

Montana Forest Stewardship Program: A Snapshot

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The proposed mission of the Montana Forest Stewardship Steering Committee (MFSSC) is to promote the health, viability, and longevity of Montana's nonindustrial forests through assuring private forest landowners access to accurate, practical and quality skills and knowledge necessary for the planned management of their forests and the natural resources therein.

Purpose

This paper is written to give the reader a quick, current overview of how and why the Forest Stewardship Program originated, how it is organized and delivered in Montana, what its components are and how they are interrelated, and the outcomes realized after twenty years of operation in the State.

Origins, Standards and Guidelines

Forty-five percent of all forestland in the United States, or 354 million acres, is under nonindustrial private ownership, and these forestlands contribute significantly to America's clean water and air, wildlife habitat, recreational resources and timber supplies. If landowners learn to manage their nonindustrial private forests (NIPF) effectively, they will achieve not only their own goals, but the country as a whole will benefit from well-managed natural resources. It is a win-win situation. Accordingly, the Forest Stewardship Program was authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (CFAA) and was eventually established in 1991. The Forest Stewardship Program is federally funded, and it provides technical assistance to nonindustrial private forest owners to encourage and enable active long-term forest management. A primary focus of this Program is to provide quality learning opportunities to landowners who voluntarily seek them. It also assists landowners in developing comprehensive, multi-resource management plans that provide the information needed to manage their forests for a variety of products and services according to the goals they have established for their own property. (USDA 2)

In Montana, the structural foundation of the Forest Stewardship Program is a series of five workshops that are offered each summer in venues across the State where both the number of privately owned forests and the extent of landowners' interest warrant them. Individuals registered for this Program are sent extensive pre-workshop print and video materials that provide them with background information and focal orientation to maximize their workshop success. Each workshop follows the same format: eight-hour sessions on Friday and Saturday, and a concluding eight-hour session the following Saturday. The purpose of the hiatus is to encourage attendees to use the information garnered, return home and evaluate the status, health, problems and needs of their own forests, and then sketch out the components of their own Forest Stewardship Plan which is completed and polished during the last Saturday session. Workshops are planned, organized and delivered under the aegis of Montana State University Extension Forestry faculty. In addition, other lecturers and advisors may include forestry professionals from wood products companies, logging and lumber companies, land trusts, University and Extension faculty, service foresters, Montana Department of Natural Resource and Conservation (DNRC), County Extension agents, conservation districts, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and entrepreneurs.

Steering Committee

The CFAA mandates that “each State Forester . . . must establish a State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee administered by the State Forester or designee thereof.” (USDA 1) The Montana Forest Stewardship Steering Committee (MFSSC) was created to meet this requirement. This Committee must include representation from a broad spectrum of entities with relevant interests in forest health and productivity such as forest landowners, conservation organizations, the state fish and wildlife agency, soil and water conservation districts, the Forest Service (FS), DNRC, tribal representatives and local government. Further, it “must be ongoing to address stewardship planning and implementation concerns and overall program coordination, not convened on a temporary basis.” (USDA 1) The primary functions of the Steering Committee are:

- To provide advice and recommendations to the State Forester concerning implementation of the Forest Stewardship Program, and other associated landowner assistance and cost-share programs.
- To provide assistance and recommendations concerning the development, implementation, and updating of the state-wide assessment and resource strategy. (USDA 1)

The MFSSC membership is comprised of “. . . twelve, at large, nonindustrial private forest landowners who are elected by the members of the MFSSC to one four-year term, three landowners each year . . . ” as well as “. . . an authorized representative from each member organization . . . ” (Bylaws) including the Forest Service, DNRC, NRCS, Montana Forest Owners Association, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, The Trust for Public Land, Montana Tree Farmers and MSU Extension Forestry.

Service Foresters

In Montana, a percentage of federal Forest Stewardship funds is used to pay a portion of the salaries of 16 service foresters who work under the DNRC. These forestry professionals, the majority of whom are in western Montana, provide technical assistance, educational resources, financial assistance and collaboration with other forestry agencies to Montana citizens who manage rural and urban forests. They are available for on-site, personalized consultations to forest communities and landowners. (DNRC)

Cost Share Programs

Well-managed forests benefit not only the landowner, but also the broader community and nation, by providing timber, resistance to wildfire, noxious weed control, riparian protection, sustainable forests and watershed areas, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. Such management does not come cheaply. It can require a huge investment of human and material resources to implement, and depending on the landowner’s goals, the payoff may take years, decades or even centuries to be realized. Long term land management accrues a public benefit as well. The health, vitality and longevity of the nation’s biological and natural resources directly impact the economy, public health and safety, and opportunities for future generations. Because of such public benefits from multiple resource management, federal cost share assistance to individual landowners became available. Initially these funds were administered by different agencies at different times and required different application procedures, all of which led to confusion and underutilization. The 2008 Farm Bill brought all of these cost share initiatives together under the National Resources and Conservation Service that now administers the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). (Kolb) Forest landowners may ask service foresters to help expedite and facilitate their participation in this program.

Ongoing Learning Opportunities

Forest Stewardship workshops provide landowners with basic skills and information as well as initial management plans. They cannot offer the breadth and depth of knowledge a landowner may want to develop about forests, but they tend to stimulate a felt need for more and continuing learning opportunities. The Master Forest Steward Program was developed and offered by MSU Extension Forestry to meet that need. This Program requires

participants to complete a total of ten courses, seven in a required core and three electives. The Forest Stewardship workshop is not a prerequisite but it is required for one to be graduated as a Master Forest Steward. (Montana Master) Extension Forestry also offers mini-college each fall on the UM campus. The mini-college is a one-day offering during which participants may study four different topics of interest.

State-Wide Assessment

The 2008 Farm Bill mandated that each state must complete a state-wide assessment and resource strategy within two years after its enactment in order to continue receiving funds under CFAA. The assessment and strategy must be updated at least every five years to assure that “. . . we are spending diminished dollars as strategically as possible and in a way that gives us our biggest ‘bang for the buck’.” (Rogers) “State Foresters were given the responsibility for assessing the sustainability of private forestlands in their states” (Shields) “A major component of the state-wide assessments and resource strategies is a spatial analysis of forest resource management threats and opportunities, to delineate priority landscape areas for delivering State and Private Forestry programs.” (Shields) “The Spatial Analysis Project (SAP) is a GIS-based strategic management tool that allows participating State forestry agencies to identify and spatially display important forest lands (rich in natural resources, vulnerable to threat), tracts currently under Forest Stewardship Plans, and areas of opportunity to focus future Forest Stewardship efforts.” (Shields) Dan Rogers, the DNRC project manager, led Montana’s statewide assessment, and in 2010 *Montana’s State Assessment of Forest Resources: Base Findings & GIS Methodology* was published. Subsequently the *Montana Statewide Forest Resource Strategy* was developed based upon the findings of this assessment.

Funding and Delivery of Services

The Montana DNRC receives federal partnership appropriations each year to conduct programs and business related to CFAA, which includes Forest Stewardship. Annual base funding to Stewardship has “ranged over the years from ~\$300k to ~\$150k. Some years the entire amount went to the Montana State University Extension Forestry planning workshop component; some years funding was split between education [workshops] and technical assistance [service foresters] All Forest Stewardship funds administered through the DNRC and MFSSC are federal pass-through; the State of Montana does not appropriate any non-federal funds for these programs.” (Rogers) The DNRC administers all CFAA programs in the state with the exception of Forest Legacy which is administered by Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Since the beginning of the economic recession in 2008, federal dollars for many programs, including Forest Stewardship, have been significantly reduced. Consequently, in 2010 the MFSSC initiated its own Development Subcommittee (DevCom) for the purpose of securing funding from grants and private donations to compensate for federal cutbacks. The DevCom was successful in meeting the shortfall during its first year. It continues to operate with the thought that continuing successes may establish the basis for a Montana Forest Stewardship endowment.

Outcomes of Forest Stewardship Program

“Since its establishment in 1991 through 1996, the Program nationally has produced more than 270,000 multi-resource management plans encompassing more than 31 million acres of nonindustrial private forest land” or almost 9% of all United States forestland under private ownership. (USDA 2)

“It is estimated that . . . 3.5 million acres . . . across Montana are currently owned by approximately 80,000 forest landowners, about half of whom own 10 acres or more. Land tax databases indicate there are more than 150,000 individual parcels of land classified as forest” (Kolb) Twenty years of Montana Forest Stewardship workshops have produced impressive participation results as the table below illustrates (Bertek).

Forest Stewardship Workshops Results by Calendar Year

	Workshops	Participants	Ownerships	Certified Plans	Certified Acres	Non-Certified Acres
1991	5	140	88	72	18,954	5,521
1992	9	338	214	122	29,897	107,754
1993	10	368	226	150	149,500	161,683
1994	10	222	141	105	75,393	8,945
1995	10	214	136	105	81,436	30,674
1996	10	232	148	106	54,809	2,999
1997	8	167	105	70	9,673	8,482
1998	5	130	90	87	7,902	-250
1999	6	166	110	94	23,817	3,941
2000	6	88	65	58	14,678	853
2001	5	95	72	59	22,514	551
2002	5	106	73	63	38,419	771
2003	5	88	58	51	15,883	1,053
2004	5	113	70	48	2,114	51,437
2005	5	80	50	36	8,470	7,563
2006	6	107	71	51	1,745	11,909
2007	5	87	47	29	2,585	3,327
2008	5	112	69	56	4,154	8,063
2009	5	77	52	42	3,769	163,308
2010	6	167	110	83	9,098	13,306
2011	5	77	56	36	1,734	3,191
2012	5	22	13			2,780

Forest Stewardship Program Totals

Workshops	Participants	Ownerships	Certified Plans	Certified Acres	Non-Certified Acres
141	3,196	2,064	1,523	576,543	597,861

Interest in Montana Forest Stewardship and a concomitant investment of human and material resources continue to increase. Under the leadership of the State Forester, the Steering Committee is being reorganized, as of Spring 2012, to include representation from a wider range of forest-related programs with a view to reaching and servicing even greater numbers of nonindustrial private forest landowners throughout Montana.

Works Cited

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Appendix A

The list below indicates some of the individuals in leadership positions with the Montana Forest Stewardship Program, Spring 2012.

Bertek, Cindy	Forest Stewardship Coordinator, MSU Extension Forestry, Missoula
Christianson, Michael	Chair, Montana Forest Stewardship Steering Committee, landowner, Bozeman
Harrington, Bob	State Forester, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Missoula
Kolb, Peter	Forestry Specialist, MSU Extension Forestry, Missoula
Rogers, Dan	Forestry Stewardship & Private Forestry Assistance Supervisor, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Missoula
Twer, Martin	Director, Master Forest Steward Program, MSU Extension Forestry, Missoula
Yule, Jamie	Vice-Chair, Montana Forest Stewardship Steering Committee, landowner, Missoula

Appendix B

Entities with interest in and contributions to Montana Forest Stewardship Program

(Adapted from an unpublished, undated chart by Peter Kolb)

Federal Government

Forest Service (FS), US Department of Agriculture. Responsible for administering national forests. Supports Forest Research Stations work with specialists' research on subjects such as grizzly bears, wildfire behavior, silviculture. Provides State and Private Forestry Assistance by funding educational and technical assistance to states, and specialized services of entomologists and pathologists.

Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS), US Department of Agriculture. Formerly called the Soil Conservation Service, the NRCS is now the main cost-share administrator for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), landowner technical assistance from local districts and some management plan assistance.

State Government

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). Provides service foresters for free consultations and technical assistance in preparing management plans. Assists with occasional cost share funds, wildfire protection, fire hazard reduction, stream management zone law, pest and pathogen survey.

Montana State Extension Forestry (MSUEF). Provides educational programs including Forest Stewardship workshops, Master Forest Steward program, Mini-college, and topics of special interest. Provides site visits, and serves as liaison to University of Montana College of Forestry and Conservation faculty.-

County Government

Conservation Districts (multiple counties). Provide forestry assistance in cooperation with DNRC and NRCS, as well as assistance in developing management plans.

County Extension Agricultural Agent, outreach of MSU Extension Service, Bozeman. Provides education on tree care, insects, and tree disease.

Non-Profit Organizations

Land Trusts. Providers/holders of non-development conservation easements. May provide some technical assistance to landowners and/or the Steering Committee. Associated with the Montana Association of Land Trusts.

Montana Forest Owners Association. A landowner policy/protection group that works to represent and protect forest landowners' rights in the State legislature. Associated with the National Woodland Owners Association.

Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation. Provides forest management educational programs for the general public. May provide some funding for the Forest Stewardship Program

Montana Tree Farm. The Montana branch of the national program funded by the American Forest Foundation. Provides assistance from certified volunteer professional foresters for management plan development. This organization is the only no-cost certifier of sustainable forest management which comes with a five-year technical site visit.

Private Enterprises

Consulting Foresters. Provide consulting services for a fee, help with management plans, and usually obtain better log sale income. Montana Logging Association. Loggers. Road building and tree harvesting information. Sawmill Foresters. Provide some free assistance for landowners with productive forests.