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**Message from Michigan:
Districts are Involved**

Forester Rick Lucas figures he has completed somewhere around 300 Forest Stewardship management plans in Michigan.

Working out of the Osceola-Lake and Mecosta conservation districts in the northwestern part of the Lower Peninsula, Lucas sees Forest Stewardship as a bedrock program. "I have always viewed Forest Stewardship as a priority, and my conservation district boards have, too."

Michigan is one of several states in the nation where districts partner with state foresters to write plans. The state funds foresters for districts under a Forestry Assistance Program operated through the Michigan Department of Agriculture. About 50 of the state's 82 counties are serviced.

The state is considering a program to provide a tax break for managed forest land, and that would require even more plan writing. Neighboring Wisconsin has Managed Forest Law that requires a Forest Stewardship plan. The state has more plans than any other in the nation.

"I'm a firm believer in having a management plan," says Lucas. "I tell a landowner to look at it as a road map. Here's where we are, where we want to go and how to get there."

Lucas knows that conservation districts are in a good position to promote Forest

Stewardship through their extensive local networks. "I promote it through conservation groups, Quality Deer Management, Whitetails Unlimited and other groups. I attend their meetings, and when it is explained, they are usually pretty receptive." He also makes frequent presentations in schools and works closely with the American Tree Farm System.

Conservation districts in Michigan have also developed relationships with local township treasurers, who include information on available conservation programs such as Forest Stewardship with tax receipts or bills. "That builds relationships with local townfolk." It also educates absentee landowners, and there are many in Lucas' territory, often living in population centers several hours away. "The overwhelming management goal is to manage the land for wildlife species," he says. "Timber management has always been a lower priority, however when people see it as a means to wildlife habitat enhancement, there's a lot more interest." Landowners are also increasingly interested in trails for hiking, skiing and other activities. Plan sizes vary widely, but they average about 80 acres.

Conservation districts in Michigan and other states are limited by rules meant to protect private sector consultants. Private consultants in states like Michigan and Minnesota are paid more to do plans under state formulas.

Districts are still involved, says Jim

Lemmerman, forester with the Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources. Some districts are now charging more for plan writing, and the work is still there.

In closing...

As we've seen, the Forest Stewardship Program has worked well across the country. With a bright new future honed by federal, state and local partners, it will address key resource concerns in a focused and accountable manner. The goal is an important one: sustainability for America's private forestlands. What's happening with the Forest Stewardship Program? Quite a bit, and that's a good thing.

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the Northeast Region. Most states are moving forward with work in this area in some manner.

Addressing state concerns about plans

At the state level, "strategic program delivery" caused some concerns that landowners once eligible would not qualify for a plan. "That is an issue, but we're not saying that a landowner who wants assistance won't be eligible. We do want to stress the fact that we have limited resources to impact what we're trying to achieve," Dalla Rosa says.

Alabama State Forester Tim Boyce has been involved with the program's evolution as chair of the National Association of State Foresters' Resource Management

Committee.

"Overall, I like the new guidelines. There will be some readjustments of where we were in the past, but the idea of targeting the money where the highest priority needs are in the state is a good one. Those areas are not mandated from the federal level. They're determined on the state level. We're not abandoning the idea that we can serve everybody, but we're trying to focus on where we can get the biggest bang for the buck."

Seeking continuity with other partners' programs, the Forest Service contracted with the Pinchot Institute for Conservation to compare Forest Stewardship plans to the requirements of major forest certification groups, with a goal of matching plan specifications and certification guidelines where possible.

Forest Stewardship Program Resources

Resources that can be accessed at the Cooperative Forestry Web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/>:

- Forest Stewardship Program National Standards and Guidelines, September 2005.
- Stewardship Handbook prepared by the National Association of State Foresters.
- National Survey of FSP participants.
- FSP Crosswalk and Standard Assessment
- Fact sheet on the Program

State foresters administer the FSP. To find contact information for your state forester, visit the National Association of State Foresters Web site at www.stateforesters.org.

NACD's Forestry Resources Web pages at <http://forestry.nacdnet.org/> provide information on a wide array of private lands forestry topics.

NACD's 2002 Special Report on the Forest Stewardship Program is on the web at <http://forestry.nacdnet.org/survey/StewardshipOpportunities.pdf>

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SPECIAL REPORT

What's New with the Forest Stewardship Program?

Popular Forest Service Program is Evolving

“What’s new with the Forest Stewardship Program?” The simple answer is “a lot.” Take some time with this Special Report, and that will become obvious.

With more than 240,000 management plans encompassing more than 27 million acres, Forest Stewardship is the flagship program of USDA Forest Service Cooperative Forestry. Forest Stewardship has been working since 1990 to assist private forest landowners to more actively manage their forest and related resources. It is popular with federal policy-makers, with state foresters who administer it, with professional foresters who write the plans and with local landowners who report high levels of plan implementation.

But while the program has many strengths, it has reached only a small percentage of private forestland in the country, and often in a scattered fashion. New program standards and guidelines will address that issue in an effort to improve program

accountability in the future.

How do conservation districts fit into the delivery system? It varies from state to state, depending on how state foresters structure their programs. We cite a couple of

examples in this report where districts are in the thick of plan writing and program administration. NACD’s Forestry Activity Survey of 2000 identified 636 conservation districts participating in the program, with more than 500 districts providing technical assistance.

Preparing plans is a state responsibility, but districts in some states cooperate with state forestry agencies to write plans. More than 300 districts reported that activity in the NACD survey. Districts also participate in outreach and education, which will receive more attention under new program standards and guidelines.

Forest Stewardship administration and activities are guided by the state forester’s Stewardship Coordinating Committee. Program guidelines call for soil and water conservation district representation on these committees. An NACD survey in 2002 showed districts are participating in most, but not all states. At this moment of change, districts should be at the table, helping to define state resource priorities. Their voice of local conservation is needed for wise state decisions.



Conservation district forester Rick Lucas (kneeling) works on forest health issues with Michigan landowners. Lucas writes Forest Stewardship Program plans with landowners while working out of the Osceola-Lake and Mecosta conservation districts in Michigan.

Pivotal Point for Enhancing Stewardship

Most of the people quoted in this report are proud of the Forest Stewardship Program, both where it has been and where it is going. Larry Payne is among them.

“It has been our bread-and-butter program in terms of helping landowners and making forests more sustainable,” says Payne, director of Cooperative Forestry with the USDA Forest Service. “I see this as a time of change, but we’re doing it with our partners, not to them.” An example: State forestry agencies have been engaged in piloting a GIS-based Spatial Analysis Project that will help shape Forest Stewardship’s future at the state level.

New National Standards and Guidelines adopted in September 2005 and a new program strategy are aimed at enhancing effectiveness and efficiency of the program and its accountability.

Defining key resources for program emphasis

Among the changes will be more emphasis on reaching landowners in important resource areas identified by states. Forest Stewardship will continue to be available

to other landowners, but states will be asked to focus attention on these resource areas.

“We’re at a pivotal point with the program, moving from first-come, first-served to a well-focused, defined standard,” says Karl Dalla Rosa, Forest Stewardship Program manager. “Forest Stewardship will be a much more focused, accountable and productive program that is hopefully going to enjoy even more support from the administration and Congress because of these changes,” adds Payne.

Under the new standards and guidelines, a statewide forest stewardship plan will identify a state’s forest resources and conditions that threaten the resources. This empowers the states to utilize the federal program to address state-based concerns. The Spatial Analysis Project will measure the impact of Forest Stewardship Program on forest resources across the landscape. GIS data layers are used to create a map that identifies areas of program focus. States can add layers that address state resource concerns. The project is evolving across the country after a four-state pilot in

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Checklist of What's New

- New National Standards and Guidelines were adopted this year. A new program strategy stresses strategically directing limited program resources.
- A Spatial Analysis Project is under way to measure impact of Forest Stewardship on forest resources across the landscape and to assist in strategic delivery of program.
- Stewardship is blending with other state and federal programs that provide cost-sharing or tax breaks.
- The program is meeting new resource challenges, including hurricanes and wildfires.
- In a recent report, 80 percent of landowners participating in Forest Stewardship said they were implementing plans. See a summary of findings in this Special Report.



What's Happening with Forest

We asked the question, and we learned: The Forest Stewardship Program is evolving in many ways across the country. Here's a look at what we found.

Spatial Analysis to Help Serve Private Land Needs

"We are finally able to track how we touch the land," says Barb Tormoehlen, Forest Stewardship Program coordinator for the 20-state Northeast Region. She is talking about the agency's Spatial Analysis Project and how it fits into new program guidelines and standards. The project was piloted in four Northeast Region states, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts and Missouri.

"Our strides in spatial analysis and display are the most significant changes in the way the program is being delivered since it began in 1990," says Tormoehlen. "Now we are able to show where the best benefits can be achieved - high, medium and low categories, which lead to designating the key resource areas in each state."

In addition to 12 common data layers that incorporate the federal perspective, states and their Stewardship Coordinating Committees will add other layers that reflect their resource concerns. It may be water quality concerns in one state, or fire in another. "With states running the programs themselves, the ownership is there," she says. "We talk about maximum flexibility with consistent methodology."

All but one state is at some stage of developing statewide resource assessments, even though the process has been voluntary. "Accountability is one of the key drivers of this," Tormoehlen says.

"Fifty-five percent of the forest land base is privately owned. If, in fact, the Forest Service mission is to insure sustainability for the nation's forests, we can't do that without focusing on private forests," she says.

Couple that with changing ownership of private forests across the country, and those providing services to landowners have some real challenges. She notes that in several states, landowners must have a minimum of 10 acres to qualify for Forest Stewardship. Yet a major demographic shift is toward small-tract ownership, often fewer than 10 acres. "People are craving

information. As we move forward, we are probably looking at the need to prepare one plan for multiple owners."

Colorado Rolls Up Its Sleeves with Help of Spatial Analysis

Colorado is nearing completion of its state-based Spatial Analysis Project. Jan Hackett of the Colorado State Forest Service thinks the tool will help state landowners in a variety of ways and extend the reach of the Forest Stewardship Program.

Hackett is landowner assistance coordinator and Forest Stewardship coordinator for the state. "For the Forest Stewardship Program, the only way to success is through collaboration, and the partnership starts with the Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee," she says. About 15 members serve on the Colorado committee. It has an important and continuing role in identifying and establishing state priorities. The committee includes membership from conservation districts and other agencies, private landowners and nongovernmental organizations.

Colorado has developed its GIS spatial analysis map to address federal and state strategic priorities. As might be expected in a state loaded with trees, state priorities include fire preparedness, prevention and insect disease control. But Colorado also has plains regions, where agroforestry practices are important. "One of the criticisms of spatial analysis is once we prioritize areas, we won't serve others. In no means is that going to be the case," Hackett says.

Spatial analysis will be a good tool for Forest Stewardship, but partnerships are equally important to achieve program goals, she says. Forest Stewardship provides technical assistance, but landowners often need cost-sharing to complete plans. One of the jobs of the Stewardship Coordinating Committee is to understand what tools are available. "We need to use the right tool for the need and work with our partners to use those tools."

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service "is becoming very important," she says. "That's why it's really important for us to

have conservation districts and NRCS at the table." More than \$500,000 of EQIP funds went to cost-sharing on forestry, agroforestry and post-fire rehabilitation in Colorado last year.

A major emphasis in fire-prone areas is development of community wildfire protection plans. Colorado is undertaking those efforts statewide and is piloting a project in which a homeowners group will tie a Forest Stewardship plan to a wildfire protection plan. Conservation districts are being encouraged by federal partners to become involved developing CWPPs.

Other programs that may help Forest Stewardship landowners achieve their goals include the Conservation Reserve Program, wildland-urban interface state fire assistance, the Emergency Watershed Program and various state programs that offer tax incentives or cost-sharing.

Colorado State Forest Service Boulder District Forester Cory Secher sees another big need. "Education and collaboration are what we need," says Secher.

Secher has worked with Forest Stewardship Program participant Bill Carpenter, who has accomplished his dream of using his 270-acre parcel for outdoor environmental education. The State Forest Service helped Carpenter develop a plan in 1986. It addressed his concerns about forest health, wildlife habitat and forage, reducing the risk of wildfire and aesthetics.

Carpenter developed an interpretive trail on his land. He had help from the State Forest Service, Shared Streams, Project Learning Tree, American Tree Farm Association and the USDA Forest Service. He hosted a grand opening Sept. 17.

Eleven signs on the trail provide information about a variety of forestry issues. Carpenter plans to make the trail available to the public on an appointment basis.

Changes in South Match with Outreach Opportunities

A new strategy in the Forest Stewardship Program calls for increased outreach and education. In the South, where forest resources are undergoing vast change, that's welcome, says David Hoge.

"The program is certainly a tool we can use for outreach and education to landown-



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ers,” says Hoge, rural forestry assistance program coordinator in the Forest Service’s Southern Region. There are more landowners to educate today than ever before in the region, which includes 14 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Declines in pulp and paper markets have reduced demand for small-diameter wood, and pulpwood prices have declined sharply. “That has an impact on landowner decisions. Some are not replanting,” Hoge says.

Big population increases and urban sprawl have increased development values on forested lands at a time when timber companies are selling off large blocks. “That certainly leads one to conclude that bigger forest tracts will be split into smaller segments and maybe developed,” he says.

New forest landowners have smaller tracts and are often interested in managing for goals other than commodities. “They own it for other esoteric reasons - wildlife, country living, aesthetics,” he says.

“So we have to tweak the program to reach that audience, too,” Hoge says. Traditionally, program focus in the South has been on large-tract landowners.

New program guidelines and standards will direct more emphasis to important resource areas designated by states, but plans will be offered in other areas, too. “We’ll try to put more emphasis on outreach and education for the important resource areas,” he says. That’s where conservation districts will be able to lend a hand, he adds.

New Partners Offer More Opportunities

With 550,000 members who have a passion for good wildlife habitat, the Wild Turkey Federation makes a natural partner for state forestry agencies, conservation districts and other partners.

“Forest Stewardship is a program we have been working on through private land outreach efforts for the past few years. We’ve really partnered with state forestry agencies and State and Private Forestry,” says Bryan Burhans, director of land management programs for the WTF. An example: “We’ve been partnering to put on landowner education workshops. Through that program, WTF has reached out and

affected 1.75 million acres.”

Conservation districts are natural partners for the Federation because they’re close to landowners on the local level, Burhans adds. He met this month with NACD Forest Resources Committee representatives to discuss how to implement an action plan based on a memorandum of understanding signed by the Federation and NACD.

A trend across the country is the change in management objectives of forest landowners. A growing number are most interested in wildlife habitat and related management objectives. “Most don’t understand that good forestry is necessary for wildlife management. That’s where it all starts. I talk to landowners all the time. I tell them that food plots are good, but if you don’t start with forestry, you’re wasting your time,” he says.

There’s another potential benefit from practicing good forestry: “If landowners can derive some profit from the land, they may stay and keep it in forestry, and the land may not be developed,” Burhans says.

Education and Outreach Elevated in New Guidelines

Alabama State Forester Tim Boyce keeps a close eye on private landowner forestry

programs at home and across the nation.

The chair of the National Association of State Foresters’ Forest Resources Management Committee sees the new direction for Forest Stewardship as mostly positive and is especially happy about the emphasis on outreach and education.

“Previously, we looked at Forest Stewardship as management plan writing guidelines. But the new guidelines stress the fact that education is as important in stewardship as technical assistance,” Boyce says. “The landowner has to be educated. Once the landowner wants that, you have the technical assistance to help.”

Boyce sees conservation districts as good places to reach out to landowners, something he has taken advantage of in delivering cost-sharing for forest reclamation in the wake of hurricanes. Districts are administering that effort in Alabama.

Alabama is home to the Treasure Forests Program, which served as model for development of Forest Stewardship. The state has nearly 2,000 landowners and 2 million acres in Treasure Forests. The vast majority have management plans, often because owners wanted to fit into Forest Stewardship.

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A field tour at landowner Boulder County landowner Bill Carpenter’s forest in September served as a grand opening for an interpretive trail, telling the story of achieving multiple goals under a Forest Stewardship plan. Colorado State Forestry Service Boulder District Field Forester Cory Secher speaks to the crowd at this stop. (Photo by Emaan Secher)