

Government-assisted Planting Programs for Diverse Species¹

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Abstract.--USDA assistance to non-industrial private forest landowners includes the Agricultural Conservation Program, Forestry Incentives Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Forest Stewardship Program, and the Stewardship Incentive Program. The Stewardship Incentive Program, in combination with the Forest Stewardship Program, may provide the greatest opportunity for planting diverse species.

INTRODUCTION

Many state and federal agencies, as well as local governments, offer assistance for planting trees. Some of these programs are designed to address tree planting, tree care, and the retention of trees in urban areas and communities, while other programs address tree planting and forest management needs in rural areas on private non-industrial forest lands.

Private non-industrial rural landowners currently manage 45 percent of our Nation's forests. Nearly one-half of the wood supply in the United States comes from these lands. In addition, non-industrial private forest lands provide much of the Nation's fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands, forest recreation, native plant species diversity, and important watersheds. Clearly, the management of these forest lands and resources has important implications for meeting our future economic, social, and environmental needs.

Unfortunately, many non-industrial private landowners have limited funds and technical knowledge for managing their forested lands. U.S. Department of Agriculture surveys indicate that up to 80 million acres of private woodlands are in need of conservation treatment and improvement. Many environmentally sensitive and economically marginal croplands and pasturelands would also benefit from tree planting.

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Incentives provide a compelling reason for landowners to use and manage their lands wisely for ecologically and socially desirable results and to voluntarily help protect and conserve our natural resources.

USDA ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Legislators have long recognized the economic and environmental benefits of providing federal assistance to landowners for the conservation and management of forest lands and resources. In fact, there is a clear mandate in legislative actions spanning 100 years for USDA assistance to forest landowners. Current Federal programs include the Agricultural Conservation Program, Forestry Incentives Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Forest Stewardship Program, and the Stewardship Incentive Program. Such programs provide incentives in the form of education, technical assistance, and financial assistance to non-industrial private landowners to improve the protection, management, and productivity of forest lands.

Agricultural Conservation Program

The Agricultural Conservation Program (ACP) is a cooperative endeavor by farmers, ranchers, government agencies, and other groups to solve soil, water, and related resource problems through cost-sharing and exchange of technical expertise. The program was authorized by Congress in 1936 to help prevent soil erosion and water pollution; protect and improve productive farm and ranch land; conserve water used for agriculture; preserve and develop wildlife habitat; and encourage energy conservation measures on agricultural land.

Cost-share payments are available as a financial incentive to farmers and ranchers to encourage conservation and environmental

protection practices that will result in long-term and community-wide benefits. Cost-share assistance is provided for a wide variety of conservation practices, including establishing stands of trees that will provide forest products or wildlife habitat, as well as improve protection from wind or water erosion.

Forestry Incentives Program

With the demand for timber in this country expected to exceed the supply within a generation, the Forestry Incentives Program (FIP) was authorized by Congress in 1973 to increase the nation's supply of timber products on a sustained yield basis and to enhance associated forest resources. Through the Forestry Incentives Program, Federal and State agencies share the costs of tree planting and timber stand improvement with private forest landowners who often cannot afford to make the long-term investment required to develop their woodlands.

There are three forestry practices in FIP, planting trees for timber production (generally, limited to commercial species), improving a stand of trees, and site preparation for natural regeneration. Only non-industrial private forest land with high potential productivity is eligible for cost-sharing under the FIP program.

Conservation Reserve Program

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was authorized by Congress in 1985 to encourage farmers to protect the nation's cropland base, improve and preserve water quality, and enhance fish and wildlife habitat. This is a voluntary land retirement program designed to reduce erosion on land that is highly erodible or contributing to serious water quality problems. The program offers farm owners and operators long-term rental payments and cost-share assistance to convert from commodity production to less intensive uses and plant a permanent protective cover of grass or trees.

CRP includes a wide array of practices applied to croplands including establishing a stand of trees in a timber planting (this includes stands of predominantly hardwoods trees); planting trees and shrubs for permanent wildlife habitat, food, or cover; establishing windbreaks, vegetative tree filter strips, shelterbelts, and living snow fences; establishing bottomland hardwood trees or adapted shrubs on wetlands; and alley cropping.

America The Beautiful

Two years ago at this gathering, Tom Landis and Ray Abriel from my office shared briefly with you about a new Presidential Initiative titled "America The Beautiful". The President's goals for the America the Beautiful Initiative included

demonstrating a commitment to sustainable forestry, building a conservation spirit and ethic in the U.S., helping to reduce carbon dioxide build-up, and producing multiple environmental benefits for society.

A major component of America The Beautiful was the National Tree Planting Initiative, a multiyear program for planting, maintaining, and improving 1 billion trees per year in communities and rural areas nationwide. The National Tree Program contained both community and rural components. The community trees component was designed to address tree planting, care, and retention in the Nation's cities, towns, and communities through technical and financial assistance to State forestry agencies, municipal governments, and volunteer groups. The rural trees component was designed to address the tree planting and forest improvement needs on non-industrial private lands in the United States through a combination of technical assistance and financial cost-sharing for landowners.

What began as a Presidential Budget Initiative was enacted by Congress in 1990. Direct funding for America The Beautiful (ATB), however, was limited to the National Tree Trust, a private, non-profit foundation created in March 1990 to promote community tree planting and preservation. The rural tree planting and forest management aspects of ATB are being implemented as a special component of the Forest Stewardship Program and its companion Stewardship Incentive Program.

Forest Stewardship Program

The Forest Stewardship Program is a technical assistance program available to non-industrial private forest landowners to encourage them to more actively manage their forest land. Participating landowners agree to manage their forest land according to a professionally written, multi-resource "Forest Stewardship Plan" which is based upon their objectives for their property. In addition to meeting the owner's objectives, however, the plan must provide for the protection of fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, wetlands, recreational resources, and aesthetic values, as well as the productivity of timber. In the Forest Stewardship Program, timber is not necessarily the driver behind forest management. Rather, the program encourages management of forests for their multiple benefits. The aim is to keep these lands in a healthy condition for present and future owners while increasing economic and environmental benefits.

Stewardship Incentive Program

The Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP) is a companion to the Forest Stewardship Program. It provides cost-share financial assistance to eligible landowners who are following their "Forest Stewardship Plan". Cost-sharing is



Figure 1.--Landowner and resource professionals discuss management options described in the landowner's Forest Stewardship Plan. (Photo by Tom Iraci)

available for landowners to hire private resource management professionals to develop their Forest Stewardship Plans, as well as a wide array of approved forestry practices: reforestation and afforestation; forest and agroforest improvement; windbreak and hedgerow establishment, maintenance, and renovation; soil and water protection and improvement; riparian and wetland protection and improvement; fisheries habitat enhancement; wildlife habitat enhancement; and forest recreation enhancement. Planting is authorized as a component of many of the practices to regenerate desirable species; to protect, restore, or improve wetlands and riparian areas; to improve water quality and fish habitat; to reduce streambank degradation; to improve or restore existing wildlife habitat; to create new wildlife habitat; to protect, restore, enhance, or maintain habitat for threatened and endangered species; to establish threatened and endangered flora species; to improve an area for recreation; and to protect, enhance, or restore aesthetic quality.

PROGRAMS FOR PLANTING DIVERSE SPECIES

Federal programs have long provided non-industrial private forest landowners with various types of forestry assistance. However, assistance has been limited primarily to soil and water conservation; timber, insect, and disease management. Programs have recognized, but not focused on, multi-purpose management and other forest uses, such as providing habitat for wildlife. Forestry assistance for landowners interested in planting diverse species for biodiversity projects has been limited.

While the Agricultural Conservation Program does include opportunities to plant diverse species, it is primarily a soil and water conservation program. County Agricultural and

Stabilization and Conservation Committees, with membership generally comprised of local agricultural growers, determine how cost-share funds are distributed in counties and which nationally approved practices are funded locally. Given limited program funding, Committees may de-emphasize practices they determine to be lower in priority for their county. Therefore, not all County Committees will approve forestry practices.

While the authorizing language for the Forestry Incentives Program does include statements regarding multi-purpose management of non-industrial private forest land and enhancing other forest resources, FIP is specifically aimed at producing timber. Generally, tree planting is authorized only for commercial species. Opportunities for planting diverse species are more limited, therefore, under FIP than other financial assistance programs. However, under appropriate *conditions*, FIP might be used to plant stands of species such as alder, cherry, walnut, or eucalyptus.

The Conservation Reserve Program has had limited application in the West, outside of our more arid areas, due to land eligibility requirements. To illustrate, in the State of California, the CRP tree planting practice has been used to assist landowners on only 884 acres since 1985 and in Oregon less than 2 percent of the total acres accepted into the CRP program have been planted to trees.

The Forest Stewardship Program and its companion Stewardship Incentive Program, highlight for the first time, the importance of managing forest land according to multiple resource stewardship principles. These two programs reflect our changing social values towards forest resources in the United States -- less commodity emphasis and more amenity values. To meet present and future demand for forest resources, they include a broad array of forest uses. The Forest Stewardship and the Stewardship Incentive Programs may be the most applicable to the biodiversity issue we're addressing this week. They encourage and benefit landowners interested in protecting, managing, and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, wetlands, recreational resources, and the aesthetic value of their forest lands, as well as the productivity of timber.

HOW THESE PROGRAMS AFFECT FOREST NURSERIES

How might these programs affect you? These are new programs and I can only speculate. Clearly, programs such as the Forest Stewardship Program and the Stewardship Incentive Program create greater opportunities for forest nurseries to lend their resources and expertise to wise forest stewardship by growing plant materials for a wide variety of natural resource uses.

In implementing the Forest Stewardship Program we are focusing on new partnerships to expand our traditional delivery system. The

vehicle for this expansion is the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee convened in each state to provide advice and recommendations to the State Forester concerning program planning, implementation, and overall coordination. In addition to various government agency representatives, the Committee must also include individuals representing Soil and Water Conservation Districts, private consulting foresters, environmental organizations, the forest products industry, forest landowners, land-trust organizations, conservation organizations, and any other appropriate interests. Through the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees you have an opportunity to influence these important programs. Participate in meetings, provide input, and get involved!

CONCLUSION

You folks out there growing the stock are the foundation of these programs. We need you involved as a key partner, because you know what can be grown successfully. These programs won't go anywhere without appropriate, high quality seed and seedlings. No trees, no planting, no programs.

For further information, please contact your state forestry agency or county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) office.