OVERVIEW

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a federal agency that emphasizes voluntary, science-based assistance to help private forest landowners. The NRCS promotes and informs private forest landowners about forestry practices that can improve growth, reduce risk, and improve forest health. Many of these practices can be cost-shared through Farm Bill programs.

HEALTHY FORESTS

Forest health is a very broad term. Many forests are both healthy and productive. However, a number of different concerns have been identified as major forestry problems in the west. These include fire and fuels, invasion of non-native and native pests, loss of biodiversity, air pollution, water quality and quantity, and degraded riparian forests.

Many forest stands have too many trees per acre (overstocked) or contain a disproportionate amount of shrubs in the understory. This competition for light, nutrients, and water leaves forests extremely susceptible to disease and insect damage, increases the risk of catastrophic fire, reduces productivity, and provides poor quality wildlife habitat as well as limited recreational opportunities. Other forests, for a number of reasons, have too few trees.

FUEL HAZARD REDUCTION

Forests and woodlands make up about 42 percent of California and half of that portion is in private ownership. Many of these acres are overstocked and at risk of wildfire damage. California and many of our neighboring states have experienced abnormally dry conditions. These adverse conditions have fueled severe wildfires that are challenging our natural resources.

Fire, a natural phenomenon, is a key to maintaining natural processes of most California ecosystems. Previously the majority of fires were of low intensity at a fairly short return interval that prevented the accumulation of large amounts of fuel. Under natural conditions, the more destructive wildfires of today were an exception and not the rule.

Destructive fires contribute to accelerated erosion/sedimentation, health hazards from smoke, property damage, lack of suitable habitat for wildlife, reduction of water quality/quantity, increased risk of flooding, and reduced recreational opportunities.

Present and past management activities have impacted a number of plant and animal species. Proper management of habitat provides shelter, cover, food, and transportation corridors for wild animals that inhabit an area during a portion of their life cycle.
HOW TO APPLY

Persons interested in participating in Farm Bill programs should contact their local NRCS field office. Applications may be submitted at any time during the year. Eligible projects will be evaluated, prioritized and selected for funding as budget allocations permit. Submitting an application does not obligate the landowner or the NRCS to the enrollment of property or any future expenditure of funds.

For more information on NRCS Farm Bill conservation programs, visit:

ASSISTANCE

NRCS conservationists can assist forest landowners with management decisions as well as providing technical and financial assistance to improve forest health and reduce the impacts of catastrophic wildfires.

In more than 75 years of assisting forest and woodland landowners, NRCS has assembled a body of technical standards to help producers address a large number of natural resource concerns. Forest conservation activities, such as those found in the right sidebar on this sheet, exemplify the type of practices for which NRCS provides technical and financial assistance.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program that promotes production and environmental stewardship as compatible goals. EQIP shares conservation costs with landowners to implement conservation practices on the landscape. This program has been used throughout California to help fund the type of forest conservation activities found on the right sidebar of this fact sheet. In addition, the Conservation Stewardship Program, a separate conservation program, can help forest landowners obtain even higher levels of environmental enhancements.

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