

## NRCS Joins Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership

### Growing Partnership Results in Better Use of Funds for Forestry

#### The Challenge

Managing forests sustainably can provide a multitude of benefits, including improved wildlife habitat and water quality. Technical and financial assistance are important tools that forest resource professionals use to promote sustainable forest management. Many landowners commit to keeping their land forested as they work with these professionals to bring their vision for their land to life.

In 2008, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) joined the Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership to improve wildlife habitat and water quality through sustainable forest management and bottomland forest restoration in the upper Midwest. However, decisions about how to allocate NRCS funds are made by local committees, which may not include a voice for sustainable forestry.

#### The Solution

The U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry has a strong, cooperative relationship with the NRCS and State forestry agencies to help raise local awareness of the importance of forest practices to sustainable agriculture and forestry. Forest resource professionals can help forest landowners use cost-share funds from the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for wildlife habitat, tree planting, forest improvement, and invasive plant control. Several State NRCS agencies are using novel ways to target EQIP funding for forestry practices

#### Resulting Benefits

**Illinois:** NRCS sets EQIP funding aside for forest management plans and practices. The local NRCS or Soil and Water Conservation District staff writes plans, which are then approved by the local Illinois DNR forester.

**Iowa:** NRCS recently began to target EQIP funds for forestry practices, allocating \$250,000 for projects and receiving an additional \$100,000 in project requests.

*EQIP funds for wildlife habitat, tree planting, forest improvement, and invasive plant control.*



*The Zumbro River watershed includes diverse woodlands and wildlife and is the target area for the NRCS Healthy Forest Reserve Program in Minnesota.*

**Missouri:** NRCS funded seven NRCS positions under a cooperative agreement with the Missouri Department of Conservation. The foresters work with local groups to raise the priority of forest practices in the use of EQIP funds, ultimately coordinating \$1.5 million in projects.

**Minnesota:** NRCS received \$980,000 in Fiscal Year 2008 for a Healthy Forest Reserve easement program to benefit threatened and endangered species. The Minnesota NRCS targeted Wabasha County and partnered with the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program.

**Wisconsin:** The Coon Creek watershed in southwestern Wisconsin area was once crippled by soil erosion, rendering once-productive farms unworkable. Landowners adopted soil conservation practices such as planting trees and removing cattle from woodlands, which gradually restored the area. In 2007, up to 12 inches of rain fell in 24 hours. The conservation practices helped prevent severe flooding.

#### Sharing Success

The sharing of State and Federal expertise in Upper Mississippi projects is providing valuable experience that will be needed as NRCS develops site plans for lands enrolled in the Floodplain Easement Program.

There are limited resources to inform forest landowners about their eligibility for NRCS cost-share program funding. Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry partnerships with other agencies on a variety of initiatives will help available resources to be used more efficiently.



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