

The Stewardship Project

USDA Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry



A Forest Stewardship Program Initiative

Description:

For the past 2 years, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry (NA S&PF) and the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters (NAASF) have been collaborating on a special initiative—the Stewardship Project. This initiative will develop tools and strategies to dramatically expand the influence and effectiveness of the collective forest stewardship efforts of both organizations over the next 10 years. State and Federal natural resource experts are developing exciting new tools that have the potential to make private forest land more sustainable and economically feasible to own.

The Project has a steering committee and five work groups. The work groups will help meet key objectives of the Stewardship Project, such as advancing landscape-scale stewardship by all stakeholders; providing seamless, effective assistance from the government; and making private forest land ownership more economically viable.

Key Issues:

- Most forest issues, such as invasive pests or forest products markets, span political and ownership boundaries.
- Smaller forest land parcels and limited operating budgets require stewardship initiatives that can reach multiple landowners rather than traditional one-on-one approaches to contacting landowners.
- While individual landowners can make important contributions to environmental health, landscape-level projects are most effective in improving overall forest sustainability.

Project Status:

The following work groups were created:

The **Landscape Scale Stewardship Work Group**, led by Andrew Arends, recently completed the *Draft Landscape Stewardship Guidance* and a brief *Landscape Stewardship Quick Start Guide*, both endorsed by the NAASF. Each document offers essential guidance on how to approach landscape-scale stewardship at the State level.

The **Communications and Marketing Work Group**, co-led by Andy Ware and Chuck Reger, completed a survey of States served by Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry and the District of Columbia to determine each State's communications capacity. Through a competitive process, the work group also contracted with a social marketing consultant for audience segmentation research. The survey results and focus group feedback provide valuable information for creating key messages and communications tools that resonate with target audiences.

The **Measures and Metrics Work Group**, led by Karen Bennett, drafted key outcomes with their associated measurements. Draft outcomes include reducing the rate of loss of private forest land; maintaining a healthy, productive, and resilient forest landscape; managing private forest lands sustainably; engaging communities; and increasing positive public attitudes towards sustainable management. These measures and metrics will provide a more accurate and compelling story of the Stewardship Program's influence.

The **Engaging Communities Work Group**, led by Thomas Worthley, has compiled examples of successful community engagement in forest stewardship efforts. The group is reviewing publications and literature on public engagement measurements.

The **Financial Viability Work Group**, co-led by Debbie Huff and Becca Brooke, is the newest group. Its members prepared a draft white paper outlining tax reform policy recommendations for the NAASF to consider. It has also outlined a 1-year action plan to lay the groundwork for establishing productive and lasting corporate partnerships.

Many steering committee members are also pursuing new approaches to more seamless government so that State and Federal agencies can work together more effectively to assist private landowners. The NA S&PF Director and the NAASF Chair participated in a discussion about opportunities for NA S&PF and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to collaborate on projects, including implementing State forest resource strategies. This meeting marks the first time that NA SPF and the NAASF have participated in a 20-state dialogue focused on enhancing the collaboration between these two Federal entities.

Future Direction:

Proposed Stewardship Projects include:

- Training cooperators to apply landscape-scale planning using the NAASF Landscape Stewardship Guide to achieve forest stewardship outcomes at a larger scale.
- Developing communications tools that help “cut through the clutter,” bringing forest stewardship concepts to the public in a meaningful way.
- Creating “how-to” guides that describe ways to approach and engage communities in forest stewardship and landscape-scale planning activities.
- Measuring forest stewardship accomplishments in a more meaningful and robust way.
- Designing a Web portal to organize forest stewardship data and information by user group.
- In 2010, eight grants were awarded to State and university partners to explore early concepts developed under the Stewardship Project, including approaches to landscape-scale stewardship, corporate partnering, engaging communities, and effective communications. NA S&PF will continue to provide ongoing support and assistance to the eight Stewardship Project grantees. NA S&PF will also share information about the lessons learned from these projects and their outcomes as well as transfer new technology as it becomes available.

Conclusions:

The Stewardship Project is a story of Federal, State, university, and nonprofit cooperation and teamwork. Together, NA S&PF and NAASF have assembled some of the best minds and most committed individuals to keeping forests as forests. This dialogue and cooperative effort will help all organizations achieve more meaningful future outcomes and have a greater positive impact on the landscape.

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