

# **Forest Stewardship Program**

## ***National Standards and Guidelines***

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### **Forest Stewardship Philosophy:**

The purpose of the Forest Stewardship Program is to assist private forest landowners to more actively manage their forest and related resources; to keep these lands in a productive and healthy condition for present and future owners; and to increase the economic and environmental benefits of these lands.

Forest Stewardship starts with landowners who care about their forest lands. They view their land as a source of family enjoyment, chance to leave something special for future generations as well as a potential source of income. They may need technical advice and financial assistance to make their vision for the land a reality.

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.

The Forest Stewardship Program focuses on providing services to landowners not currently managing their forest land according to a resource management plan that embodies multi-resource stewardship principles. 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 Program if forest resource management activities on such forest lands meet or are expanded or enhanced to meet the requirements of the Forest Stewardship Program.

### **State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee:**

Each State Forester must establish a State Forest Stewardship Coordination Committee, administered by the State Forester or equivalent State official. The committee must include individuals representing the following:

- o The Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and Extension Service.
- o Local Government.
- o Soil and water conservation districts.
- o Consulting foresters.
- o Environmental organizations.
- o Forest products industry.
- o Forest landowners.
- o Land-trust organizations.

- o Conservation organizations.
- o State fish and wildlife agency.
- o Any other appropriate interests.

Existing state committees may serve as the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee if their membership includes the interests specified above. A State Forester may seek an exemption to full representation on the above. To do so, the State Forester must submit a request for exemption in writing, with a supporting recommendation by the Regional Forester or Area Director, to the Director of Cooperative Forestry for approval. The request for exemption must include a justification of why a representative of a particular interest is unable to participate.

The committee must be ongoing to address stewardship planning and implementation concerns and overall program coordination, and not convened on a temporary basis. Normally, Committee members serve 3-year terms and may be reappointed for consecutive terms. Terms for persons who by virtue of their positions are Committee members (e.g., State conservationists, State chairperson of forest landowners association, etc.) would be ongoing during their tenure in the position. Membership may be staggered to ensure Committee continuity. The duties of the Committee include the following:

- o Provide advice and recommendations to the State Forester concerning implementation of Forest Stewardship Program, Forest Land Enhancement Program, and Forest Legacy Program.
- o Provide assistance and recommendations concerning development, implementation, monitoring and updating of the State Forest Stewardship Plan.

### **State Forest Stewardship Plan:**

A Statewide Forest Stewardship Plan is required. The purpose of the plan is to serve as a dynamic framework for the implementation of the State Forest Stewardship Program. The plan should be updated as needed to reflect significant modifications in emphasis areas, delivery systems partnership, priorities and other factors affecting program implementation over time.

- o The plan must be action oriented, multi-disciplinary in scope, and concurred in by a majority of the State Stewardship Coordinating Committee members. Such concurrence should be in writing.
- o The plan must spell out partnerships with other agencies and organizations, particularly those that will become part of the delivery system involved in providing technical assistance.
- o The plan as a minimum must address the following:

- \* Baseline data on forest resources of the State.
- \* Conditions that threaten the forest resources of the State.
- \* Economics and environmental opportunities associated with forest resources of the State.
- \* Management programs, opportunities, and objectives for intermingled Federal, State, and private land ownership patterns within the State.
- \* The need for NIPF lands to be managed for all forest resources, including soil and water, wildlife and fish habitat, recreation and aesthetics, and timber and other forest products.

The plan may incorporate by reference other documents that include information on the above subjects.

- o The plan must cover a five-year period and identify a goal for NIPF acreage to be placed under Forest Stewardship Management during the period.
- o The plan must set priorities for achieving the goal and objectives identified for the State for each of the fiscal years.
- o The plan must identify its intended delivery system to reach qualified landowners, develop a landowner Forest Stewardship Plan, and assist the landowner in meeting his/her Plan objectives. State Foresters should cooperate with other agencies and the private sector in the delivery of this program and should share funding with other agencies, organizations and/or consultants, to provide technical assistance to landowners.

### **Landowner Requirements:**

There must be a recommendation and approval process for a landowner to qualify for full Forest Stewardship status. States should develop standards for landowners to qualify for Forest Stewardship recognition. Following are the national standards that must be incorporated into State standards.

- o The landowner must demonstrate that he/she is a good Steward. This may or may not require a probationary period. Withdrawing recognition from the landowner fails to follow the plan or chooses to withdraw from the program.
- o At appropriate intervals, the landowner's plan should be reviewed and the landowner recognition status reviewed.
- o Standards for Stewardship recognition must be established by States.

- o If ownership changes, the new owner is required to sign up for a Forest Stewardship Plan consistent with the new owner's objectives or the farm/property is withdrawn from recognition status.

## **Landowner forest Stewardship Plan:**

Landowner voluntary participation in the Forest Stewardship Program represents a good faith commitment to implement strategies suggested in the Landowner Forest Stewardship Plan. Private property rights cannot, by law, be jeopardized through participation in this program.

The Landowner Forest Stewardship Plans must be prepared or verified, as meeting the minimum standards of a forest stewardship plan, by a professional resource manager. Plans must identify and describe actions to protect, manage, maintain and enhance relevant resources listed in the law (soil, water, range, aesthetic quality, recreation, timber, water, and fish and wildlife) in a manner compatible with landowner objectives. The plan must be approved by the State Forester or a representative of the State Forester.

Landowners must be involved in plan development by setting clear objectives and should understand clearly the completed plan. A well prepared plan will:

- o Clearly state landowner objectives.
- o Have a cover page.
- o Provide for authorship and/or signature lines within the document.

The plan preparer should consider and evaluate resource elements present and include a brief description of those that are applicable and their importance to the ownership. Resource elements to be considered are:

1. Soil Interpretations.
2. Water.
3. Range.
4. Aesthetic Quality.
5. Recreation.
6. Timber.
7. Fish.
8. Wildlife.
9. Forest Health.
10. Archeological, Cultural and Historical Sites.
11. Wetlands.
12. Threatened and Endangered Species.

Management recommendations, or where appropriate, alternative strategies should be provided for those resource elements described. Prescriptions or treatments should be integrated and stand or site specific. An ownership map

drawn to scale, or photo, to include vegetation cover types, stream and pond location with a legend will enable the landowner to implement the plan.

Landowners' understanding may be improved by including activity summaries and appendices. Appendices might include:

- o Description of assistance available and incentive programs
- o Educational materials
- o A glossary of terms
- o 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.

These last three items are covered by legislation other than the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, as amended by title XII of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 (16 U.S.C. 2101, et seq.), but must be considered for Federally funded programs.

The professional resource manager should discuss the Forest Stewardship plan with the landowner, following completion, to assure understanding.

### **Funding Considerations:**

The State Forester in cooperation with the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee should periodically set a maximum dollar limit, per acre and/or plan, for federal funding to prepare the basic landowner forest stewardship plans. Intensive and complex computations such as allowable cut calculations, intensive wildlife habitat assessments, boundary surveys, growth, yield and financial analysis, timber sales preparation or marking, and intensive timber cruises are examples of activities that State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees shall exclude from federal funding in a basic landowner forest stewardship plan. Care should be taken that Federally funded services provided to the landowner do not adversely impact services provided by natural resource professionals in the private sector.

### **Continuing Education for Stewardship:**

The State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee will develop a continuing education program to provide landowners with multi-resource information. The State Forester and Committee should work closely with the Extension Service and others in pursuing this effort.

The Continuing Education Program could include:

- o Landowner tours and demonstrations.
- o Informational “landowner” brochures and pamphlets.
- o Extension bulletins/newsletters.
- o Access to membership in woodland owner associations.
- o Subscriptions to natural resource publications.
- o Invitation to technical workshops, seminars, etc.

### **Forest Stewardship Recognition:**

Recognition is appropriate for landowners, and perhaps agency and organization cooperation, for special efforts made to accomplish program goals. The national standards for recognition of qualified forest landowners are a Forest Stewardship sign and a formal Forest Stewardship Certificate.

- o Forest Stewardship Signs: The signs are viewed as an honor award, and provided to landowners only as long as they are maintaining their qualifications standards. Landowners who are withdrawn from recognition status should be required to remove their signs from their property and return them to the State Forester. State Foresters should develop a policy on replacement of signs. Foresters should work with landowners to see that signs are properly placed and posted to get maximum visibility. This needs to be balance with posting the sign in as safe and secure an area as possible.
- o Forest Stewardship Certificates: A National Forest Stewardship Certificate, suitable for framing, will be developed for stewardship qualified NIPF landowner presentation. It is recommended that Certificates be signed at the State Forester/Director of Natural Resources or Governor’s level, and presented, if possible, at a special occasion, possibly at a local Woodland Owners Association meeting.
- o Other Recognition Symbols: Decals and other types of recognition will be left up to individual State Forestry agencies and Forest Service Area and Regions. Any expertise for other recognitions symbols will be the sole responsibility of the States.

### **State/National Recognition:**

While the focus of the recognition activities is on the individual landowners, State Foresters in consultation with their State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee, may choose to develop additional recognition activities within State. Further, recognition activities may be developed at the regional and national level. These options could include the following approaches.

- o State: States are encouraged to develop a Forest Stewardship award of recognition program for individual forest landowners, groups, organizations, etc. Several top stewardship landowners could

complete for the honor of being selected for “Stewardship Forest” of the year, or Forest Stewardship Landowner/Manager of the year.

- o Regional: Regional recognition by the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters, Southern Group of State Foresters, and Council of Western State Foresters, should also be considered.
- o National: NASF, possibly in conjunction with other national groups, might recognize groups and organizations, and select/recognize a National Forest Stewardship Landowner.

### **Forest Stewardship Accomplishment Reporting:**

As a minimum, statistics must be maintained by State and reported annually for:

- o The number of Forest Stewardship Plans completed. This should translate to landowners assisted; plans should only be reported once.
- o Acres included in Forest Stewardship Plans. This translates to acres under Forest Stewardship management; acres should only be reported once.

The collection of such information will be coordinated with the Cooperative Forestry Annual Accomplishment Report.

### **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 (TA) to individual forest landowners. Program administrative cost must be kept to a minimum. Administrative costs are defined as indirect costs per the Grants Management Handbook.

The following additional guidelines apply:

- o Federal funds must be matched by non-federal cash, services, or in-kind contributions.
- o The Washington Office will make the initial funding allocation on a North, South and West geographic area basis, i.e., (Northeastern Area, Region 8, and Regions 1-6 and Region 10 comprising the West).

Forest Stewardship Program Funding Procedure:

- o Remove Washington Office assessments, earmarks, and a base amount of \$100,000 per State, Commonwealth, Territory or possession and \$50,000 per Freely Associated State.

- o Allocate \$100,000 to each of the Forest Service Regions and Institutes for program coordination and delivery.
- o The remaining funds are distributed to the three geographic areas (North, South, and West) based on resource need and program opportunity. The determination of need is derived from the number of NIPF owners, number of NIPF acres, and acreage of agricultural land in need of protection. Program Opportunity is determined by the latest 5-year average of Forest Stewardship Plans and acres encompassed by Plans. Needs and opportunity criteria are weighted 90:10.