

# Forest Stewardship Program

## National Standards and Guidelines

### Appendix

#### USDA Cost-Share Program Applicant Information

State Forestry agencies are encouraged to engage with NRCS, Conservation Districts, USDA Forest Service and other partners in their states to coordinate and improve delivery of forestry assistance to landowners. The Memorandum of Understanding signed on September 29, 2008, by the lead executives of the Forest Service, NRCS, National Association of State Foresters, and National Association of Conservation Districts describes several actions for improving forestry conservation assistance and can serve as a model for state collaboration. The Forest Service and NRCS will continue to work together, and with state partners to assure that programs are complementary and effective.

The following additional guidance is provided for those who intend to use Forest Stewardship Plans to satisfy USDA Conservation Program requirements in order to receive cost-share assistance for plan implementation. The guidance is intended to expedite and facilitate participation in USDA cost-share programs when requested by the forest landowner. Participation in these programs is entirely voluntary.

The 2008 Farm Bill explicitly allows participation by non-industrial private forest landowners in many USDA conservation programs, which are administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and/or Farm Service Agency (FSA). To determine basic eligibility for these programs landowners must first go to their local USDA Service Center and provide to the FSA the required personal financial information that will be used to determine their adjusted gross income (AGI), which cannot exceed \$1 million unless other conditions are met. Their Forest Stewardship Management Plan (FSMP) may also provide other required USDA information regarding highly erodible land and wetlands. NRCS staff at the Service Center may also be able to assist landowners with this process. Eligible NIPF landowners may then be able to apply for a wide range of cost-share assistance to implement their FSMP through these and other programs:

NRCS programs:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> AGI limitation does not apply to HFRP. HFRP is only available in a limited number of states.

- Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)
- Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

More information about these programs is available from NRCS at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>

FSA programs:

- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
- Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP)
- Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP)

More information about these programs is available from FSA at:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

The 2008 Farm Bill requires a FSMP or other forest management plan (approved by NRCS State Conservationist) if the EQIP plan of operations addresses non-industrial private forest land. Application for specific USDA programs (e.g., EQIP) will also require the following documentation to accompany an approved FSMP or another forest management plan:

- A detailed description for each cost-share program practice or activity applied for, consistent with agency activity and/or practice standards and the description of one or more practice alternatives. (This could simply be the proposed alternative and a no action alternative.)
- An updated map of property that clearly indicates locations of proposed cost-share practices.
- A completed Environmental Evaluation (NRCS-CPA-52) is required for compliance with NRCS regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other applicable federal environmental laws and Executive Orders. Compliance and documentation are ultimately the responsibility of the USDA agency providing cost-share assistance. Forest Stewardship Plans should, however, in addressing all resource elements present, provide most or all of the environmental information necessary for Environmental Evaluations and regulatory compliance. To learn more about the information requirements for EQIP contact NRCS staff at your local Service Center and review the criteria for a forest management plan in the NRCS electronic Field Office Technical Guide at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/>

State Foresters are encouraged to work with their State Conservationist to reach agreement on the information needed by NRCS for FSMP compatibility with EQIP and to facilitate landowner participation in other USDA conservation programs.