

Healthy Woods Start With a Plan

Manage What You Value, With Assistance From NRCS

Introduction

There are many reasons to enjoy woodlands—beauty, wildlife, hunting, timber, walking trails and much more. Getting all you want out of your land, while facing threats like disease and invasive species is why the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is here to provide assistance. A plan assists landowners in understanding what they have and want, while also identifying practices that support unique values.

The plan NRCS offers is called a Forest Management Plan (FMP). It is very similar to other popular plans including the Forest Stewardship, Tree Farm and Managed Forest Law (MFL) plans. In fact, these plans may qualify you to receive financial assistance through NRCS to develop a FMP.

What is a Forest Management Plan?

A Forest Management Plan is a gateway to understanding your woodlands health and potential. The FMP is a site-specific plan developed based on the landowner's management objectives and the professional expertise of a skilled forester to achieve long-term forest management goals. The NRCS administers the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which provides support for the development of FMPs in Wisconsin.

Management plans (including NRCS FMPs, Forest Stewardship Plans, Tree Farm Plans and others) are an extremely valuable tool for landowners and managers. They provide detailed information about species composition, potential harmful pests, other ecosystem components of the property and surrounding landscape and related opportunities and limitations. They provide a "road map" to achieve the landowner's goals in a cost-effective and strategic way, while protecting and enhancing wildlife habitat and other forest resources.

Additionally, by having a FMP, you may be eligible for further EQIP financial assistance for the implementation of conservation practices detailed in the plan. NRCS recognizes the value of FMPs and attempts to fund as many as possible.

The NRCS does not require landowners to perform practices scheduled in FMPs after their plan is completed. However, practices scheduled in FMPs must be followed if the property becomes enrolled in the MFL program. Therefore, landowners are highly encouraged to actively participate in the planning process with their forester.



FMPs must be written by a forester who is qualified as a Technical Service Provider (TSP) with NRCS in Wisconsin. While TSPs may use their own plan format, all FMPs must meet the same criteria. If the FMP will be used for entry into the Wisconsin MFL program, talk with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Forester for your county to discuss the program and its requirements. Find DNR Foresters using the Forestry Assistance Locator at www.dnr.wi.gov/fal/.



Application Process

The following is a step-by-step guide detailing the process to apply for EQIP funding to have a FMP developed:

(1) Establish Eligibility for USDA Programs

If this is the first time you have participated in USDA programs, you will need to make an appointment with the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) or NRCS at your local USDA Service Center to establish eligibility and farm records. Find your nearest Service Center at www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator.

Be ready to provide the following documentation:

- a. Control of the land you wish to enroll. Please provide a lease or copy of the deed to the property.
- b. If applying as an individual, please provide your Social Security Number and contact information. If applying as an entity or joint operation (e.g., LLC, Corporation, etc.), please provide documents that describe the entity or partnership, and establish signature authority (e.g., articles of incorporation, bylaws, partnership paperwork, etc.).



In order to apply for NRCS programs, individuals must complete eligibility requirements:

- a. Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Determination, Form AD-1026.
- b. Average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Statement, Form CCC-941 (to be eligible for NRCS programs, the applicant must meet certain AGI requirements).
- c. Farm Operation Plan, Form CCC-902. FSA will collect producer eligibility information about NRCS and FSA program customers. In order for FSA to properly complete CCC-902, be sure to communicate that you are completing this so

you can be in the EQIP program. Even if you have been in NRCS programs in the past, verify that you have this form completed correctly and in 'Determined' status.

- d. Member's Information for Entities and Joint Operations, Form CCC-901. Only required for establishing farm records for an entity, not needed for individuals. Note: All members of an entity must be listed on the CCC-901 and complete a CCC-941 reflecting their personal AGI.

You can find all available forms by clicking "Browse Forms" at <https://forms.sc.egov.usda.gov/eForms/>, or by visiting your local USDA Service Center. It takes time for the paperwork to be processed and additional information may be needed. Please start the process early to ensure your records and eligibility are current prior to any program sign-up deadlines.

(2) Applying for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Prior to program sign up deadline you will need to:

- a. Ensure your eligibility is up-to-date with the FSA office and you are listed as "owner" or "operator" on lands that you farm or manage.
- b. Complete and sign a Conservation Program Application, NRCS-CPA-1200.
- c. Review the Conservation Program Contract Appendix, NRCS-CPA-1202-CPC, which explains the terms and conditions of NRCS program contracts.
- d. Complete a Direct Deposit Form (SF-1199A). All NRCS program payments are made via direct deposit.

(3) Completing the Program Application and Contracting Process

Conservation Planners with the NRCS will guide you with the completion of the final application documents:

- a. Conservation Plan.
- b. Conservation Plan/Schedule of Operations.
- c. Application Ranking Summary.

If your application is selected for funding, you will need to sign a Conservation Program Contract, NRCS-CPA-1202.

IMPORTANT: Do not start any work until you have signed the Conservation Program Contract.

(4) Hiring a Technical Service Provider (TSP) to Prepare the Plan

To locate a qualified forester to write your FMP, either contact the local NRCS office or search on the NRCS Registry website:

- a. Visit <https://nrcs-sites.secure.force.com/FindaTSP>.
- b. From there, click on your state and county in the drop down lists.

- c. From the “Practice Code” drop down list, select “106– Forest Management Plan.” Click on “Apply Filters” at the bottom of the column to generate the list of TSPs.
- d. You can click the “View Resume” button next to any of the names to find out more about a TSP.
- e. When you contact a TSP, you may wish to inquire about references, rates, etc., to help you make an informed decision. Note: the cost of plans vary considerably, depending on the TSPs required travel, the condition and type of forestland you have and other factors. Incentive payments under this program are not intended to cover 100% of the cost. Regardless of what the TSP charges, NRCS reimburses you a flat rate. This rate may change from year to year.
- f. The TSP will develop the plan, and following the participants approval, submit it to the local NRCS office for review. IMPORTANT: Once the plan has been completed by the TSP, submitted to the NRCS for review, and certified as meeting the FMP criteria, the NRCS will issue payment to the participant. FMPs must be completed within 12 months of signing the CPA-1202 (Conservation Program Contract).



NRCS Forest Management Plan Criteria and Client Deliverables

(1) FMP Primary Objectives

The FMP will:

- a. Meet the client’s objectives.
- b. Meet NRCS quality criteria for the identified resource concern(s).
- c. Provide recommendations that comply with federal, state, tribal and local laws/regulations.

(2) Deliverables for the Client—a hard copy or electronic version of the plan that includes:

- a. Maps
- b. Preferred management alternatives.
- c. Other applicable items upon your request.

(3) Highlights of FMP Criteria

- a. TSP documentation of discussions on management with client.
- b. Client objectives.
- c. Location and plan map of parcel.
- d. Soils maps.
- e. Documentation of existing conditions.
- f. Inventory of vegetation (e.g., species composition, size, stocking, and health).
- g. Identification of resource concerns.
- h. Desired future conditions.
- i. Recommended forestry practices to achieve objectives.

The TSP will identify resource concerns based on an inventory to assess these concerns and opportunity for treatment. The inventory will typically include forest management stand boundaries, site index, basal area, species, size class, wood product potential, soil conditions, slopes, topography, natural and cultural features, roads, wildfire risk, risk of insect and disease infestation, fish and wildlife species and habitat elements, noxious and invasive species, water quality, and other important features as applicable.

Next Steps for Participant

Once your FMP is approved, you are ready to apply for forestry practices identified in the plan to meet your objectives. The EQIP application process is the same as above. Continue to work with foresters and NRCS planners to implement the practices in your plan that you choose to do. You are encouraged to implement as many as possible.

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