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privately owned. This includes 430 million acres of land that is owned by more than 10 million family forest owners. "This program is a critical tool to help ensure landowners are able to keep their land in working forest and also provide important public benefits."

In order to participate in the program, the state, working with the Forest Service and the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee (SFSCC), develops an assessment of need (AON). In the AON, the state documents the important forest resources and their threats, as well as how the FLP is important to the state. The AON also outlines the program goal(s) and priorities within the state, including identifying the areas that will be the geographic focus for the program.

Each state works with the SFSCC differently, but in general the Committee (or an FLP subcommittee) works with the state to develop the AON and reviews and ranks potential FLP projects, for final approval by the state.

To qualify for the program, first, the land must be within the geographic priority area identified in the state's AON. If it is within a focus area, the landowner then submits an application to the state for consideration by the SFSCC. If both the SFSCC and the state identify it as a top priority project, then, the proposal advances to consideration in Washington, D.C., where a select number of Forest Legacy projects are chosen. Ideally, a

successful Forest Legacy project will show the threat of nearby development or subdivision, have important ecological, economic, and social attributes, and is part of a larger land conservation effort, including adjacent to already protect land such as state or federal forest lands.

Dee Sessions, the Forest Service's regions 1 and 4 (Northern and Intermountain) coordinator for Forest Legacy, believes that the program sounds more involved to most landowners than it really is.

"The initial concept of it might be complicated," says Sessions, "but once you get to know the program it isn't so complicated."

Another thing landowners might not understand about adding a conservation easement to their property, Sessions says, is that they still retain control of their property.

"What is a conservation easement? A lot of people have this misconception that it's the government taking away a landowner's rights. That just isn't the case," says Sessions.

As much as those factors can be misunderstood, Forest Legacy has still realized great success throughout the country. It now boasts involvement by 46 states and territories, each of which needs to complete an AON before accepting proposals from citizens within the state.

The reason the program has found its wings in state and federal government, says Forest Service's Director of Cooperative

Forestry Larry Payne, is because of its bipartisan support from lawmakers.

"It's one of those white hat, highly supported programs that congressional members from both parties, Federal and state, just love because it's their way of making a difference in preserving a working forest," says Payne.

Because of that bi-partisan support the program has received an increase in funding in most of the years since 1996. The reason for the increase had to do with an amendment at that time which allowed states to hold the easements on the land rather than the federal government.

"That was a significant turning point in the program," says Conant. "Typically, landowners are more comfortable working with the state and local government rather than the federal government."

According to Conant, as the program started to gain momentum, key land trusts and conservation organizations became more interested in Forest Legacy. "Through their efforts and the state efforts to promote the program, the budget has continued to grow," she says.

In fact, in President Bush's FY 2007 budget, Forest Legacy was allotted more than \$61 million, or roughly \$5 million more than it had to work with in 2006. In other words, the Forest Legacy Program is gaining steam even in this time of tight federal budgets.



Forest Legacy Program Resources

One thing that will help districts become more involved with the USDA Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program is contact with state and regional coordinators who can offer assistance. Following are resources that districts can use to get better acquainted with the program and the people behind it.

FLP Web site:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/flp.shtml>

Forest Legacy Program Implementation

Guidelines of 2003:

http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/library/flp_guidelines.pdf

A listing of regional and state coordinators:

http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/library/flp_all_contacts.pdf

Forest Stewardship Program website:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/fsp.shtml>

NACD Forestry Notes

"What's new with the Forest Stewardship Program?"

<http://forestry.nacdnet.org/forestrynotes/>

Dec05/FSP-SpecialReport.htm

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Districts can have an impact

Forest Legacy: A Brief History of the Program

Since 1992, when it was first funded, the USDA Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program (FLP or Forest Legacy) has used conservation easements and fee acquisition with willing sellers to help protect approximately 1.15 million acres of forest land.

Most FLP projects conserve land through the use of conservation easements, which allows the land to remain in private ownership. These private forests provide a variety of important goods and services to the public, including quality drinking water, wildlife habitat, timber and non-timber products, and recreation, though each project has its own unique characteristics.



The program is administered through the USDA Forest Service in cooperation with states. Through Forest Legacy, landowners receive financial assistance to protect environmentally important forest areas that are threatened by subdivision or conversion to non-forest uses. The federal government may fund up to 75 percent of project costs, with at least 25 percent coming from private, state or local sources. High market value for those privately owned parcels, and increasing property tax costs are sometimes tempting reasons for landowners to sell to

developers; Forest Legacy is an incentive to conserve the land.

“When people drive around the country they enjoy seeing undeveloped forest land and they probably don't realize that most of it is privately owned and would look dramatically different if those properties were subdivided and developed,” says Kathryn Conant, the Forest Service's national coordinator for the Forest Legacy program. To illustrate Conant's point, more than 50 percent of America's forests are

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(Top photo) A Carbon River Forest Legacy project in Western Washington State. (Bottom photo) Forest Legacy Program managers visit Trout Pond Forest Legacy project in New Hampshire.

Conservation Districts and RC&Ds should be involved

The Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is one that has enjoyed much success since it was added to the 1990 Farm Bill. One area where state and national leaders feel it can become more successful, however, is through building partnerships with conservation districts and RC&Ds in each state. Conservationists within those organizations have the potential to become valuable links to landowners, and help guide proposals through the evaluation process.

Larry Payne, Director of Cooperative Forestry for the Forest Service, believes there is more involved here than just potential. According to Payne, being an advocate and educator of FLP is something districts are responsible for doing.

“I have a deep belief that conservation districts are the first line of action for conservation in America,” says Payne.

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What Districts Can Do To help

Interested in working with the Forest Legacy Program (FLP) in your state? Here are several ways in which districts can be of help:

• Educate landowners

As popular as Forest Legacy has become, there are many landowners with the potential to add a conservation easement who are unaware of the program and its benefits

• Be a facilitator

Districts can help landowners locate sources of funding or sources of technical assistance for developing stewardship plans

• Join your State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee

What better way to get involved than to become involved in the Forest Legacy decision-making body for your state

• Communicate with representatives

Tell them about the program's importance and also about projects in their state that may be coming up soon for approval

• Help the landowner meet FLP requirements

Inquire about the monitoring process, or about helping the landowner meet public access requirements



Districts Help Forest Legacy in Variety of Ways

Conservation districts around the country can become involved with the USDA Forest Services's Forest Legacy Program (FLP or Forest Legacy) and accomplish local resource goals in the process. There is evidence from states across the country that districts can and do play a partnering role in Forest Legacy. Here are examples of district activities:

A key piece of the puzzle in Montana (Blackfoot Challenge)

In the early 1990s, the Blackfoot Challenge was formed by several Montana conservation organizations in an attempt to "maintain a rural lifestyle in the Blackfoot River watershed." The Challenge set a goal to protect 88,000 acres of working land in the region. Today the group has secured 52,000 of those acres, with the Forest Legacy Program contributing \$4.5 million to the initiative.

According to Jim Stone, the chairman of the Challenge and the treasurer of the North Powell Conservation District, the Forest Legacy Program has been a big help to the group's efforts in reaching their goal. "It's all part of the puzzle," says Stone. "Any money that's available to fit into that puzzle we're after. Legacy fits into that."

Stone says North Powell has been one of the many important partners that allow work to get done on the ground. The district works with other agencies, such as The Nature Conservancy, US Fish and Wildlife, and BLM, to meet the goals set forth.

"It's about doing the right thing for the watershed," says Stone. "On any day the district might be the lead on a given project. We're about education more than anything else."



The North Powell Conservation District in Montana is an important partner in the Blackfoot Challenge (Traci Bignell photo).

Serving on the Stewardship Committee in Alaska

Hans Klausner had not been with the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District long before he received a phone call from the executive director of the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts, asking him if he would be willing to represent the district on the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee. Klausner jumped at the opportunity.

"It brings the cooperators to a body that makes decisions statewide," says Klausner. "Through (Homer's) position on that council, we can bring the needs and problems of landowners to the state forestry department. In that capacity is how I became most familiar with the Forest Legacy Program."

In 2004, the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust proposed a Legacy plan that would adjoin a 360-acre experimental forest, managed by Homer SWCD through the Division of Forestry, and more than 200 acres of federal forest land. "It's one of the last areas that is fairly contiguous and that's primarily due to an active role taken by the landowners," says Klausner. The proposal was approved and Klausner was asked to serve a role on the Land Trust. Now he has been able to bring the two organizations together, and has plans to pull resources from both to better the Legacy plan.

"The marriage of the two organizations is a very symbiotic relationship where they can trust each other to do quality work," says Klausner.

According to Klausner, Forest Legacy is a good fit for Alaska for the same reasons it is a good fit in the lower 48 states.

"I think what the Forest Legacy Program provides to areas such as this one is some future benefit to having intact forest ecosystems near communities that (a) utilize them for forest products, (b) utilize them for non-traditional forest products such as berries and mushrooms, and (c) utilize them for forest recreation," he says.

Helping to prepare a proposal in Washington

Washington landowner Steve Wilson attended a symposium in February 2005 on conservation easements. There he first learned about Forest Legacy. It seemed

like a perfect fit for the 1,300 acres of forest land he had accumulated and been trying to shield from development.

"My main mission over the last 30 years has been trying to buy as much adjoining land to keep development away from the two valleys located around my property," says Wilson. "Unfortunately, I've also gotten myself deeply into debt."

Wilson worked with the staff members from the Pend Oreille Conservation District to help him develop a proposal, which included a detailed power point presentation. Because most of the staff's time was already committed to other projects, several members volunteered after-hour time to complete the presentation.

"I think it's difficult for a landowner to do this on their own," says Wilson. "I received a lot of help from the district. They have the equipment and the people with the expertise to help put together the proposal. That was absolutely essential for me to do this."

Last year Wilson was chosen as the state's No. 2 Forest Legacy project. The FLP in Washington has focused on industrial lands, and the Wilson project is the state's first family forest owner proposed FLP project. Wilson did not receive federal funding but plans to continue to try to get his land enrolled in Forest Legacy.

"(Forest Legacy) does a few things for me," says Wilson. "It permanently keeps development away from my property. It's designed for working lands. It encourages the landowner to work the forest. It would also give me some funds to pay those debts off."

"This ties in to what I've been trying to accomplish all of these years."

RC&Ds do their part, too

In Massachusetts, the Berkshire-Pioneer RC&D received third party funds from the state in the years 2002, 2003, and 2004 for appraisal work and to help to contract out work with other partners. The Pilgrim RC&D was on the original Massachusetts Forest Legacy Committee which helped establish the Massachusetts Assessment of Need (the planning document for FLP within the state).

To date, Massachusetts has enrolled approximately 4,000 acres of its privately owned forest land into the Forest Legacy Program.

Have a Forest Legacy success story to share? Contact Mike Beacom at 715/824-6091, or msbeacom@gmail.com.



Districts and RC&Ds should get involved ... cont. from page 1

“Sometimes if a conservation districts doesn’t see a dollar in it for them they don’t want to do it. But I think they have a shared responsibility, a calling to work with private landowners in their area. If that’s the case, and I think it is, then they need to be aware of all of the programs and tools available to private landowners.”

In fact, Payne feels conservation districts can play a role at several levels.

“Conservation districts, through their state association, should do their best to have a representative on the State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee. Then they would be one of the voices in the state for which projects move forward for national funding,” says Payne.

“There is also a place for them to get directly involved, and that’s identifying parcels of land where there is a big advantage for having a conservation easement. They can be a facilitator.”

After educating landowners on the availability and plausibility of the program, districts can then offer landowners assistance in helping to organize a land conservation proposal that the landowner will put in front of a State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee, and ultimately a review panel at the national level. Without a well-organized, attractive proposal, that project may rank behind other projects in his/her state. Districts many times have the technology and resources to help develop such a presentation.

Another requirement of Forest Legacy is that 25 percent of the funding come from state, local, or other non-Federal sources, through either cash, donation, or in-kind services. Districts have the local ties necessary to act as a facilitator in this regard and help put a landowner in touch with adequate funding.

If funding is granted from the federal level, the district can help monitor the progress of the plan. According to Kathryn Conant, the USDA Forest Service’s national coordinator for FLP, this is one phase of the process where districts can secure money to help offset time and resource costs.

“Other partners can help facilitate getting the project implemented - assisting with the development of a forest stewardship plan, the monitoring protocols, developing baseline data - and conservation districts could enter into agreements with the state to do the monitoring,” says Conant. “Because conservation districts are on-the-ground, local organizations, landowners would likely be more willing to work with them than larger governments.”

In Maine, where Forest Legacy has recorded more acres than any other state, districts have yet to play much of a role in the success, says Ralph Knoll, chair of the Maine Forest Legacy Committee. But that doesn’t mean there isn’t plenty of room for their involvement, he says.

“The nature of these Legacy projects has been such that they’re decided ahead of time. There’s just not a lot of folks involved in the initial stage,” says Knoll. “I think districts can have a role once it moves to the legislative process. At that stage, the more folks we can bring on board, the better off (the program) will be.”

Dee Sessions serves as the Forest Legacy coordinator for the Forest Service’s regions 1 and 4, Northern and Intermountain Regions. Sessions believes a strong stewardship plan carried out is vital to a strong FLP proposal.

“One of the key ties to the Forest Legacy Program is that it has to have a stewardship plan,” says Sessions. “That’s where I can see districts being a big help.”

Sessions encourages districts to inform senators and representatives how important it is to maintain private forests in this country. He and Payne agree that spending time informing members of congress is important to the success of the Forest Legacy program in each state.

“Conservation districts can provide the local and national support for that project that is going through the process,” says

Payne. “They can make sure their representatives and senators know that this project from their own backyard is working its way up through the congressional funding system.”

In Massachusetts, RC&Ds have played a small role in the program. The state has six sponsored areas for FLP, and may add two more soon. Each of those areas needs a local sponsor and someone to make landowners aware of the program, two things the RC&Ds can do, suggests Massachusetts Forest Legacy coordinator Mike Fleming.

“The RC&Ds could become sponsors, or serve as partners to those sponsors,” says Fleming. “They could help by working with landowners to encourage them to get involved with Legacy, or just to make (landowners) aware of the program. It’s the awareness that’s important.”

It is apparent that there is a need for local help for FLP. Districts are excellent resources for several of those stages.

“There are great opportunities for conservation districts throughout the entire process,” says Conant.

And Forest Legacy will offer the district rewards, too. Says Payne, “Maybe as conservation districts are looking at the whole landscape around their community - whether it’s tourism, viewing, or outdoor recreation, or wildlife habitat - this program could be an important tool to help complete the picture.”

