

REDESIGNING STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY

Questions and Answers from the Redesign Board

General

Q1: What are we trying to achieve with the S&PF Redesign?

A: *The State and Private Forestry (S&PF) Redesign began with a recognition that forests and the public benefits they provide are threatened at a scale and pace that are much greater than our current S&PF programs and delivery model can address. In addition, the U.S. Forest Service has been asked by Congress and others to increase the competitiveness of its S&PF programs, to focus and prioritize resources on issues and landscapes of national importance and, ultimately, to validate the relevance of continued federal investment. The Redesign Approach aims to address these issues by improving our ability to effectively and proactively invest federal resources on the ground as well as to demonstrate that an investment in state and private forestry provides value to the American people far in excess of its cost.*

Q2: Are State Foresters still considered the primary S&PF delivery partners? How will the new S&PF approach offer opportunities for other stakeholders?

A: *Yes. State Foresters, based on current authorization, will continue to be the primary S&PF delivery partners under the Redesign approach. That said, state forestry organizations will have a significant incentive to reach out to a wide variety of stakeholders in order to maximize resources and accomplishments on the ground. Key opportunities will include the development of state forest resource assessments and the identification and implementation of projects in the Redesign competitive grants program.*

Q3: How will capacity be addressed so that each state is able to maintain at least a minimal program level?

A: *One of the initial guiding principles established by the Redesign Board was to “maintain an effective level of capacity or ‘institutional infrastructure’ in each state.” This principle is critical to our collective ability to address unforeseen circumstances and needs. As the competitive portion of the Redesign approach moves forward, at least 35% of funding will be available to maintain institutional infrastructure. Also, as the Redesign approach gains momentum, we believe it will facilitate making a strong case for increasing the public investment in state and private forestry, thereby expanding the opportunities available to all participants.*

Q4: How will monitoring of and adjustments to the Redesign Approach be handled?

A: *The Deputy Chief for S&PF will work with the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) and S&PF leadership to establish a process for long-term monitoring and adjustments to the Redesign approach. Other key stakeholders will be engaged and involved as appropriate.*

Q5: How will we know if we have been successful?

A: *We will shape and influence forest land use on a scale and in a way that optimizes public benefits from trees and forests for both current and future generations. Specifically, we will inform choices on forest land conversion such that those forests that disproportionately provide public benefits are conserved; we will demonstrably improve protection of our forests from the risks of catastrophic fire, uncharacteristic insect and disease activity, and invasive species; and we will contribute to the enhancement of public benefits associated with trees and forests.*

National Themes

Q6: What is the purpose and intended use of the National Themes?

A: *The National Themes will be used, in conjunction with the National Assessment, to identify where and how federal S&PF resources should be focused in order to make the most significant progress in providing diverse and sustainable public benefits from trees and forests. Issues and/or geographic areas that are identified for emphasis at the national level will be included in the national guidance for competitive allocation that is sent to the geographic regions. The regions will then have the flexibility to address these national priorities in a way that is meaningful to their members.*

Q7: How often will the National Themes be reviewed and/or changed?

A: *This has not been determined. The themes are intended to be long-term in nature and the Board recognizes the importance of thematic consistency for program and resource planning. Review and updating of the national themes may occur in conjunction with the periodic reauthorizations of the Farm Bill or updates of the National Report on Sustainable Forests, produced as part of the Montreal Process for Criteria and Indicators (C&I).*

Q8: Does the emphasis on National Themes and public benefits mean S&PF is abandoning its previous focus on private lands and landowners?

A: *No. The majority of the nation's forest lands are privately owned. As a result, private landowners play a key role in determining the extent to which public benefits are produced from forests. Federal resources will continue to be invested on private lands where action on those lands contributes to the provision of public benefits in the long-term. Further, these federal investments will continue to leverage non-federal funds that are focused on enhancing public benefits from private lands.*

National Assessment

Q9: What is the National Assessment and how will it be used?

A: *The National Assessment will be produced through a geospatial decision support system that is used to characterize forest conditions, trends and opportunities across the nation and to inform national level priorities for investment of S&PF funding and resources. The National Assessment will also be used, along with other accountability tools, to demonstrate how work accomplished in the states relates to needs identified nationally. Ultimately, the system will be an interactive, web-based resource that can be modified to*

assist in planning, priority setting and accountability at the regional and state levels, as well as at the national level. As the National Assessment evolves, we will need to consider how this system corresponds to and interacts with other national assessment efforts such as the National Assessment on Sustainable Forests and USFS Resource Planning Act assessments.

Q10: What data sets will be used for the National Assessment?

A: The initial information used to populate the decision support system and produce the National Assessment will consist of existing, nationally consistent data sets primarily managed by the USFS. The data sets used will be tiered to the three National Themes and will include: development risk, woody biomass potential, wildfire risk, insect and disease risk, critical wildlife habitat, priority watersheds, and the wildland urban interface.

Q11: How does NASF and/or the S&PF Deputy Area have input in the National Assessment?

A: The initial phase of the National Assessment is being built through a contract with Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI), a leading company in geographic information system (GIS) technology and software. A Technical Team made up of data managers and GIS specialists from the USFS and state forestry agencies is guiding ESRI's work. In addition, the Redesign Board has received regular updates and both NASF and S&PF leadership will have extensive review and input prior to completion of the project.

Q12: How will the National Assessment deal with entities that don't fit into existing data collection systems such as FIA, etc.?

A: Initially, only data sets that are nationally consistent will be used in the National Assessment. In recognition of the fact that there are gaps in important data (e.g., islands and territories, urban forest conditions, etc.), work is on-going to determine how best to incorporate compatible data that reflect important conditions related to the nation's forests.

Q13: Will the National Assessment be flexible enough to allow for the incorporation of better quality data as they become available?

A: Yes. We expect to take an adaptive approach to the National Assessment. At the national level, a formal change management process will be put in place to facilitate changes in core data sets that may be needed as technology, information or our understanding of the challenges at hand improves.

Q14: How frequently will the National Assessment be updated?

A: This has not been determined. Once the full development of the geospatial decision-support tool is complete, we will likely review the core elements of the system on at least an annual basis, prior to developing national guidance for the competitive allocation process.

State Assessments & Response Plans

Q15: What is the difference between a state assessment and a state response plan?

A: *A state forest resource assessment is a comprehensive analysis of the forest-related conditions, trends and opportunities in each state. Each state assessment will also identify the priority landscapes for treatment and outline strategies for addressing the key issues and landscapes identified. A state response plan is the document that will be submitted by the state to the USFS (likely on an annual basis) in order to request competitive federal dollars. The response plan should specifically identify how the state proposes to invest federal dollars, in combination with other available resources, to address the national themes and desired outcomes along with priorities identified in their own state assessments.*

Q16: What are the key components of a state assessment?

A: *State assessments are to be developed in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders. At a minimum, state assessments will: describe forest conditions on all ownerships in the state; identify forest related benefits and services; highlight both trends and issues of concern; delineate high priority forest landscapes to be addressed; and outline strategies for addressing the Redesign national themes as well as critical issues and landscapes identified through the assessment. State assessments will be geospatially based and should make use of the best existing data. States are encouraged to identify critical information gaps as part of their assessment process so that this information can be acquired as opportunities arise. Final direction on state assessments will be provided upon completion of the current reauthorization of the Farm Bill.*

Q17: Will islands and territories develop these assessments as well?

A: *Yes. Islands and territories will develop a forest resource assessment as described above for their jurisdictions. Competitive proposals submitted by islands and territories should reflect the issues and opportunities identified in these assessments.*

Q18: Will tribal lands be included in state assessments?

A: *Yes. The analysis of forest conditions, trends and opportunities on all ownerships should incorporate tribally owned and/or managed lands. Tribes should also be fully engaged, along with other key stakeholders, in the identification of priorities and strategies as described above.*

Q19: When will state assessments and response plans be required?

A: *It is anticipated that work will begin on state assessments in FY 2008 with completion by FY 2010. State Response Plans submitted from FY 2008 – FY 2010 will be based largely on existing assessment information. Beginning in FY 2011, a state response plan that is based on the state assessment will be required in order to apply for competitive funds.*

Q20: What flexibility will be provided to states in developing their assessments? How will we ensure a minimum level of consistency nationwide?

A: *The Redesign Board has recommended a minimum number of elements that each state*

assessment must address. A state assessment must be geospatially based, describe forest conditions on all ownerships, identify trends and issues of concern or priority, delineate high priority landscapes to be addressed and outline strategies for addressing issues and landscapes identified as high priority. If each state assessment effectively addresses these common elements, according to common definitions, we should be able to effectively “roll-up” the information contained in them at the national level. These elements are also consistent with related language being considered in the Farm Bill. If a more quantitative roll-up of state assessment information is desired, we will need to establish the specific information points either prior to the initiation of state assessments or prior to the first review cycle.

Q21: How should National Forests and USFS Research Stations be engaged in the development of State Assessments?

A: National Forests and other federal lands should be considered as part of the “all lands” approach to state assessments. National Forest Supervisors and staff should be engaged in the development of state assessments and competitive projects along with other key stakeholders on the landscape. USFS Research Stations will be a key resource to states in the development of state assessments and should also be consulted on questions regarding the effective application of science on the ground.

Q22: How often will state assessments be reviewed and/or updated?

A: State assessments should be reviewed and updated, if needed, at least every five years. This may logically occur in conjunction with the periodic reauthorizations of the Farm Bill. They may be reviewed and updated more regularly as determined by the state.

Q23: Will state assessments take the place of all other assessments or plans currently required of states by S&PF?

A: That is the long term objective. In the short term, states are encouraged to use existing assessments and plans, such as Forest Legacy Assessments of Need, as a foundation for building complementary elements in their comprehensive state assessments.

Q24: What kind of technical assistance will be provided to states for state assessments?

A: The extent of technical assistance provided by the USFS will depend on available resources and the nature of state needs. Examples of assistance that may be provided include training and other assistance with GIS applications, assistance in working collaboratively with diverse stakeholders to develop the assessments, and financial support for contracting of needed services.

Competitive Allocation

Q25: What is the value of a competitive process?

A: Increasing the competitive component of S&PF allocations will allow us to demonstrate that we are investing federal resources in projects that address clearly identified priority issues and landscapes and have the greatest opportunity for success.

Q26: What is the role of the geographic regions in the competitive allocation process?

A: *The Redesign Board believes that there are geographically unique issues, challenges and opportunities that would be difficult to address through a national process. The Board determined that these unique circumstances would be better addressed by having the geographic regions design and implement the competitive processes. The Board also believes that the geographic regions will be better able to monitor the impacts of the competitive process on both state and federal colleagues and identify appropriate ways to mitigate outcomes that might compromise long term success.*

Q27: How will the USFS participate in the regional competitive processes?

A: *At the national level, USFS representatives have worked collaboratively with state forestry representatives, as part of the Redesign Board, to identify national criteria to guide the competitive allocation. In the geographic regions, it is expected that state forestry and USFS representatives will work together to design and implement a competitive process for their region that meets national guidelines as well as regional priorities. These interagency regional teams will also screen and evaluate projects for funding.*

Q28: How will islands / territories participate in the competitive process?

A: *Islands and territories will submit project proposals for competitive funding through the appropriate geographic regional process.*

Q29: Will the use of interagency teams in the competitive process trigger NEPA?

A: *No. The State Foresters will make the final decision regarding site-specific projects selected for funding. The Deputy Chief for S&PF will determine the appropriate mix of program funds, based on the projects identified by the State Foresters, and allocate the requisite funding to the corresponding USFS Regional/Area Office for grant execution.*

Q30: What program funds will be included in the FY 2008 competitive process?

A: *The competitive process will include 15% of the net available, after ear marks and national commitments, in the following program areas: Cooperative Fire, Cooperative Lands Forest Health Management, Urban and Community Forestry and Forest Stewardship.*

Q31: Will program funds not included in the FY 2008 competitive process (i.e. Volunteer Fire Assistance, Forest Legacy, and Federal Lands Forest Health Management) be incorporated into the competition in future years?

A: *There is a commitment to review these programs and the basis for their allocation following the initial implementation of Redesign. It is intended, however, that the distribution of these funds be handled in a way that complements and corresponds with the competitive process whether or not they are actually rolled in to the competition itself.*

Q32: What if the funding requested does not match up with the funding appropriated in specific S&PF program areas?

A: *For FY 2008, the Deputy Chief for S&PF will work with Regional S&PF leadership to*

resolve these issues. As we move to a higher level of competition, we made need to explore new authorities or seek assistance from Congress.

Q33: Are entities other than state forestry agencies eligible for competitive funding?

A: *State forestry agencies are the only eligible applicant for competitive funds. Organizations other than state forestry agencies, including Federally Recognized Tribes, are considered partner applicants. However, based on national competitive criteria, project proposals will be scored based on the level of partner/cooperator involvement in project planning and the leveraging of partner/cooperator resources in implementation. Partner applicants should contact their state forestry agency for additional information.*

Q34: Will an annual competitive process allow for enough consistency in staffing and other program elements to achieve desired outcomes?

A: *States will be submitting proposals for funding that, based on the state assessment, offer the greatest “return on investment” to the public. Projects may include on-going needs (such as staff, grant programs, etc.) as long as they are the mechanism that can maximize success relative to the size of the investment requested. As noted below, projects may be funded for up to three years of work, which should also allow for consistency in planning, staffing and capability. Multi-state projects are also eligible and could provide for shared staffing and resources.*

Q35: How long do applicants have to complete competitively funded projects?

Projects may be funded for up to three years of work.

Q36: Will the emphasis on landscape-scale and national interest in the competitive criteria end up excluding small states or small forestry programs from competition?

A: *No. The ability to put together an effective project proposal that meets the national criteria is not determined by the size of a state or program. The emphasis in the criteria is on being proactive rather than reactive; on working with more partnerships and at watershed or landscape scales so that activities will effectively influence environmental conditions; and on leveraging all available resources to address the highest priorities. The national themes and competitive criteria do serve to focus the scope of activities, but there is still enough flexibility that all states, islands and territories will be able to compete effectively.*

Q37: How will the competitive allocation process guard against overly large swings in funding?

A: *The competitive allocation process will be grounded in the identification by states and territories of projects that will provide the greatest “return on investment” to the public. Although priority needs will change over time, it is likely that the degree of change will be modest from year to year. The competitive processes in each geographic region should be designed to take into account the need for an on-going level of service in order to achieve desired outcomes. The gradual ramp-up of competitive funding percentages will enable State Foresters and USFS leaders to monitor and refine these processes to ensure they consider and balance delivery capacity along with desired outcomes.*

Q38: How will non-competitive funding be handled?

A: *For FY 2008, all non-competitive S&PF funding will be distributed according to existing methodologies. It is assumed that State Foresters will use non-competitive funding to meet their highest priority needs related to producing outcomes that provide the highest “return on investment” to the public. State Foresters will work with the USFS Regions and Area to identify those functions that can be most efficiently performed by the USFS across state boundaries and to determine how to assign corresponding resources from available funds.*

Q39: Will states be expected to meet the same accomplishment targets with potentially less funding?

A: *No. Accomplishment targets and/or other performance expectations are negotiated between USFS Regions / Area and individual states as part of the grant award process. USFS and state personnel should take resource availability into account when negotiating accomplishment targets for non-competitive S&PF funding.*

Q40: Can a competitive grant award be included in a state’s consolidated payment?

A: *Yes. For the FY 2008 competitive allocation process, states will be able to receive and match competitive grant awards as part of their consolidated payment grants.*

Staffing & Organization

Q41: Has the Redesign Board considered what kind of changes might be needed in S&PF programs and/or staffing in order to meet the Redesign goals?

A: *Yes. The Board began considering options for programs and staffing at its initial meeting. The objective is flexible and adaptive organizations that are designed to address dynamic challenges and opportunities and maximize available resources and expertise. The Board also determined that, at some point, we may need to seek Congressional support for collapsing program line items.*

Q42: How are program and staffing needs being addressed and how will this relate to the USFS Transformation effort?

A: *The Redesign Board chartered a Programs and Staffing Workgroup to build a framework for answering these questions. The workgroup has proposed a process through which State Foresters and USFS leadership would cooperatively assess, on an on-going basis, key S&PF staffing needs within the USFS Regions, Area and Washington Office. These assessments would be based, in part, on the needs, opportunities and priorities identified in state assessments and response plans. This Workgroup proposal will be undergoing review and revision over the next few months.*

Transformation is a separate process within the USFS and impacts the entire agency. It is hoped that the Redesign process might inform the Transformation process; however, it is not clear the extent to which this can and will occur.

Q43: Will changes in programs and staffing impact both federal and state personnel?

A: *Yes. Staffing in both the USFS and the states will be assessed as part of the process described above. It is anticipated that there will a wide range of approaches taken by states to maximize outcomes. It is likely that the current federally-influenced staffing in at least some states might be identified for realignment based on the priorities established in the states' assessments and response plans. Federal staffing will be addressed through the process of developing a USFS S&PF staffing plan. An effective staffing assessment involving the states and USFS will identify opportunities to efficiently draw upon and share federal expertise across state lines. This will, in turn, further influence state staffing in some instances.*

Demonstrating and Communicating Results

Q44: How will we demonstrate that the Redesign approach is successful?

A: *Better accountability for meaningful results is of utmost importance in the Redesign approach because S&PF has struggled, in the past, to demonstrate how our efforts add up to something of value to the American public. The Redesign Board chartered a Demonstrating and Communicating Results Workgroup to explore this challenge and recommend a new approach. The workgroup has recommended a three tiered Annual Report Card that will include visual demonstrations of progress (maps, charts, etc.), a discreet set of performance indicators, and use of success stories to personalize local accomplishments. The Report Card will be cooperatively developed by NASF and the USFS, but will be issued by NASF. As with the National Assessment, we will need to consider how the Annual Report Card corresponds to and interacts with other national efforts to assess and report on results, including the National Assessment on Sustainable Forests and the USFS Resource Planning Act (RPA) assessments.*

Q45: Will the Redesign add to our already complicated mix of performance measures and tracking systems?

A: *In the short term, we will endeavor to make use of existing reporting items and accountability systems whenever possible. There may be some additional reporting required in FY 2008, and possibly FY 2009, depending on the nature of projects selected through the Redesign competitive grant process. As Redesign moves forward, this new approach to accountability will be refined to minimize and streamline the states' reporting burden and ensure items reported are relevant, effective and focus on priority outcomes, not activities. In the long term, performance measures that do not meet this standard will be eliminated and / or replaced.*

Q46: Should states continue to use existing systems for reporting?

A: *Yes. Although it is the intention of the Redesign Board that redundant measures and systems be consolidated or eliminated, states will need to continue using existing reporting systems until further notice.*

Q47: Do we have the right people and skills to address this new emphasis on accountability and communication?

A: *We will need to assess current capability in both the USFS and state forestry organizations. It is likely some new skills in areas such as GIS, planning and communications and marketing will be needed. The need for such skills should be revealed in the staffing assessments described under programs and staffing above.*

Q48: How will our efforts to demonstrate accountability be tied to the National Assessment?

A: *The National Assessment will help us to identify priorities for action at the national level. Once work has been completed, we will use accomplishment data along with national assessment data to demonstrate that resources were invested in high priority areas and meaningful outcomes achieved.*