

Stewardship ... continued from front page

stewardship best, we really need to tell how stewardship is contributing to leading landowners to other programs.” EQIP, WHIP and CRP are most common, and landowners with a stewardship plan can become eligible for tax and certification programs in some states.

In December, a team of researchers began developing a survey and organizing focus groups to gain a better understanding for the indirect benefits the program provides; eventually, Forest Service leaders will share those findings nationally. The “Evaluation of the Effectiveness and Reach of the Educational Programs and Technical Assistance Activities of the U.S. Forest Service, Forest Stewardship Program” is being conducted by the Forest Service with help from the University of Massachusetts Family Forest Research Center. The researchers will look at the program over the past five years, focusing mostly on those activities common to all regions of the country.

Shifting to landscape-scale stewardship

The all-lands approach USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack launched in 2009 has spread throughout the Forest Service and will now be implemented by Forest Stewardship leaders. In actuality, the program’s 2004 Spatial Analysis Program was already looking at tackling broader landscapes through the use of GIS-based data to identify priority areas within each state.

Now the Forest Stewardship Program intends to develop more landscape-scale and community-based projects, as well as pull more broad-based conservation into individual plans. The program will continue to serve individual landowners, but the more holistic approach will help it to achieve a broader set of goals.

Ray Abriel has worked for the Forest Service for more than three decades, most recently serving the upper northwest. He understands the need for landscape-scale stewardship.

“Up here, it’s hard not to be in a watershed where you have state lands, federal lands, national forest system lands, industry lands, family forest lands – it’s a potpourri of lands making up the watershed,” he says. “We can’t just focus on one property to cover these issues.”

Abriel points to salmon recovery as an example. In Washington, the salmon must travel from the ocean, through the cities and private lands before reaching the national forest in the high mountains. “All the work we do on national forest lands to create better fish habitat is for not if the fish can’t get up there, if they’re blocked down below,” he says.

Recently, Abriel was a witness to change. Every couple of months, the Forest Service holds a Regional Leadership Team meeting in the Pacific Northwest where Forest Service leaders gather, including Regional Forester Kent Connaughton and his executive team, regional directors and National Forest supervisors. In March, Connaughton invited the Oregon and Washington state foresters to the meeting, along with other key partners. “In my 20 years here I cannot recall when that’s happened before,” says Abriel. “The idea was to see what we can do to really start pulling together an all-lands approach.”

Oregon is working on revising its state forest action plan with Forest Service input, and follow up discussions for the group have been planned. Abriel sees it as proof that the all-lands approach to conservation is not a product of the times or of this administration. “From here on, regardless of what goes on around us, or above us, it’s about all lands,” says Abriel. “People on the ground realize that is the only way we’re going to make a difference.”

Most agree the state forest action plans are helping conservation leaders make the transition. The action plans offer state and local forest land priorities for national leaders to target. “If we continue to leverage those and stress the importance of them, they can make all the difference,” says Dalla Rosa.

“My worry is that if we don’t do that, they’ll be put on a shelf collecting dust and will be one more planning exercise that didn’t translate a lot.”

In every area of the country there are areas of greater need, and the action plans will help Forest Stewardship leaders determine where to concentrate their efforts.

“All properties are not created equally,” says Mike Huneke, Forest Stewardship Manager for the Forest Service’s Northeastern Area. “Some have greater conservation value, or greater value to society, than others.” Huneke points to the Catskills in central New York, a project the Forest Service has been studying for years. “Nearly nine million people are deriving their drinking water from there. Targeting the stewardship dollar and the effort where we can achieve the greater good is what the state strategies were all about.”

The question now, says Huneke, becomes “How can we use our authorities on the Stewardship Program to work in a different way and aggregate landowners in what we’re calling landscape stewardship?”

Looking toward 2020

The Forest Stewardship Program remains strong, even in the current economic climate. There is hope among its national and regional leaders that the FSP 20twenty strategy will help to address some of the program’s primary concerns and serve as a launching pad for a new era of forest management.

But if there is one common thread to all of the proposed changes and identified challenges – one thing that fits into each focus area – it’s a need for the Forest Service to leverage its many partners to help Forest Stewardship grow. Those relationships, above all else, will help FSP 20twenty accomplish its objectives. Whether that involves engaging with county and municipal governmental organizations and planning boards on land-use planning decisions, or working alongside the NASF Forest Resource Management Committee in developing new performance measures, partnerships are key.

Conservation districts are positioned to help with each challenge the program faces. Says Dalla Rosa, “The districts can help us identify where opportunities exist locally and can also help us leverage resources. Certainly they can help us get the word out to landowners.”

“With regard to this new model of a landscape-scale forest stewardship, getting landowners to buy into that approach is going to depend a lot on having their trust. A lot of landowners are distrustful of government and government programs, but they’ve developed relationships with districts and have faith in what districts provide them.”



FORESTRY NOTES: SPECIAL REPORT Forest Stewardship

More than just a plan

FSP 20twenty: Moving forward



Since its authorization in the 1990 Farm Bill, the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) has been responsible for the development of more than 350,000 forest management plans covering more than 40 million acres nationwide. The program is delivered to landowners through a far reaching network which includes forestry technical assistance providers, consultants, and non-profit partners.

Most understand that the program is essential in addressing our most pressing forest resource concerns by assisting private landowners in a variety of ways: preparing them for financial incentive and property tax abatement programs; providing access to forest certification and new markets for forest products and ecosystem services; and creating forest sector jobs in rural communities. The program also helps conserve and restore farmland with the introduction of agroforestry practices.

But at a time when our private forest land is more vulnerable than ever, investment in the program has been curtailed. State and federal budgets have declined in recent years, and reduced staffing also has limited the program’s reach.

To counter this, the Forest Service and its state agency delivery partners constructed FSP 20twenty – a plan to guide Forest Stewardship into the next generation of landowners. The strategy outlines how the program will promote and support the State Forest Action Plans that were prepared by state forestry offices and required through the 2008 Farm Bill.

FSP 20twenty was also designed to address many of the obstacles Forest Stewardship leaders have identified within the program. The strategy will focus on: establishing partnerships to help communicate the program’s mission; developing new methods for measuring program performance; and incorporating a landscape-scale approach to future stewardship project work.

Creating a new image

Branding has long been a concern for the program. Forest Stewardship National Program Manager Karl Dalla Rosa acknowledges that because each state has its own

version of the program, many landowners and even partners are unaware Forest Stewardship is a national program. And while most link stewardship to a physical document (a plan), those guiding the program see it as a conservation ethic, not just a piece of paper.

“We haven’t done a very good job the last several years communicating what the Forest Stewardship Program is about and why it’s unique,” Dalla Rosa says. “Because of that I think the program has lost its unique identity or brand.”

Part of the solution is to encourage local and state partners, such as conservation districts, to help share information about the program with private landowners. “With limited funding and reduced staffing, it’s so difficult to get the one-on-one time with landowners needed to make a meaningful impact,” says Tim Mersmann, District Ranger for the Conecuh National Forest. “It is really important to coordinate with a network of partners and peer groups. We need as big of an army as we can build to get the word out on the importance of stewardship.”

Mersmann and other forestry leaders, including the Southern State Foresters, spent the past year drafting “Southern Perspectives for the Future of Forest Stewardship.” That document, along with the Northeastern Area’s Stewardship Project, helped program leaders re-evaluate Forest Stewardship on a national level.

Choosing a new measuring stick

Tracking performance is another key obstacle. Up to this point, the Forest Stewardship Program has been measured primarily in terms of plans and acres. The program has racked up impressive totals in both categories, but those numbers alone do not tell the full story for what the program has accomplished.

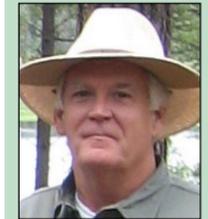
As suggested in “Southern Perspectives for the Future of Forest Stewardship,” the Forest Stewardship Program acts like mortar to integrate the bricks (other programs). But it’s difficult to show the value of only the mortar.

Says Mersmann, “To tell the story of

See 'Stewardship' on back page

Spread the word about stewardship

Conservation districts have shared the benefits of Forest Stewardship with landowners since the program’s introduction through the 1990 Farm Bill. Across the country, districts participate in a number of ways, whether it’s helping landowners shape stewardship plans or assisting with cost-share programs available only to those who have a plan.



Charles Holmes
NACD Forest RPG

It’s an easy sell. As I shared with congressional leaders in May, the program is an invaluable tool for the long-term management of our private non-industrial forest lands. On my land in Alabama, the program has been partially responsible for my being able to restore more than 700 acres of longleaf pine to its natural setting. I believe in Forest Stewardship.

Now the Forest Service needs our assistance to help the program extend its reach. As Forest Stewardship adopts an all-lands approach, it is critical that landowners understand the role they play within their local landscape. But faced with new challenges and budgetary restraints, the program needs its partners to help spread the word. Districts are well-positioned to lend a hand.

I encourage your district to participate. Establish relationships with your local and state forestry agencies and educate landowners on all that Forest Stewardship offers – benefits that stretch well beyond the implementation of the plan. With your help, Forest Stewardship can grow, spreading an ethic that will help preserve our private forest lands for future generations.

Charles Holmes
Chairman, NACD Forest RPG

Stewardship Resources

- » Forest Stewardship Program website
www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/fsp
- » Private Landowner Network
www.privatelandownernetwork.org
- » Forest Taxation
www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/tax
- » Women Owning Woodlands
www.womenowningwoodlands.net

- » Forest-a-syst
www.forestasyst.org
- » Landscape Stewardship
landscapestewardship.org
- » Landserver
www.landserver.org
- » Forest Matters
na.fs.fed.us/stewardship/newsltr/newsltr.shtm

5 reasons for districts to spread the word

For more than two decades the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) has helped landowners more effectively manage their forest land. In all, the program has completed more than 350,000 plans covering more than 40 million acres.

But beyond those numbers, Forest Stewardship provides much more. Here are five things conservation districts should know about the program, with comments from Forest Stewardship National Program Manager Karl Dalla Rosa:

1 It introduces landowners to a network of expertise

When a landowner develops a stewardship plan, it helps that person to connect with local forest experts in carrying out the plan. These relationships can prove invaluable to the landowner. Says Dalla Rosa, "What makes it different from the technical assistance provided through other programs? In my mind the big difference is that the Forest Stewardship Program continues to provide private forest landowners with technical expertise through this vast network of partners, including service foresters, state foresters, conservation districts, private consultants and others."

2 FSP is a gateway program

By itself, Forest Stewardship may only represent a single plan. But that plan opens the doors to a wealth of other opportunities for landowners. Says Dalla Rosa, "The Forest Stewardship plan provides landowners with access to a variety of cost-share programs,

tax abatement programs and other opportunities and incentives that they otherwise wouldn't have access to." The most widely accessed cost-share programs include EQIP, WHIP and CRP. Dalla Rosa adds that some states only offer tax incentive programs to those landowners who have a stewardship plan. And when biomass energy was being explored, the program was being looked upon as a way to offer assurance practices would be sustainable.

3 The program acts as an advocate for private forest land

Dalla Rosa admits that often when the Forest Service reviews policy documents or position papers, the private land component is buried or hard to identify. "Cooperative forestry is always trying hard to maintain awareness for why private forest land is important," he says. "And when we work with other agencies within the department – like FSA and NRCS, whose programs are tailored for farmers and ranchers – we're always reminding them that when they deliver those programs that a lot of private landowners are forest landowners."

4 It connects landowners to landscapes

For most of its existence, the program has helped individual landowners employ a better conservation ethic on their property. Really, though, it has accomplished far more, as those efforts have impacted the lands surrounding each participating landowner. Now the Forest Service is working with states and land-

owners in different ways to have a greater impact on focus landscape areas, including priority watersheds. "It's still ultimately about addressing the individual landowner's objectives," Dalla Rosa says, "but we're trying to get those landowners to see the role they play in the broader landscape."

5 Technological advancements made through the program benefit all

The Forest Stewardship Program continues to advance landscape assessment and spatial accomplishment tracking technologies to further focus program impact and illustrate outcomes. First with the Spatial Analysis Project, then WebDET, and most recently with SMART (Stewardship Mapping and Reporting Tool), the program is helping conservation leaders to identify and address priority areas. Ultimately, more accurate measuring and mapping systems leads to more effective land management – and hopefully more support for the program and the work of its partners.

FSP Timeline

Here are a few key dates in the history of the Forest Stewardship Program ...

1990 - The Forest Stewardship Program is authorized through the Farm Bill.

2004 - The Spatial Analysis Project launches, helping each state to deliver the Forest Stewardship Program. The ground-breaking effort uses a GIS-based strategic management tool to identify priority areas.

2009 - USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack introduces an all-lands approach to conservation.

2011 - The Forest Service, American Forest Foundation and NRCS develop a common management plan template to help landowners gain certification and program eligibility across agency boundaries.

2012 - The Forest Service enters into an agreement with the Forest Stewardship Council, providing further access to certification for landowners with Forest Stewardship Plans. (The Forest Service entered a similar agreement with the American Tree Farm System in 2010).

2012 - The Forest Service introduces FSP20Twenty, a campaign to promote and support the implementation of State Forest Action Plans in a way that can be measured clearly, consistently, and meaningfully at all levels.



For more than two decades, the Forest Stewardship Program has helped connect landowners to other conservation programs and practices, like the buffer planting pictured above.



SUCCESS STORIES

District helps stabilize stream banks

The streams that flow through Murley's Branch in northwestern Maryland carry some of the purest water in Allegany County. But when conservation leaders began to more closely inspect the watershed, they discovered parts of the stream bank needed repair, and enlisted a local district to help restore it to its natural condition.

The restoration work was part of the Town Creek Ecosystem Management Project, which began in 1994, with representatives from Allegany Soil Conservation District (SCD) and Bedford County Conservation District (Pennsylvania) on the steering committee.

"We chose Town Creek Watershed to look at large-scale land management issues," says Dan Hedderick, a forester with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Forest Service.

For one of the first major projects, Hedderick approached Allegany SCD about restoring a stream bank on a local landowner's property. DNR Forest Service secured funding from the Chesapeake Bay Trust and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and constructed a Forest Stewardship plan with the landowner (the district provides a portion of the cost for each management plan).

This particular stream in Murley's Branch flowed alongside what once was a cornfield in a flood plain. The previous landowner had installed a dike along the stream to keep the channel flowing when flooding

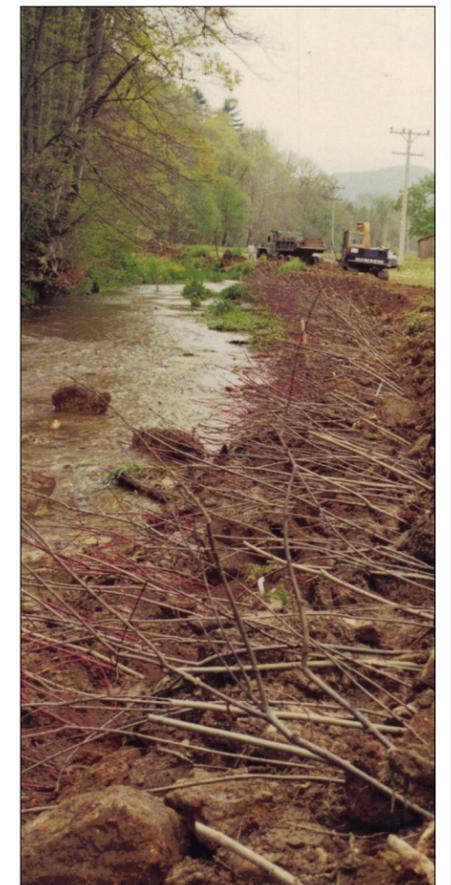
occurred. "Typically that approach doesn't work," says Craig Hartsock, Allegany SCD District Manager. "It didn't work in this case, either. The flood plain was losing a lot of sediment every time we had a storm event."

As part of its bioengineering work, the district hired a contractor to remove the dike and put rock veins back in the stream to restore the natural channels. The district then buried willow fascines along the stream bank walls (the bundles included streamco willow, black willow and red osier dogwood). After the district's work was finished, the Maryland DNR Forest Service planted a buffer next to the stream consisting of sycamore and black locust trees.

A few years later, the district again was asked to assist with the stream bank bioengineering design for a similar landowner project in Murley's Branch. "We've had a good relationship with our DNR forestry office," says Hartsock. "They have a lot of expertise to offer, and we have a lot of experience working with landowners."

According to Hartsock, Allegany SCD has assisted with more than \$3 million worth of stream bank restoration over the past decade.

For more information on this project, view the Town Creek Long-Range Planning Guide for Ecosystem Management at <http://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/download/towncreek.pdf>.



The Allegany County SWCD buried willow fascines as part of the stream bank restoration project.

Districts assist Stewardship in a variety of ways

Conservation districts in many states have engaged in a variety of Forest Stewardship Program projects, often involving several partners.

Here are a few examples for how districts have helped to promote the program.

PENNSYLVANIA & NEW JERSEY

A few years ago, conservation leaders from the Upper Delaware River watershed – including those from several conservation districts – came together with a mission to improve jurisdictional communication and collaboration to support sustainable communities and working landscapes throughout the watershed.

The project – Common Waters – assists forest landowners in the region in managing their lands, which in turn will preserve the water that flows downstream through the Delaware River. There are four cat-

egories that qualify for funding: Forest Stewardship plans; forest management practices related to water quality; conservation easement assistance; and portable timber bridge construction or purchase by loggers.

MINNESOTA

The Aitkin County SWCD recently created a partnership with neighboring St. John's Abbey to expand the country's only conservation district-led forest certification program. Thanks to the district's efforts, north central Minnesota landowners have an advantage when marketing timber harvested from their lands. To qualify for the program, landowners must have at least 10 acres of forestland and a stewardship plan; the district has helped landowners prepare plans since the mid-1990s.

OREGON

West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Forestry Specialist Michael Ahr encourages landowners with 10 or more acres of forestland to consider a forest stewardship plan. West Multnomah SWCD has been actively managing forest invasives and reducing the threats posed by wildfire; stewardship plans help those efforts.

Ahr uses a template designed by representatives from Oregon State University Extension, the Oregon Department of Forestry, NRCS, and the state's Small Woodlands Association. The uniform template satisfies NRCS requirements to apply for cost-share, and allows the landowner to become certified through American Tree Farm System. "And with a few additions it should get them certified under FSC standards," he adds.