

Forest Stewardship Program National Standards and Guidelines



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USDA Forest Service
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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 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, Farm Service Agency, and the Cooperative Extension Service
- 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 Forest Stewardship Plan.

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 Forest Stewardship Plans

A State's Forest Stewardship Plan serves as a dynamic framework for the implementation of its Forest Stewardship Program and any associated landowner incentive and assistance programs. The plan should support related State and Forest Service strategic plans. The plan must be updated as needed, but no less frequently than every five years, to address emerging issues, changing forest resource management priorities, program emphases, program delivery partnerships, and other factors affecting program implementation. The plan may incorporate or reference other documents that include relevant information.

The plan must be action-oriented and multi-disciplinary in scope, and include or address the following:

- Baseline data on the forest resources of the State.
- Forest resource threats and opportunities, both environmental and socio-economic.
- Strategies and systems for reaching qualified landowners, developing and delivering landowner Forest Stewardship Management Plans, and helping landowners achieve their plan objectives.
- State specific Forest Stewardship Management Plan content guidelines.
- Working partnerships with other agencies and organizations, particularly those that are part of, or complement program delivery strategies and systems.
- Management problems, opportunities and objectives associated with intermingled federal, State and private land ownership patterns within the State.
- A listing of organizations and agencies represented on the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee.

In addition, the plan must be guided by the following stewardship principles and define important forest resource areas where program activity will be emphasized.

Stewardship Principles

State Forest Stewardship Plans should be guided by the National Association of State Foresters' (NASF) *Principles and Guides for a Well-Managed Forest*:

- Contribute to the conservation and biological diversity of the forest and landscape in which it resides.
- Maintain and improve productive capacity.
- Maintain the Health and Vigor of the Forest and its Landscape/Watershed.
- Protect Soil and Water Resources.
- Consider Carbon Cycles.
- Consider Socio-Economic Benefits.
- Comply with Applicable Laws and Rules.

Strategic Program Delivery

Each State is required to identify, describe and spatially define important forest resource areas where program outreach and activity will be emphasized. The establishment of these program focus areas is intended to enable the efficient, strategic use of limited program resources where they will address current State resource management priorities and produce the most benefit in terms of important forest resource values. Establishment of these areas should include consideration of the following resource management opportunities and threats:

- Forest Productivity
- Forest Health
- Water Resources
- Wetlands
- Fish and Wildlife Habitat
- Recreational Resources
- Wildfire Risk
- Risk of Development/Conversion
- Proximity to Publicly Managed Forest Land
- Private forest landownership patterns/target landowner groups

States are encouraged to consider other environmental and social factors, as appropriate, to enhance program impact. Important forest resource areas may include non-forest lands, such as grasslands, agricultural lands and riparian areas, where agroforestry, afforestation or reforestation will produce environmental benefits. Establishment of these program focus areas shall not preclude participation by landowners in other areas where resource benefits may also occur.

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, a landowner agrees to manage his/her property according to an approved Forest Stewardship Management Plan. Landowners should 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 on landowners in important forest resource areas that are defined in the State Forest Stewardship Plan. Within those areas the Forest Stewardship Program must 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 multiple landowner Forest Stewardship Management Plans, especially where ownerships are relatively small.

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 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 plan 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:

- Soil
- Water
- Cover types/biodiversity
- Range
- Aesthetic quality
- Recreation
- Timber
- Fish and wildlife
- Threatened and endangered species
- Forest health
- Archeological, cultural and historic Sites
- Wetlands

Management recommendations or alternative strategies, where appropriate, will be provided to protect or enhance those 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 activity summaries and appendices. Appendices might include:

- Description 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

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 Forest Stewardship Management Plans. Federal Forest Stewardship funding will normally not cover 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. However, these elements should be included if feasible. Care should be taken to assure 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 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 NGOs, 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 to adopt a program to recognize participating landowners, especially those who have demonstrated exemplary forest stewardship management in following their Forest Stewardship Management Plans. State recognition programs must include the following national standards:

- The landowner must demonstrate that he/she is a good Steward. This may or may not require a probationary period.
- Recognition must be withdrawn if the landowner fails to follow his/her Forest Stewardship Management Plan or chooses to withdraw from the program.
- At appropriate intervals, the landowner's plan and management activities should be reviewed and the landowner recognition status reviewed.

The nationally established mechanisms for recognition of stewardship participants are a Forest Stewardship sign and a formal Forest Stewardship certificate.

- Forest Stewardship signs: The signs are viewed as an honor award, and provided to landowners only as long as they are maintaining their qualification standards.
- Forest Stewardship certificates: A Forest Stewardship certificate, suitable for framing, will be developed for presentation to qualified NIPF landowners. It is recommended that certificates be signed at the State Forester/Director of Natural Resources or Governor's level, and presented, if possible, at an appropriate occasion.

State/National Recognition

While the focus of the recognition activities is on individual landowners, State Foresters in consultation with their State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees may choose to develop additional recognition activities. 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 Forest Stewardship Management Plan. A visit to a property may indicate that some stands or compartments are being managed sustainably as defined

by the Forest Stewardship Management Plan and that others are not. 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.

Accomplishment Reporting

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

- Number of new or revised Forest Stewardship Management Plans completed.
- Number of new or revised Forest Stewardship Management Plans completed in important forest resource areas.
- Number of acres covered by current Forest Stewardship Management Plans (cumulative).
- Number of acres in important forest resource areas covered by current Forest Stewardship Management Plans (cumulative).
- Number of landowners receiving Forest Stewardship Program technical assistance.
- Number of landowners participating in Forest Stewardship Program educational programs.
- 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).

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.

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.)

** Reliable data must exist for number of acres of eligible NIPF acres in important resource areas if these factors are to be used.*