



Enhancing Penn's Woods with the Conservation Stewardship Program

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June 29, 2012

When William Penn founded the colony of Pennsylvania in 1681, he directed that one acre of trees should be retained for every five acres developed. Ninety percent of the colony was wooded in the 17th century. Today, 59 percent of "Penn's Woods" remains forested (more than 16 million acres) and 71 percent of that woodland is held by private forest landowners. An estimated one in eight Pennsylvania households owns at least one acre of forestland. Our forests provide all Pennsylvanians with multiple benefits; however, they also face many challenges.

Several federal programs provide forest landowners with the tools to keep their forests healthy and productive. Management practices like forest thinning, tree planting, integrated pest management and many more, have very real implications for the kinds of forests our children will inherit and whether the next generation will have healthy places to enjoy, hunt, fish, and grow timber. In many ways forestlands are the natural infrastructure of our communities and if we want our descendants to enjoy them, we will have to take care of them.

Many current owners of Penn's Woods are already wonderful stewards of their lands; the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is designed to reward them for the skillful tending of the woods and to encourage them to reach for even higher levels of conservation.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers CSP not only to farmers, but also to private forestland owners. CSP is a voluntary conservation program that offers annual payments for five years for maintaining and improving the level of conservation already practiced on private forestland. Conservation activities are offered to address resource concerns that will improve air quality, water quality, soil erosion and quality, wildlife habitat, and/or energy.

A forestland owner can sign up any size of woodland, as long as it is a functional woodlot. It is important, but not mandatory, to have a forest management plan to manage the woodlot. Forest management plans will identify activities that are needed to improve your forest stand. Several of the activities normally scheduled in forestland management plans will be compatible with the activities offered in CSP. Common activities offered include pest management; wildlife habitat management; timber management; creating additional wildlife habitat, such as shallow water areas; wildlife-friendly fencing; and riparian forested buffer improvement. Typical payments for forestland CSP contracts in Pennsylvania average \$8-12 per acre/per year for five years. A 40-acre contract will be about \$400 per year for a total of \$2,000.00.

For an applicant who is a beginning forestland owner, or is socially disadvantaged, the minimum yearly payment is \$1,000 per year for a total minimum five-year contract of \$5,000.00.

Applications are accepted in your local NRCS office year round. The typical ranking period cutoff date is January or February. All applications submitted from the last ranking period cut off will be ranked and may be offered a contract. Check the Pennsylvania NRCS website, www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov, for the most up-to-date information on all conservation programs, the signup process, and ranking dates for funding.



A downed tree can be used for wildlife habitat when left alone to rot.



A den tree can be used by small animals and birds for shelter in the forest.



Shallow areas can provide water for wildlife.