:

- To provide advice and recommendations to the State Forester concerning implementation of the Forest Stewardship Program, and other associated landowner assistance and cost-share programs.
- To provide assistance and recommendations concerning the development, implementation, and updating of the state-wide assessment and resource strategy.

State Foresters are encouraged to actively pursue partnerships with Committee and non-committee agencies, organizations and institutions interested in forest resource management and conservation.

State-Wide Assessment and Strategies for Forest Resources

The state-wide assessment and resource strategy, as authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill (sec. 8002), replaces the State Forest Stewardship Plan and other planning requirements under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act (CFAA). There are three components to the assessment and planning now required by the CFAA:

- State-wide assessment of forest resources—provides an analysis of forest conditions and trends in the state and delineates priority rural and urban forest landscape areas.
- State-wide forest resource strategy—provides long-term strategies for investing state, federal, and other resources to manage priority landscapes identified in the assessment, focusing where federal investment can most effectively stimulate or leverage desired action and engage multiple partners.
- Annual report on use of funds—describes how S&PF funds were used to address the assessment and strategy, including the leveraging of funding and resources through partnerships, for any given fiscal year.

Each state is required to complete a state-wide assessment and resource strategy within two years after enactment of the 2008 Farm Bill (which occurred on June 18, 2008) to receive funds under CFAA. The assessment and strategy must be updated as needed, but no less frequently than every five years. Refer to the national guidance for state-wide assessments and resource strategies for more specific requirements.

States are strongly encouraged to incorporate existing assessments, such as those carried out for the Spatial Analysis Project (SAP). A major component of the state-wide assessments and resource strategies is a spatial analysis of forest resource management threats and opportunities, to delineate priority landscape areas for delivering State & Private Forestry programs. A state's SAP provides a good foundation and for this analysis.

State-wide assessments and resource strategies must be guided by the following national themes and objectives and delineate important forest resource areas where program activity will be emphasized.

State & Private Forestry National Themes and Objectives

The assessments and strategies should address the national themes and associated management objectives:

Conserve Working Forest Lands: conserving and managing working forest landscapes for multiple values and uses.

- Identify and conserve high priority forest ecosystems and landscapes.
- Actively and sustainably manage forests.

Protect Forests from Harm: protect forests from threats, including catastrophic storms, flooding, insect or disease outbreak, and invasive species.

- Restore fire-adapted lands and reduce risk of wildfire impacts.
- Identify, manage and reduce threats to forest and ecosystem health.

Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests: including air and water quality, soil conservation, biological diversity, carbon storage, and forest products, forestry-related jobs, production of renewable energy, and wildlife.

- Protect and enhance water quality and quantity.
- Improve air quality and conserve energy.
- Assist communities in planning for and reducing wildfire risks.
- Maintain and enhance the economic benefits and values of trees and forests.
- Protect, conserve, and enhance wildlife and fish habitat.
- Connect people to trees and forests, and engage them in environmental stewardship activities.
- Manage and restore trees and forests to mitigate and adapt to global climate change.

Landowner Eligibility and Requirements

For purposes of this program, nonindustrial private forest (NIPF) acreage includes lands owned by any private individual, group, association, corporation, Indian tribe or other private legal entity, such as Alaska Native corporations. Further, it includes rural lands with existing tree cover, or suitable for growing trees.

Private nonindustrial forest lands that are managed under existing Federal, State, or private sector financial and technical assistance programs are eligible for assistance under the Forest Stewardship Program. Forest resource management activities on such forest lands must meet, or be expanded or enhanced to meet the requirements of the Forest Stewardship Program.

Participation in the Forest Stewardship Program is voluntary. To enter the program, landowners agree to manage their property according to an approved Forest Stewardship

Management Plan. Landowners also understand that they may be asked to participate in future management outcome monitoring activities.

Program Outreach

States are encouraged to focus their outreach efforts in important forest resource areas that are defined in the state-wide assessment and resource strategy. Within those areas the Forest Stewardship Program should be accessible to all landowners. In addition, outreach efforts should:

- Identify and address underserved communities and groups.
- Balance the needs of current participants and potential future participants.
- Coordinate with other landowner assistance programs to avoid duplication and support ongoing efforts as appropriate.
- Identify opportunities for landscape-scale and/or multiple landowner planning and technical assistance delivery, especially where ownerships are relatively small.
- Promote and foster the development of peer-to-peer landowner networks.

The Forest Stewardship Program and associated outreach efforts must adhere to the USDA non-discrimination policy: *The USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status.*

Forest Stewardship Management Plan Standards

A Forest Stewardship Management Plan is a plan that addresses individual landowner objectives while adhering to National and State Forest Stewardship Management Plan guidelines. State guidelines must consider the NASF *Principles and Guides for a Well-Managed Forest*. A general outline for plans, actions and progress, as relating to these principles, can be found in NASF's *A Stewardship Handbook*.

Plan Criteria

All Forest Stewardship Management Plans must:

- Be prepared or verified as meeting the minimum standards of a Forest Stewardship Management Plan by a professional resource manager, and be approved by the State Forester or a representative of the State Forester.
- Document authorship.
- Clearly state landowner objectives.
- Describe current forest condition or condition class.
- Describe desired forest condition or condition class.
- Include practices and activities aimed at reaching the desired forest condition or condition class.
- Document a feasible strategy and timeline for practice and activity implementation.
- Describe any suggested monitoring activities to be done by the forester or landowner.
- Be developed for a specified management period that adequately allows for progress with the landowner's long term stewardship objectives.

- Be reviewed and renewed, revised or rewritten at the end of the specified management period or sooner as needed, to be considered current.

Landowners must be involved in plan development by setting clear objectives, timetables and targets, and clearly understanding the plan's details and implications.

Resource Elements

The plan preparer will consider, describe and evaluate resource elements present and their importance to the ownership. Resource elements to be considered include:

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| ▪ Soil and Water | ▪ Threatened and endangered species |
| ▪ Biological diversity | ▪ Forest health |
| ▪ Range | ▪ Archeological, cultural and historic sites |
| ▪ Aesthetic quality | ▪ Wetlands |
| ▪ Recreation | ▪ Fire |
| ▪ Timber | ▪ Carbon cycle |
| ▪ Fish and wildlife | |

Management recommendations and alternative strategies, consistent with landowner objectives, will be provided to protect or enhance all resource elements that are present. Prescriptions or treatments must be stand or site specific. An ownership map drawn to scale, or photo, that accurately depicts vegetation cover types, hydrology and other significant forest related resources with a legend, is required.

The professional resource manager will discuss the Forest Stewardship Management Plan with the landowner, following completion, and periodically, to assure understanding and encourage plan implementation.

Additional Information

The landowner's understanding may be improved by including additional information appendices. Appendices might include:

- Descriptions of assistance available and incentive programs.
- Educational materials.
- A glossary of terms.
- An explanation of applicable Federal, State and/or county regulatory programs, especially as they apply to:
 - Archeological, cultural and historical sites
 - Wetlands
 - Threatened and Endangered Species

Forest Stewardship Plans and USDA Conservation Programs

The 2008 Farm Bill explicitly expands eligibility for many USDA conservation programs to include non-industrial private forest landowners. The Farm Bill also recognizes that Forest Stewardship Management Plans (FSMP) and other forest

management plans may address conservation program planning requirements for certain programs, where forest land is concerned, thus eliminating the need for a separate conservation plan.

The Forest Service will work with State Foresters and USDA agencies to facilitate participation in USDA conservation programs by providing relevant training and information to foresters and landowners. All who are providing technical and planning assistance should make landowners aware of programs for which they may be eligible. Plan preparers can also help to prepare landowners for participation in these programs during and after the planning process. State Foresters are encouraged to consult with their State Conservationist to mutually agree to any additional information needed by NRCS for landowners to participate in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and other USDA conservation programs. Through these programs, eligible landowners may be able to receive assistance to implement their FSMP. Please see the **Appendix** for more information.

Continuing Education for Stewardship

The State Forester in consultation with the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee will develop a continuing education program to provide landowners, state service foresters, and other natural resource professionals with relevant and timely forest resource management and planning information. The State Forester and the Committee should actively seek partners, including the Forest Service, Cooperative Extension, Conservation Districts, relevant non-governmental organizations, and others to achieve continuing education program objectives. The continuing education program could include:

- Tours and demonstrations
- Informational brochures and pamphlets
- Extension bulletins/newsletters
- Information regarding woodland owner associations and landowner cooperatives
- Natural resource publications
- Technical workshops, seminars, etc.
- Web-based information

Forest Stewardship Recognition

States are encouraged, but not required to adopt a program to recognize participating landowners. The nationally established mechanisms for recognition of stewardship participants are a Forest Stewardship sign and a Forest Stewardship certificate. State Foresters in consultation with their State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees may choose to develop additional recognition activities for exemplary landowner forest stewards. Recognition activities may also be developed at the regional and national level. These options could include the following approaches:

- Forest Stewardship award or recognition programs for individual forest landowners, groups, organizations, etc.
- Selection and recognition of a “Stewardship Forest” of the year, or Forest Stewardship Landowner/Manager of the year.

- Regional recognition by the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters, Southern Group of State Foresters, and/or Council of Western State Foresters.
- Selection and recognition of a national Forest Stewardship Landowner by NASF or other national group or organization.

Monitoring Forest Stewardship Management Plan Implementation

Successful implementation of landowner Forest Stewardship Management Plans, and thus sustainable forestry in practice, provides the best indication that the program is achieving its primary purpose of encouraging the long-term stewardship of non-industrial private forest lands.

The Regional Forester, Area, or Institute Director will develop a program for periodically monitoring the implementation of a representative sample of current Forest Stewardship Management Plans in important forest resource areas and other areas as appropriate. Guidelines for an acceptable random, representative sampling methodology will be developed and maintained by the Regional Forester, Area, or Institute Director and periodically reviewed by the Washington Office. Acceptable sample size will vary by Region, Area or Institute, State or Territory depending on the number, acreage, and distribution of current Forest Stewardship Management Plans.

Selected properties will be visited and assessed by State, Forest Service or other qualified resource management professionals to verify that current forest conditions are consistent with landowner stewardship objectives and the result of sustainable management, as defined in the landowner's approved Forest Stewardship Management Plan. A visit to a property will indicate whether or not that property is being managed sustainably as defined by the Forest Stewardship Management Plan. Visits to selected properties will yield a percentage of total acres visited, that are being managed sustainably as defined by approved Forest Stewardship Management Plans. This percentage will be used as an indication of overall accomplishment in terms of acres managed.

Visits to selected properties may be conducted by the plan preparer or another natural resource professional. Management plan implementation monitoring programs may be conducted in partnership with other landowner assistance and/or land management agencies and organizations.

Additional, more detailed guidance for plan monitoring is provided in other program related documents.

Accomplishment Reporting

Each State or Territory must maintain and annually report the following accomplishment data:

- Number of acres covered by current Forest Stewardship Management Plans (cumulative).
- Total number of eligible NIPF acres in spatially defined Important Forest Resource Areas.
- Number of acres in important forest resource areas covered by current Forest Stewardship Management Plans (cumulative).
- Total number of acres in important forest resource areas being managed sustainably, as defined by a current Forest Stewardship Management Plan. (cumulative/as confirmed through a monitoring program as described above).
- Number of new or revised Forest Stewardship Management Plans completed.
- Number of landowners receiving Forest Stewardship Program technical assistance.
- Number of landowners participating in Forest Stewardship Program educational programs.

In addition, states are encouraged, as feasible, to develop and maintain central databases that locate Forest Stewardship Plans and accomplishments on the landscape as facilitated through the use of available spatial analysis and plan writing/tracking tools.

Additional, more detailed guidance on accomplishment reporting is provided in other program related documents.

Funding Guidelines and Management

The Forest Stewardship program should strive to fund the delivery of a maximum amount of “on the ground” information and technical assistance to individual forest landowners. Program administrative costs should be kept to a minimum. Administrative costs are defined as indirect costs per the Forest Service Grants Management Handbook (FSH 1509.11).

The following additional guidelines apply:

- Federal funds must be matched by non-federal cash, services, or in-kind contributions.
- The Forest Service Washington Office will make the initial funding allocation on a Forest Service Regional, Area, and Institute basis, based on an appropriate program level of funding for each State and territory to maintain program stability, and several relevant program direction and accomplishment considerations which may include:
 - Number of eligible nonindustrial private forest landowners.
 - Number of eligible nonindustrial private forest acres.
 - Number of eligible nonindustrial private forest acres in important forest resource areas.
 - Number of new or revised Forest Stewardship Management Plans completed.
 - Number of acres covered by new or revised Forest Stewardship Management Plans completed.

- Number of acres in important forest resource areas covered by new or revised Forest Stewardship Management Plans completed.
- Total number of acres covered by current Forest Stewardship Plans (cumulative).
- Total number of acres in important forest resource areas covered by current Forest Stewardship Plans (cumulative).
- Percentage of nonindustrial private forest acres in important forest resource areas being managed sustainably, as defined by a current Forest Stewardship Plan. (This is the primary program outcome measure that will be used as an indication of program impact.)