

Forest Stewardship Program

Key Messages –

Since being authorized by the 1990 Farm Bill, the Forest Stewardship program has:

- Served as the primary, most extensive (in reach and scope) private forest owner assistance program in the U.S.
- Successfully created and helped sustain a vast, effective network of forestry technical assistance providers and programs.
- Provided more than 300,000 comprehensive management plans covering about 34 million acres nationwide. In FY 2008 alone, the program reached nearly 900,000 forest landowners through various education and assistance programs.
- Established strong and effective partnerships with State Foresters, Conservation Districts and many other partners to provide for broader forest landowner participation in USDA conservation programs.

Most Significant Recent Program Contributions

- **Landscape-based assessment and planning.** Through the GIS-based Spatial Analysis Project, all states have identified where they need to focus outreach and technical assistance efforts in order to maximize forest resource outcomes. This work has prepared States well for what is required by the 2008 Farm Bill – particularly with respect to State-wide Assessments and Resource Strategies.
- **Outcome –based accomplishment tracking.** The program has successfully developed and released powerful plan-writing and spatial accomplishment tracking tools for field foresters and program managers capable of displaying and relating all S&PF activities to landscape priority areas and associated forest resource attributes. States are successfully implementing a statistically reliable field monitoring program to meaningfully assess plan implementation.
- **Gateway to various incentives and assistance.** Program is increasingly serving as a “gateway” through which landowners can gain access to a variety of assistance and programs including USDA cost-share, state tax abatement, forest certification -- and emerging ecosystem service and renewable energy markets. Demand for Forest Stewardship planning assistance is expected to increase significantly because the 2008 Farm Bill expanded eligibility for many USDA conservation programs to include private forest landowners.

Key Challenges

- **Declining budget.** Annual appropriations for the program have, in recent years, been steadily declining.
- **Lack of visibility.** Because the program is delivered primarily through state and other partners, the Forest Service’s role and contribution is, for the most part, not visible or recognized at the point of delivery.

- **Broad authority.** The program's inherent flexibility and broad authority, while attractive to delivery partners, has made it more difficult to focus on national priorities and core program. The federal role is continuously called in to question.

What Can We Do?

- More visibly recognize federal contribution to State programs.
- Get landowners and partners to justify and call for more support for program.
- Reach more landowners in priority landscape areas: promote peer to peer networks and explore social marketing options.
- Develop and implement landscape, multi landowner plans to better address landscape-scale resource management concerns and opportunities such as mitigating and adapting to global climate change, managing fire adapted ecosystems, conserving wildlife habitat, and sustaining water quality and supply.
- **Support program at level needed to address priority landscapes.** Performance results for 2008 indicate that we're affecting only 2.5% of our targeted landscape within spatially identified program priority areas. Assuming that program impact will increase proportionately with program budget support and our goal is to address all currently identified priority landscapes within 10 years -- we need approximately **\$120 million in annual appropriations through FY 2019 .**

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