

SPECIAL REPORT



Here comes FLEP

FLEP Priorities

FLEP encourages the long-term sustainability of non-industrial private forestlands by providing:

1

**Financial assistance/
cost share**

Education

2

3

Technical assistance

FLEP Practices

“The Big 11” FLEP program practices are the underpinnings of FLEP delivery. All relate to long-term sustainability of the NIPF resource. Practices include:

- 1) Forest Stewardship Plan Development
- 2) Afforestation/Reforestation
- 3) Forest Stand Improvement
- 4) Agroforestry
- 5) Water Quality Improvement and Watershed Protection
- 6) Fish and Wildlife Habitat (but not fish)
- 7) Forest Health and Protection
- 8) Invasive Species Control
- 9) Fire and Catastrophic Risk Reduction
- 10) Fire and Catastrophic Event Rehabilitation
- 11) Special Practices

Time to help make FLEP a success

America’s conservation districts were among the partners that worked to make the Forest Land Enhancement Program part of the 2002 Farm Bill. Now it’s time to help make FLEP a success.

“FLEP and the forestry provisions in the Environmental Quality Enhancement Program show that there’s a bigger realization today of the value of private, nonindustrial forests to our country, to our freedom, to our health,” says Larry Payne, director of Cooperative Forestry for the USDA Forest Service. “We need to make these programs succeed.”

Hal Brockman’s advice on how conservation districts can do that is straightforward. Brockman, the national program manager, wrote the FLEP Interim Rule. He has worked with conservation districts in several capacities. His advice:

“Conservation districts should be represented in each state on the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee. That representative should keep the state association as well as all districts in the state informed about the decisions made by the committee and the state forester on how FLEP will function in the state,” Brockman says.

The importance of that involvement is underscored by comments from Bill Bennett of the Fayette County Soil and Water Conservation District in Iowa. Bennett, a Tree Farmer in northeast Iowa, represents conservation districts on the state’s Stewardship Coordinating Committee. “When they originally drew up the FLEP plan in Iowa, it didn’t say anything about conservation districts. They didn’t have a problem putting us in, but we had to have someone there from the districts to tell them that,” says Bennett, a former member of NACD’s Forest Resources Committee. As a result of his input, landowners in Iowa will be able to sign

up for FLEP in conservation district offices. Those district offices are familiar and comfortable points of entry for landowners in Iowa and across the country.

State foresters administer FLEP. Working with them and their committees can lead to district involvement in implementing FLEP.

“Where this relationship is good and functional, districts should work with the state forester and the committee to actively shape FLEP within the state and offer the services of the districts in the state to help implement any phase of the program,” Brockman says. “This could include technical or educational assistance as well as working with landowners to implement cost-share practices. States have the authority within the Interim Rule to share their FLEP resources with third parties to implement FLEP.”

The comment period on the Interim Rule recently completed its 60-day cycle.

The final rule should be ready for publication in the Federal Register by June of 2004. “The comments from the Interim Rule and the first year of experience will help us toward a final rule,” Brockman says.

Fiscal year 2003 funds were distributed to the Forest Service offices July 3. A total of \$20 million was distributed for 2003, based on federal allocation formulas. States have either completed or are completing their State Priority Plans, detailing how they plan to use 2003 funds, Brockman says. Those plans are reviewed by Forest Service regional personnel. Those states that have received their 2003 FLEP funds have started taking sign-ups, Brockman says. The Forest Service hoped to have Fiscal Year 2004 funds out by mid-October.

Fiscal year 2003 funds are multi-year funds, allowing for their carryover into subsequent years.



Facts & figures: What districts should know

What is FLEP?

The Forest Land Enhancement Program was authorized as part of the 2002 Farm Bill. It's the first time a forestry title has been part of a Farm Bill. FLEP is a landowner assistance program that provides cost-share funding, technical assistance and education to non-industrial private forest landowners to improve the health and productivity of their forestlands.

What about FLEP Funding?

\$100 million was authorized for program years 2002-2007. Fiscal year 2003 allocations totaled \$20 million. Also in FY 2003, \$20 million was transferred from FLEP to Forest Service firefighting accounts. Those funds may be restored by Congress. Allocations to states are based on national allocation criteria.

What role does the state forester play?

The state forester has a key role in administering FLEP. The state forester's State Stewardship Coordinating Committee establishes the state FLEP Priority Plan, which is reviewed by an appropriate Forest Service official. That plan determines how FLEP funds will be allocated in each state. The state forestry agency or its representative also evaluates management plans submitted by landowners and approves them for participation in FLEP.

What should conservation districts do?

Districts should make sure that they are represented on the State Stewardship Coordinating Committee. Conservation district officials or a representative from the state conservation district association should be active on the Stewardship Committee. The representative(s) should regularly communicate to districts about Stewardship Committee activities. State foresters are responsible for delivering a wide range of forestry programs. It's important for districts to have good communication with their state foresters. One way to do that is to enter into formal agreements with the state foresters. The agreements can outline responsibilities and potential areas for cooperation. Communication is the key. Get involved, stay involved.

Why should districts be interested in FLEP?

FLEP is all about good forest stewardship. Districts have similar goals. NACD's Forestry Activity Survey of 2000 clearly showed that a majority of America's conservation districts nationwide are involved in forestry activities. Districts are active in forestry education and technical assistance, and they deliver cost-share programs that have forestry elements. Education, technical assistance and cost-sharing are the three major FLEP priorities. The state foresters determine how FLEP is administered. Conservation districts can help the state forester by offering their assistance where it's appropriate.

What if districts don't have FLEP responsibilities in 2003?

Stay active. FLEP is funded through 2007. State priority plans may change and evolve. Districts, especially those with forestry programs and staffs, need to present themselves as willing and capable partners. At the very minimum, districts should be knowledgeable about FLEP today to steer landowners with inquiries in the right direction.

Does FLEP complement other Farm Bill programs?

Yes. Some states have already found ways to combine FLEP and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. EQIP priorities are set by the Natural Resources Conservation Service state conservationist, based on recommendations from Local Work Groups that are formed and chaired by conservation districts. Other programs, including the National Fire Plan, also dovetail with many of the goals of FLEP. Some conservation districts are already active in delivering Fire Plan programs.

What about FLEP acreage and dollar limits?

FLEP allows treatment of up to 1,000 acres per year per landowner, and variances of up to 5,000 acres, if significant public benefits will accrue. The aggregate payment to any one landowner through 2007 may not exceed \$100,000.

What practices are eligible for FLEP?

They are listed in the graphic on page 1.

Where can I find out more about FLEP?

The first step is to contact your state forestry agency. Other sources of information follow.

FLEP Contacts

NACD's Forestry Notes newsletter closely follows FLEP developments. The newsletter is distributed nationwide and available on NACD's Web site at www.nacdnet.org/forestrynotes. Current and past issues are archived there. The NACD Web site also has regular updates about FLEP and other Farm Bill programs.

NACD's Forestry Programs Office Director Bill Horvath oversees the agency's forestry programs. He can be reached at billhorvath@charter.net or 715-3341-9119.

The USDA State and Private Forestry Web site has current information on FLEP. It is located at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/flep.shtml>.

The National Association of State Foresters also closely follows FLEP. NASF's Web site is at www.stateforesters.org. Type "FLEP" into the search line for recent information about the program. The site also has

FLEP off and running: districts should be involved

Cooperation Keys Maryland Success

A memorandum of understanding signed by the Dorchester Soil and Water Conservation District, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources-Forest Service and the USDA Forest Service paved the way for FLEP cooperation in that state.

It led to the Dorchester District administering FLEP cost-share payments in Maryland, said Jim Newcomb, Dorchester district manager. "The DNR-Forest Service felt we could expedite payments to customers," said Newcomb, who has served as the conservation district representative on the State Stewardship Coordinating Committee. "We're proud of our role. It's important to always be looking for network building," he said. "One of the reasons we picked it up is we have so many landowners in the district managing timber."

Cooperation at the state level has proven beneficial to landowners, said Forest Stewardship Program Manager Patrick Meckley. The state's FLEP and Environmental Quality Incentives Program complement each other, thanks to ongoing interaction between State Forester Steven Koehn and Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist David Doss. The state EQIP program manager is a member of the State Stewardship Coordinating Committee, and the state forester is represented on the NRCS Technical Advisory Committee, which makes decisions about EQIP allocations.

In addition to the state's \$114,000 FLEP allocation, \$309,000, or 8.1 percent of the state's EQIP funding, has been directed to forestry cost-share practices, according to Meckley. The top FLEP cost-share priority is developing Stewardship Plans, with afforestation/reforestation, fish and wildlife and invasive species control other top practices. Top EQIP forestry practices are afforestation/reforestation, forest stand improvement and agroforestry.

Contact Newcomb at 410-228-5640.

Provide FLEP Education, says Virginia District Leader

As FLEP unfolds across the country, conservation districts are well suited to help state foresters deliver one of the three top national FLEP priorities: educa-

"FLEP absolutely, positively has to be a success."

*-Larry Payne,
Director Cooperative Forestry
USDA Forest Service*

tion.

So says Bob Dixon of the Peaks of Otter Soil and Water Conservation District in Virginia. Dixon, a member of NACD's Forest Resources Committee and a retired forester, says districts should make FLEP education part of their regular routines.

"When districts do field tours, it's a good idea where appropriate to have a forestry stop," he says. The Peaks of Otter District does that. The Virginia Department of Forestry organizes and conducts the district's forestry field stop. "The program can be tailored to what type of forestry you have in the county. Make forestry a part of all your education programs," Dixon says.

FLEP is authorized throughout the life of the 2002 Farm Bill. Demand has outstripped supply in Virginia. The state was allocated \$146,000 in Fiscal Year 2003. "That lasted about two days," Dixon says.

Districts match up well with the FLEP education priority. NACD's Forestry Activity Survey of 2000 showed that responding districts provided more than 3,200 education programs annually, including general information, workshops, tours and other activities.

Contact Dixon at bdcdbed@worldnet.att.net.

Shelterbelts Get Attention in South Dakota

South Dakota's shelterbelts, like those in other Great Plains states, are in serious need of repair. That need emerged as the state's top practice priority, says Ray Sowers, state forester.

Of the state's \$100,000 FLEP allocation, \$75,000 went to cost-sharing for shelterbelt restoration projects. The state's conservation districts have provided input on the state forester's Stewardship Coordinating Committee and at the local

level, where they interact with the state's service foresters, Sowers says. If the state's FLEP allocation grows in future years, conservation districts will likely be called upon to deliver portions of FLEP, says Sowers, an advisor to NACD's Forest Resources Committee.

There's plenty of work to be done, too. "The Great Plains states are in tremendous need of replacing those old shelterbelts. We've done several studies showing that 85 percent of them are in very poor condition."

Districts across NACD's Northern Plains Region are already engaged in windbreak/shelterbelt work. One-hundred-sixty districts in the six-state region said they provide windbreak/shelterbelt services in NACD's Forestry Activity Survey of 2000.

Contact Sowers at ray.sowers@state.sd.us.

Serving as connectors in Rhode Island

Conservation districts have played the familiar role of connector in the early stages of FLEP delivery in Rhode Island, says State Forester Thomas Dupree. Districts help assure seamless delivery of Farm Bill programs, he says, and that's important because of efforts under way to connect FLEP and the Environmental Quality Enhancement Program. The Natural Resources Conservation Service administers EQIP. "Districts make that connection," he says, adding that districts are represented on both the state forester's Stewardship Coordinating Committee, which sets state FLEP priorities, and the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee, which plays a key role in developing state EQIP priorities.

The state has chosen development of Stewardship Plans as its top priority, with 50 percent cost-share available to landowners. There's high interest in Stewardship Plans in the state, especially since it has revised its Farm, Forest and Open Space Act. The new law provides for new and substantial reductions in property tax assessments for owners of forested land. The land must have a Stewardship Plan to qualify.

When the plans recommend forestry practices, the state hopes to connect with other programs, such as EQIP.

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Success

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"We're working closely with NRCS and State Conservationist Judy Doerner to make sure EQIP is set up to get practice work done," Dupree says.

Contact Thomas Dupree at tdupree@dem.state.ri.us.

Addressing fire with FLEP in Colorado

Colorado's two top FLEP priorities both address a major concern in the state: catastrophic wildfire. Colorado has been hard hit by large fires in recent years, including the 137,760-acre Hayman Fire of 2002.

Addressing fire is among the overriding principles of FLEP, and Colorado chose hazardous fuels reduction and forest health practices including thinning, insect control and diseased tree removal as its top priorities, says State Forester Jim Hubbard.

The state received a \$270,000 allotment, and 75 percent of the funding went to those practices. In an effort to address needs across the whole state, some FLEP funds were set aside for windbreak establishment on the plains in eastern Colorado.

"Without a doubt, our wildland fire hazard is the biggest problem, and it's related to the condition of the forest. FLEP certainly helps," Hubbard says.

Conservation districts are regularly informed about FLEP developments, and in turn are informing their local residents of its potential. Colorado districts have been involved in an array of fire-related activities, including restoration, education, volunteer training and studies of potential business opportunities for wood products derived from hazardous fuel reduction. In addition to FLEP, Hubbard says districts should state informed about competitive grant programs for hazardous fuels mitigation. Districts can and have applied for those grants.

Contact Hubbard at jhubbard@lamar.colostate.edu

Invasive species get attention in Connecticut

Addressing invasive plant issues is another of FLEP's overriding national principles, and Connecticut will use a portion of its \$178,000 allotment to do that, says Larry Rousseau. He is a district supervisor of the Northwest Conservation District (formerly Litchfield Conservation District)

in Connecticut.

Rousseau is a member of the state Stewardship Coordinating Committee and makes his living as a state service forester.

The plan for invasive species is to focus on woodlots that have grown up on old agricultural lands. These disturbed areas are more at risk from invasives. "We're looking at cost-sharing for control," he says. The Northwest district, comprised of parts of four counties, has a staff botanist able to offer advice to landowners.

About \$64,000 of the state's allotment will go to cost-sharing. Stewardship Plan development and updates will receive about \$18,000 in cost-share funds. The conservation district also works closely with the Connecticut Division of Forestry on educational activities, a key FLEP priority. They have jointly developed forestry workshops, and the district has provided meeting facilities for various gatherings. District newsletters also promote FLEP.

Other programs are being eyed for partnering with FLEP. That could include the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, which may provide cost-share opportunities to landowners who complete or update Stewardship Plans.

Contact Rousseau at 860-485-0226.

FLEP principles, district delivery

Seven principles guide the USDA Forest Service and state forestry agencies in delivery of the FLEP program. In the following text, the principles are displayed in italics. The indented text that follows each principle shows how America's conservation districts are already engaged in helping to address those principles and hints at ways for them to become involved with FLEP. The information on district activities comes primarily from NACD's Forestry Activity Survey of 2000.

- *Establish, manage, maintain, protect, enhance and restore NIPF lands.*

A majority of America's conservation districts nationwide report forestry activity.

- *Enhance the productivity of timber, habitat for flora and fauna, soil, water aid quality, wetlands and riparian buffers of these lands.*

Conservation districts are engaged in forestry activity that ranges from tree sales and tree planting services to providing technical assistance for installation of riparian buffers.

- *Assist owners and managers to more actively manage NIPF lands to enhance and sustain the long-term productivity of timber and non-timber forest resources.*

Hundreds of conservation districts nationwide provide forestry information and host or participate in forestry workshops and tours. Hundreds of districts also participate in the federal Forest Stewardship Program, most of often providing technical assistance to NIPF landowners.

- *Reduce the risk and help restore, recover and mitigate the damage to forests caused by fire, insects, invasive species, disease and damaging weather.*

Almost 800 districts responding to NACD's Forestry Activity Survey listed "insects and disease" as a major forest health and productivity concern. About 450 districts cited fire as a major concern. Districts are actively involved in addressing those issues at the local level.

- *Increase and enhance carbon sequestration opportunities.*

Conservation districts sell an estimated 28 million trees annually and often assist landowners in tree planting and maintenance. District programs that encourage riparian buffers on rural lands increase carbon sequestration in areas that provide the most potential for net gains in sequestration.

- *Enhance implementation of agroforestry practices.*

Nationwide, districts are directly involved in planning and installing a variety of agroforestry practices, including riparian buffers, windbreaks and silvopasture.

- *Encourage and leverage state, federal and local resource management expertise, financial assistance and education programs that support FLEP.*

America's 3,000 conservation districts, almost one for every county in the nation, are conservation leaders at the local level, providing education and technical assistance and helping to deliver an array of cost-sharing programs.