

RVCC PRIMER

From Ideas to Action:

A Guide to Funding and Authorities for Collaborative Restoration

RVCC
Rural Voices for
Conservation
COALITION



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to thank everyone who completed our online survey on federal programs and to all of our phone interviewees for their time, edits, and expertise. We would also like to extend a special thank you to those interviewees who agreed to be the 'experts' listed throughout this primer.

ABOUT RVCC

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) promotes new approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the rural West. We are committed to developing practical solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and the well-being of communities. We work together to improve issues that affect rural communities, public and private land management, and the continuation of a natural resource-based economy in the West, advocating for the inclusion of comprehensive community interests.

Wallowa Resources with Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer.

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This project was made possible through support provided by the United States Forest Service to the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition and Wallowa Resources, under the terms of Cooperative Agreement #16-CA-11132544-032 supporting an All Lands Learning Network.

Cover photo by Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

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“Individuals and organizations tend to think about the various authorities and tools as isolated one-off decisions...Before we think about changes or new authorities, we need to take a more holistic approach that achieves diverse outcomes using existing and underutilized tools.”

- Dylan Kruse, Sustainable Northwest

Overview

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For nearly 20 years, the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) has successfully advocated for the expansion and improvement of federal policies that support stewardship and restoration on public and private lands. An all lands approach to collaborative stewardship recognizes the social, ecological, and economic interdependence that exists regardless of property and management boundaries; and strategically targets the larger benefits that can be achieved when working together at broader scales.

There are currently dozens of programs and authorities that can enable this holistic approach to land stewardship. Yet through interviews and conversations with community practitioners, it became clear that few felt knowledgeable about the federal resources at their disposal or about navigating the agencies that administer them. Likewise, within federal agencies, existing tools and programs are often applied or interpreted inconsistently, leading to confusion about what is and is not possible.

This unfamiliarity and inconsistency, in combination with the increasing importance of implementing collaborative agreements, led RVCC to create this practitioner guidebook. We believe there is significant room for creativity, flexibility, and innovation within existing policies, programs, and authorities; and that leveraging programs and unlocking efficiencies will lead to improved outcomes.

This guidebook presents a menu of USDA Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) tools and programs available to implement land stewardship on public and private lands, as well

as insider tips and lessons learned. It is intended to increase understanding of the options for effective collaborative forest management. While not exhaustive, this primer represents many of the key tools and programs available.

METHODOLOGY

When this guidebook was first created in 2016, we used the following processes. We scanned the existing pool of federal programs, tools, and authorities related to collaborative natural resource management through a variety of lenses, and distilled existing knowledge and expertise into short “how-to” fact sheets. To gather information, we first surveyed our RVCC network participants to gauge understanding in the field around the various programs. We intentionally limited our focus to two federal agencies and focused primarily on forests. We then conducted dozens of interviews with program experts and community leaders, reviewed case studies, and summarized existing legislation, agency guidance and other materials. Finally, we developed the following fact sheets in consultation with program experts. We revised the guidebook in 2019 to 1) update information and experts, and 2) expand all sections, focused primarily on agreements. You will find two new programs and one new authority, as well as a greatly expanded exploration of types agreements. To provide this, we re-examined current agency guidance and webpages, and interviewed 13 key contacts to inform this process.

How to Use This Guide

This guidebook is intended to orient community-based practitioners, agency staff, and individuals to Forest Service and NRCS tools and programs available to implement land stewardship on public and private lands, while providing useful tips and ideas. Lessons were drawn from conversations with experienced collaborators and agency leaders. In order to orient readers to the two federal agencies, we include information and maps outlining their organizational structure and summary of their primary purpose.

After the agency overview, we discuss existing tools using the following breakdown:

- **Programs** that provide financial resources for project design and implementation (e.g. Conservation Innovation Grants and Regional Conservation Partnership Program)
- **Authorities** are approved by Congress and provide the legal justification for federal agencies to spend or accept money for a particular purpose
- **Agreements** formalize a relationship between parties and are the instruments most commonly used to implement the objectives of an authority or program.

Each section generally includes a summary of the program, authority or agreement, and information on how it works, how to apply, the role for partners, and tips. In several areas we've added an “ask an expert” section, complete with contact information for people who have used the program or authority successfully and are willing to share their lessons learned. We also created an easy-to-read spreadsheet with key deadlines, match requirements, and eligible applicants for the funding programs.

This guide is intended to be a starting place for learning about available tools, which may be subject to change over time. To learn more, contact your local agency offices or seek additional information online.

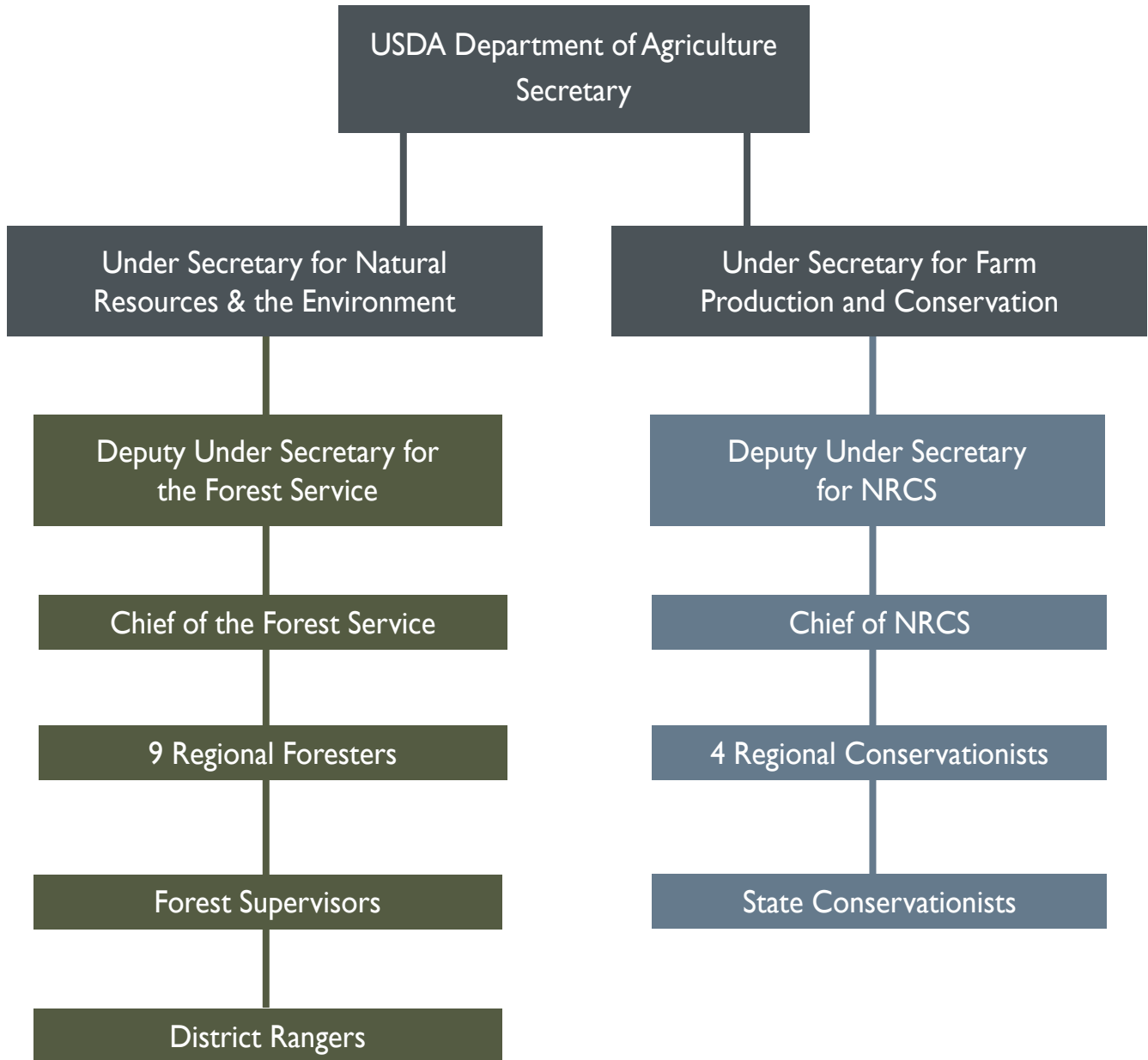


Photo Credit: Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership



Oregon landowner talks with NRCS soil conservationist.
Photo Credit: NRCS/Tracy Robillard

Agencies at a Glance



FOREST SERVICE

BACKGROUND

The Forest Service manages 193 million acres of federal lands within 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands. The agency also works with state and local entities to manage non-federal lands, conducts natural resource research, and promotes international land stewardship.

MISSION: Sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations."

EMPLOYEES: 30,000

REGIONS: 9 (there is no Region 7)

PRIMARY PROGRAM UNITS

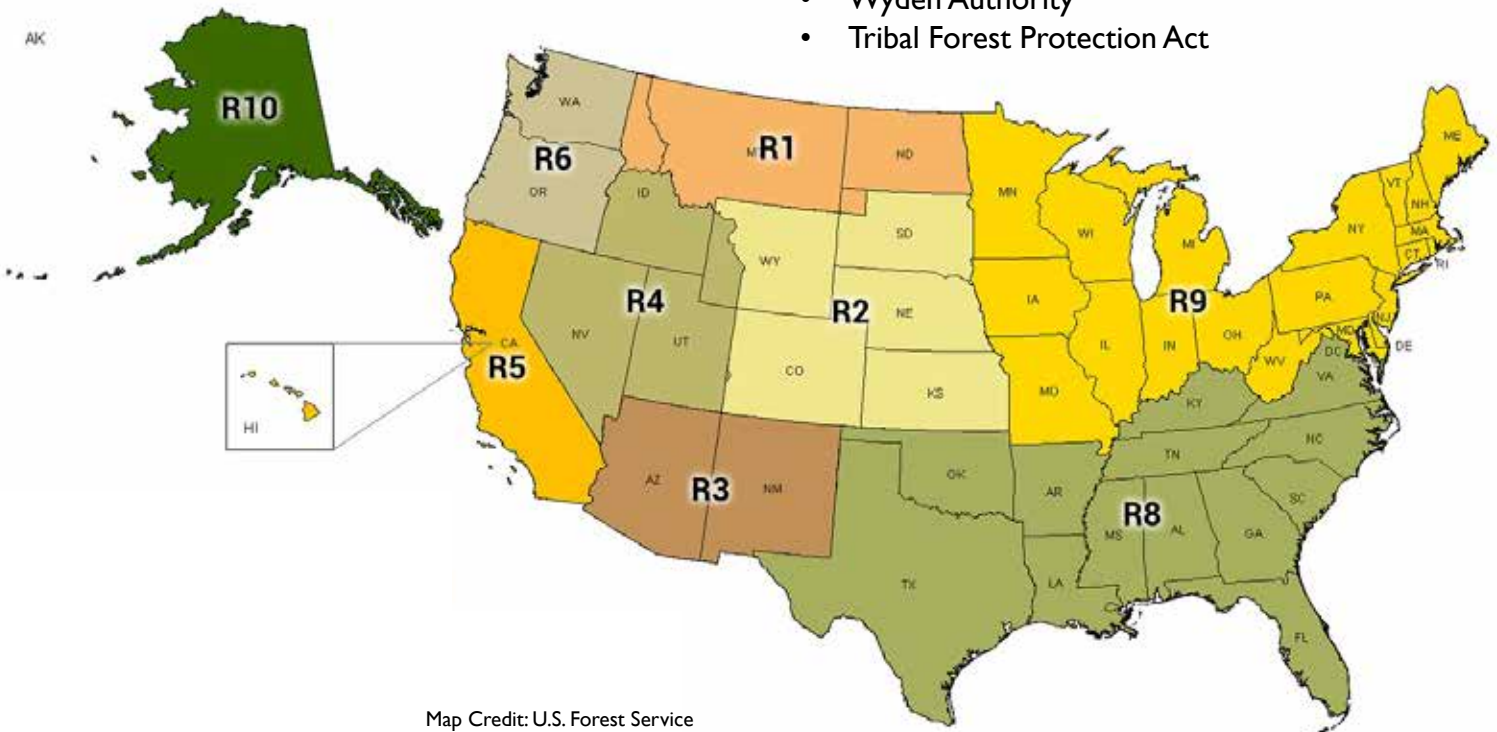
- National Forest System
- State & Private Forestry
- Administration
- International Programs
- Research

KEY PROGRAMS

- Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program
- Forest Legacy Program
- Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program
- Landscape Scale Restoration Competitive Grant Program
- National Fire Capacity Mitigation Funding
- Joint Chiefs' Restoration Partnership

KEY TOOLS

- Stewardship Contracting Authority
- Good Neighbor Authority
- Wyden Authority
- Tribal Forest Protection Act



Map Credit: U.S. Forest Service

NRCS

BACKGROUND

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works through county-based offices with agricultural producers, forest stewards, and private landowners to promote the voluntary conservation of soil and water resources through technical and financial assistance.

Activities supported by NRCS must produce a conservation benefit, and generally must implement proven conservation practices that are detailed within NRCS handbooks.

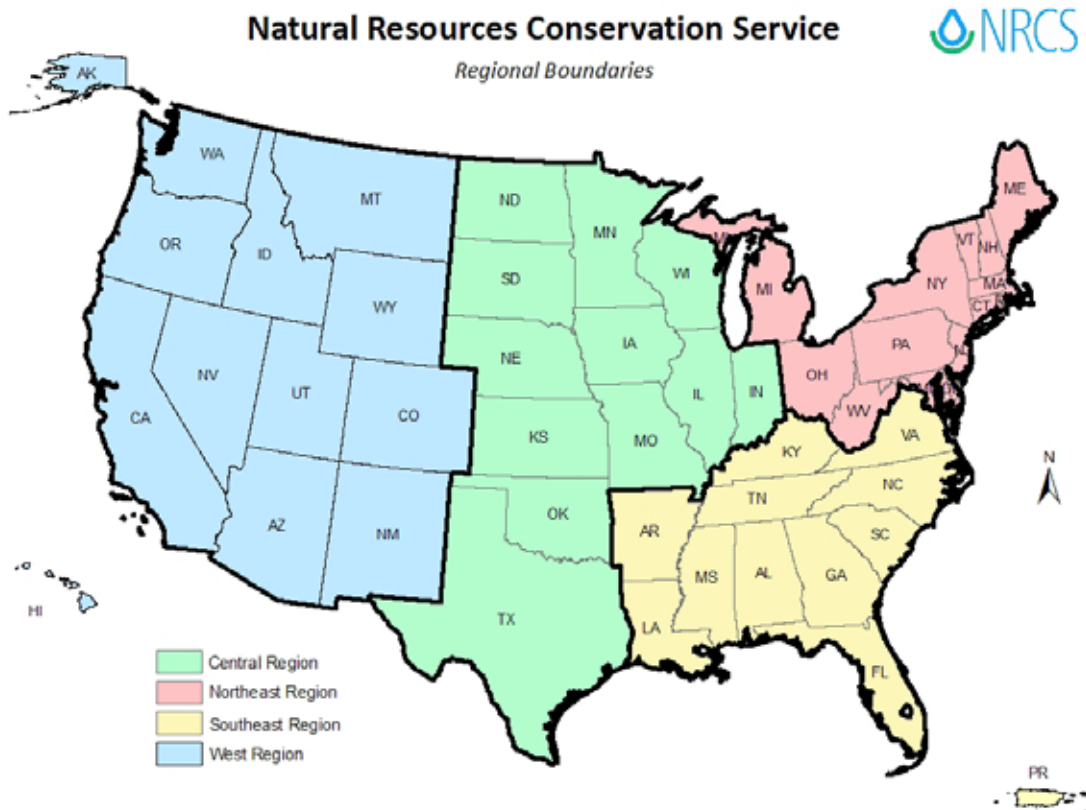
MISSION: Improve the health of our Nation's natural resources while sustaining and enhancing the productivity of American agriculture.

EMPLOYEES: 11,500

REGIONS: 4

KEY PROGRAMS

- Conservation Innovation Grants
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program
- Conservation Stewardship Program
- Joint Chiefs' Restoration Partnership



Map Date - June 2012
Map Source - Regional Conservationists Office

“How can Forest Service leadership set expectations that we operate with partners in a certain way, and fully utilize the various tools that are available at our disposal? That’s the question I would ask and the challenge I’d set for my peers.”

- Jason Anderson, Forest Service

PROGRAMS



Photo Credit: Ecosystem
Workforce Program

FUNDING PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Agency	Program	Eligible Applicant	Land Ownership	Conservation Priority	Match Requirement
Forest Service	<i>Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program</i>	Collaboratives or local USFS offices	Public and private	All-lands large-scale restoration	CFLR Fund can cover up to 50% of non-NFS, non-planning activities. Forest units or partners must supply the rest
	<i>Forest Legacy Program</i>	Landowner	Private	States use USDA-approved priority areas and project criteria	25% from state, local or landowner sources
	<i>Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program</i>	Nonprofits, universities, and tribes	Public, or public and private	Watershed and landscape scale restoration in OR, WA, CA, and Southeast AK	No requirement, but non-federal leverage is expected
	<i>National Fire Capacity Mitigation Funding</i>	Nonprofits, state and local government, fire departments, educational institutions, tribes	Private	Wildfire risk reduction	1:1 match from nonfederal sources
	<i>Landscape Scale Restoration Program</i>	State forestry agencies	Non-federal forest land that is rural	Variable (prescribed fire, thinning, invasive management, monitoring, outreach and education), but must tie to a state Forest Action Plan	1:1 match from nonfederal sources
Both	<i>Joint Chiefs' Restoration Partnership</i>	Local NRCS and USFS offices	Public and private	Wildfire, habitat for at-risk species, water quality	No requirement, but non-federal leverage is expected
NRCS	<i>Environmental Quality Incentives Program</i>	Landowners or operators	Private	Depends on the state and year	Partial "cost payments" depend on the region and the practice
	<i>Conservation Innovation Grants</i>	State or local units of government, federally-recognized American Indian tribes, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals	Project must relate to an innovation that can be applied to private working lands	Changes yearly and may be different for state pools and national pool	50% match
	<i>Conservation Stewardship Program</i>	Individuals, legal entities, joint operations, or Indian tribes that meet the stewardship threshold for at least two priority resource concerns when they apply	Private	Depends on the state and year	None
	<i>Regional Conservation Partnership Program</i>	Non-profits, local government agencies, Tribes, educational institutions, etc.	Private, or private and public	National, CCAs, and State pools will have different priorities named in their RFPs	Non-federal leverage required but not quantified

FUNDING PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Agency	Program	Maximum Award	Assistance Type	Application Period	Duration
Forest Service	<i>Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program</i>	No more than \$4 million per year per project, for up to 50% of cost of implementation and monitoring on NFS land (doesn't include planning, work on non-NFS lands)	Technical & Financial	N/A	Annual funding, which expires in 2019
	<i>Forest Legacy Program</i>	<75% of project costs	Financial	Depends on the state	These are predominantly perpetual easements
	<i>Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program</i>	\$24,000	Financial	Depends on the state	12 months, renewal allowed, may only have one grant open at a time
	<i>National Fire Capacity Mitigation Funding</i>	\$300,000 or \$150,000, depending on region	Financial	Variable	For projects in the NE region, the grant term is 4 years, with a 1-year extension possible. Grant terms for other regions was not available.
	<i>Landscape Scale Restoration Program</i>	Variable by region	Financial	Generally Fall but depends on region.	Up to three years
Both	<i>Joint Chiefs' Restoration Partnership</i>	>\$4 million	Technical & Financial	Late Summer/ Early Fall	Annually for up to 3 years
NRCS	<i>Environmental Quality Incentives Program</i>	\$450,000	Technical & Financial	Rolling	Contracts last up to 10 years
	<i>Conservation Innovation Grants</i>	\$75K for State pool, \$2M for National pool	Financial	Between Fall and late Winter	Projects can last 1-3 years, no renewals
	<i>Conservation Stewardship Program</i>	Individual contracts can be awarded up to \$40,000 per year or \$200,000 over the life of the contract; a joint operation can receive up to \$80,000 a year or \$400,000.	Financial	Rolling	Contracts last 5 years with an option to renew
	<i>Regional Conservation Partnership Program</i>	Refer to Regional Conservation Partnership Program website for max award amount.	Technical & Financial	Spring and Summer	Contracts up to 5 years

COLLABORATIVE FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PROGRAM

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

Congress created the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) in 2009 to promote forest health and resiliency, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and support economic well-being in local communities through collaborative, science-based restoration efforts. As of 2019, there were a total of 23 CFLRP projects that range from 50,000 to 2.4 million acres, and many have significant tribal, state or private lands within their boundaries.

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE FUNDED?

CFLRP has several unique features, including a requirement that projects sustain community and collaborative engagement. Project proposals are required to have the pledged support of local collaborative groups for the 10-year duration of the program, and the subsequent 5-year period of multi-party monitoring.

In addition, each project is expected to achieve multiple objectives:

- Encourage ecological, economic, and social sustainability
- Leverage local resources with national and private resources
- Re-establish natural fire regimes and reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire
- Experiment with and demonstrate the effectiveness of ecological restoration techniques
- Encourage utilization of forest restoration by-products

HOW IS IT FUNDED?

Congress has authorized up to \$80 million annually for new and existing CFLRP projects, though available funding is always subject to annual appropriations.¹ Each project can receive no

more than \$4 million a year, which can cover no more than 50% of the cost of implementing and monitoring restoration treatments on National Forest System (NFS) lands.² These funds can be matched by various sources, including:

- In-kind or financial contributions from partners
- Forest Service appropriated, permanent, or trust funds
- Retained receipts from stewardship contracts

CFLRP funds cannot support planning or work on non-NFS lands, so projects use a variety of other resources to accomplish their work on private, state, or tribal lands. Strategic investments on federal lands can leverage new and significant funding from a range of partners who see the benefit of building on these efforts. Individual forest units may also be able to provide additional funding from their budgets.



The Southwest Jemez CFLRP is a long-term forest and watershed restoration strategy to increase the landscape's resilience to severe wildfire and other large-scale disturbances. USDA Photo by Lance Cheung with permission of the Pueblo of Jemez.

WHAT IS THE ROLE FOR PARTNERS?

There are ongoing opportunities for partners and contractors to engage with the projects already underway.

- **Participate in the collaborative process!** The collaborative groups that work together to support CFLRP projects are open entities. Meetings are public, and new partners are encouraged to join at any time.
- **Lend your capacity and expertise.** New partner groups who can contribute time, money, facilitation, or knowledge to a CFLRP project may be welcomed. However, newcomers looking to get involved should take great care in building relationships and respecting the longstanding partnerships already at work in these areas. Opportunities include stewardship contracting and agreements, elements of ecological, social, and economic multi-party monitoring, and job-training, youth, and volunteer programs.

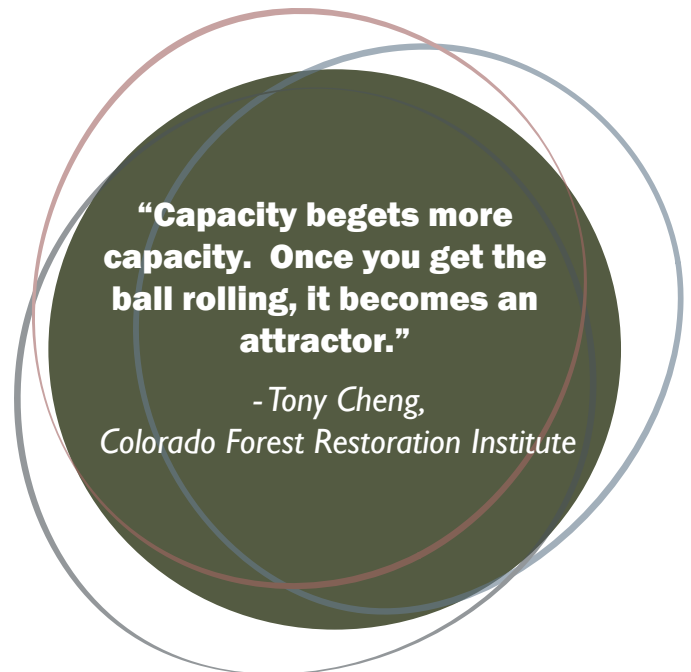
THINGS TO KNOW

- The 2018 Farm Bill included a five-year reauthorization of CFLRP until 2023.³ The legislation allows the Forest Service to, on a case-by-case basis, grant current projects one-time funding extensions for up to 10 years in order to complete originally planned work.⁴ It also allows the Forest Service to select up to 10 new CFLRP projects in any given year, depending on available funding.

- The Forest Service began accepting and reviewing proposals for new projects as well as existing project extensions in late 2019.⁵
- CFLRP projects often serve as a catalyst for additional forest restoration and investment within the National Forest. Therefore, there may be opportunities to get involved or access other funding sources within the project area.

LEARN MORE

Explore the Forest Service CFLRP website and map to see if there's a project in your area.



ASK AN EXPERT

DYLAN KRUSE, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS & PROGRAM STRATEGY SUSTAINABLE NORTHWEST

Dylan coordinates the CFLR Coalition, a national alliance formed to ensure successful implementation of the CFLR program through funding and policy recommendations.

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LINDSAY BUCHANAN, CFLRP COORDINATOR FOREST SERVICE

Lindsay is the National Coordinator for the CFLR program in Washington D.C. She provides support and guidance to the 23 CFLRP projects across the country.

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FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is intended to protect important forest areas from development and fragmentation, either through fee-simple land purchases or permanent conservation easements. The easements restrict development and use multi-resource management plans to protect values such as soil and water, biological diversity, recreation, timber, and more.⁶

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE FUNDED?

Project proposals:

- Must be located in landscapes that have been designated by the state as Forest Legacy Areas and must be at least 75 percent forested.
- May involve a single landowner and property or an assortment of parcels and landowners.
- May be submitted by a sponsoring organization (like a land trust) and/or an eligible landowner (including tribes).

HOW ARE PROJECTS SELECTED?

Project proposals are submitted by states and forwarded to the Forest Service (generally in November) for additional review and final prioritization by a national panel (usually in January).

Projects are scored based on three criteria:

1. Public benefits gained from the protection and management of the property.
2. The likelihood of conversion resulting in a loss of forest resources and public benefits.
3. Whether the project fits within a larger conservation plan or initiative, and enhances previous conservation investments.

HOW IS FLP FUNDED?

FLP usually receives about \$60 million a year⁷ through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Projects are funded through USFS State and Private Forestry, and

can be used for up to 75% of project costs (for both easements and land purchases). At least 25% of the remaining project costs must come from non-federal sources, which can include a landowner match or state or local sources.

WHAT IS THE ROLE FOR PARTNERS?

Partner organizations can help identify critical landscapes for protection, initiate conversations with landowners, and work with state agencies to develop projects for consideration. Partners can also play an important role in providing matching funds.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Work with your state agency and partners early** in the project development stage to best capture the diversity of social, ecological and economic values of the proposed project. Be sure to survey complementary efforts that may align with your proposal.
- **Evaluate title and third party interests early** on to catch any issues that may make the property ineligible for FLP (e.g. right-of-ways, outstanding mineral interests).
- **Look to additional resources**, such as EQIP, to fund the implementation of a multi-resource management plan for an easement.

THINGS TO KNOW

- FLP is a highly competitive program. Typically, around 50 projects are proposed by the states each year, and more recently around 20 projects have received funding in a given year.
- The process of applying, being selected, receiving funding, and conducting due diligence on a project



Stimson Forestlands Forest Legacy Project. Photo Credit: Stimson Lumber Company

- can take several years. It requires a high degree of commitment from landowners and partners.
- Conservation easements (usually held by the state agency) account for 82% of all FLP projects, in which properties remain in private ownership.
- FLP can only be used for acquisition related expenses, and not implementation of the multi-resource management plan. Other resources, such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) dollars, can be used for that purpose.
- Many property owners benefit both through the sale or donation of their property rights, and through reduced taxes that accompany the land use limitations of their easement.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Contact information for each state's FLP coordinator is available on the Forest Service website.

ASK AN EXPERT

MARGEE HAINES, COOPERATIVE FORESTRY PROGRAM SPECIALIST COOPERATIVE FORESTRY/ FOREST SERVICE STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY

Margee provides support to Cooperative Forestry Landowner Assistance Programs (Forest Legacy and Community Forest and Open Space Programs) and large-landscape cross-boundary work including the Landscape Scale Restoration Program.

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COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND LAND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

FOREST SERVICE REGIONAL OFFICES

WHAT IS IT?

Funded by some Forest Service regional offices, the Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program (CCLS) invests in building the capacity of collaborative groups and community based organizations to implement landscape scale restoration projects. It is one of the few programs designed specifically to support partners, collaborative groups and community based organizations in carrying out projects that restore landscapes and strengthen local economies. It is currently available in Southeast Alaska, Oregon and Washington. Additional states may be added as funding is available.

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE FUNDED?

The two primary goals of the program are to help community-based and collaborative organizations remove barriers to watershed and/or landscape scale restoration projects, and to help facilitate job creation and retention and business development in their region. Each region also has goals unique to that region's context and needs. Funds can be used for organization and staff support, travel, community outreach, and meeting facilitation or group coordination. Funds cannot be used for outreach and/or education as a primary project component; any form of advocacy or litigation; or for providing funds directly to the Forest Service or other federal entities.

HOW IS IT FUNDED?

The program was launched in 2011 in Region 6, through a cooperative agreement with the Forest Service and NRCS. At this time all funds are federal and come solely from regional Forest Service offices. The program is neither legislated nor appropriated. Private foundations and nonprofits have provided additional support and administrative capacity to the program.

HOW DO I APPLY?

Eligible applicants include non-profits, universities, and Native American tribes. Each region has different timelines for proposals. Requests for Proposals typically occur once a year.⁸ Proposals must include a letter of support from your Forest Supervisor and grants are for a period of one year.

THINGS TO KNOW

- Funds can be spent on projects on private land, using the Wyden Authority, but they must provide a clear, tangible benefit to the adjacent forest service lands. Nearly all funding in the past has supported work on or adjacent to NFS land.
- Proposal requests are limited to a maximum of \$24,000 and there is not a match requirement. Approximately half of the proposals in 2017 were funded.
- CCLS is a discretionary program and could be eliminated depending on budgetary constraints.
- Administration of CCLS is at the discretion of regional offices and may change over time.
- CCLS award funds cannot be used to meet the matching requirements of any federal award program.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Identify other sources of funds to leverage**, such as technical assistance or state sources, to make your application more competitive.
- **Work with a fiscal sponsor to develop a project proposal** if your organization or group is not eligible to apply.
- **Work with your regional Forest Service staff.** They can help you understand the application process in your state.



Community capacity is the collective ability of residents to respond to social, economic, and environmental stresses and meet the needs of the community by drawing on as much local capital as possible.

-Mohan Dhamotharan, author of the Handbook on Integrated Community Development



Photo Credit: Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

ASK AN EXPERT

ADAM LIJEBLAD, DIRECTOR, CONSERVATION AWARDS NATIONAL FOREST FOUNDATION

Adam oversees NFF's national grantmaking program and coordinates conservation partnerships.

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NICHOLAS GOLDSTEIN, LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS SPECIALIST FOREST SERVICE, REGION 6

Nick serves as the USFS liaison to the Oregon and Washington congressional delegations and also coordinates the Region's work to support and empower place-based forest collaborative groups through initiatives like the CCLS grant program.

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JOINT CHIEFS' RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

FOREST SERVICE & NRCS

WHAT IS IT?

The Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership supports all-lands projects that reduce wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protect water quality and supply, and/or improve habitat for at-risk species across public and private lands. Sometimes called Two Chiefs', the initiative also encourages and facilitates coordination between the agencies while providing technical and financial resources to partnership-based projects.

HOW IS JOINT CHIEFS' FUNDED?

The Joint Chiefs' Initiative was created in 2014 by NRCS and USFS leadership, and is not the result of congressional action. Therefore, rather than receiving specific appropriations, the agencies award targeted resources through existing programs and budgetary line items, which are allocated to the appropriate NRCS state office and USFS forest unit. NRCS provides technical and financial resources through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The Forest Service provides technical and financial resources through various programs and budgetary line items in the State and Private Forestry division and the National Forest System division.

HOW DO I APPLY?

Projects must be jointly designed and submitted by local NRCS and USFS offices and can last up to three years. Individuals or entities interested in engaging in the design of a potential project should approach their local or regional leadership. Applications are generally accepted in late summer or early fall, and are reviewed in a nationally competitive process by USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C.

JOINT CHIEFS' MUST-DOS

- Obtain two levels of signatures: the local NRCS Conservationist and Forest Supervisor, and those of the NRCS State Conservationist, State Forester, and Regional Forester.⁹



Photo Credit: Lindsay Warness

- Address at least one of the following goals:
 1. Reduce wildfire threats to communities and landowners
 2. Protect water quality and supply
 3. Improve habitat for at-risk species across public and private lands
- Include a combination of activities on private land, National Forest and state land.¹⁰
- Include land treatments and education, outreach, and coordination activities on public, state, tribal and private land.¹¹
- Leverage non-federal resources (in-kind and/or financial). There is no formal requirement for the type or amount of these outside resources, but higher levels of leverage make a proposal more competitive.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Work with NRCS and USFS early on, and enlist their help in designing the proposal.** Their support is essential, because both agencies must sign-off on your proposal for it to be eligible for funding.
- **Competitive proposals seek support for implementation, not planning processes.** For work on federal lands, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis may be required. Therefore, project partners should ideally have experience working with one another.
- **A smaller agreement or other partnership arrangement** that brings together local land management stakeholders can serve as a valuable stepping stone toward developing a successful Joint Chiefs' proposal.¹³

THINGS TO KNOW

- Because Joint Chiefs' is an initiative designed by both agencies, and is not a formal, congressionally-authorized program, future changes to agency leadership could impact the continuation of this initiative.
- While proposed projects can be up to three years, funding allocations are made on an annual basis and are not guaranteed from year to year.¹²
- Total funding for new Joint Chiefs' projects fluctuates each year depending on agency budgets and competing needs. In fiscal year 2019, combined NRCS and USFS funding per project ranged from \$60,000 to over \$3 million. That year, the agencies put nearly \$38 million toward 30 new and continuing projects.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Reach out to your local USDA Service Center and your local forest unit for more information on designing a joint proposal.



Photo Credit: Nils Christoffersen

ASK AN EXPERT

BILL GAMBLE, DISTRICT RANGER WALLOWA-WHITMAN NATIONAL FOREST

Bill oversees the implementation of a Joint Chiefs' project in eastern Oregon called East Face of the Elkhorn Mountains.

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ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM

NRCS

WHAT IS IT?

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) supports the design and implementation of conservation activities on private working lands through a range of technical and financial assistance.

WHO CAN APPLY?

Non-industrial private forestland owners, tribes, and agricultural producers are all eligible for EQIP contracts,¹⁴ which range from 1 to 10 years in duration¹⁵ (but typically average 3 years).

HOW DOES IT WORK?

All assistance through EQIP begins with a conservation plan that outlines recommended conservation practices for a property. NRCS works one-on-one with producers to develop these plans, which include an inventory and analysis of a property's soil, water, and other natural resource needs, as well as a package of recommended NRCS conservation practice alternatives. The producer can then choose from those alternatives and apply for EQIP funding to assist with their implementation. There are numerous conservation practices for forest stand improvement, forest trails and landings, fuel breaks, weed control, prescribed burning, riparian forest buffers, and more.

HOW IS IT FUNDED?

The 2018 Farm Bill continued mandatory permanent funding for EQIP. Funding for the program will increase from \$1.75 billion in fiscal year 2020 to \$2.025 billion in fiscal year 2023.¹⁶ Program dollars are allocated to each state from the national NRCS budget.

EQIP contracts cover a portion of the implementation costs of a conservation practice. The remaining cost is borne by the landowner or

can be matched using other sources. The amount of support is based on regional costs, on a per-acre or per-practice basis. Payment schedules are available on each state's NRCS website.¹⁷

HOW DO I APPLY?

Producers apply directly to NRCS field offices for EQIP support, and applications are accepted on a continual basis. They are then batched together during scheduled periods and are grouped by funding pool – national, state or local – based on scope.¹⁸ Requests are ranked based on their expected conservation benefits and whether they address the priority natural resource concerns of the fund pool.

THINGS TO KNOW

- Descriptions of each state's approved conservation practices can be found in its Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).
- Individual contracts cannot exceed \$450,000, and can cover costs essential to the planning, design, materials and installations of the practice, as well as forgone income resulting from the practice.¹⁹
- While EQIP contracts are generally paid upon completion of conservation practices, advance payments are allowed for limited resource, socially disadvantaged, military veteran, or beginning farmers or ranchers.²⁰ States are allowed to identify specific practices that will be funded at a higher level than other activities. Those practices must address nutrients in ground and surface water, conservation of water, identified wildlife habitat, or watershed-specific resource concerns.²¹

LEARN MORE

Contact your local NRCS Service Center to learn more about selection cycles, funding priorities, and any special EQIP initiatives offered in your state.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Become an advocate.** As a community partner, there are many ways you can facilitate the use of EQIP in your region. These include promoting awareness of the program, its eligibility requirements, and application sign-up periods; and attending local work group meetings and assisting NRCS offices in understanding local resource concerns to develop appropriate funding pools.
- **Apply early!** Generally, EQIP funding is fully utilized every year. Be sure to apply before the posted “batch date,” and for the most appropriate funding pool.

“It can go a long way when a partner advocates for a particular tool or program...A friendly nudge can encourage us to think about things in a different way.”

- Tera Little, Forest Service



Photo Credit: Bob Christensen

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS

NRCS

WHAT IS IT?

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIGs) fund on-the-ground projects that test, scale-up, and/or stimulate the development of new conservation innovations or technologies on private working lands. The program aims to transfer conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) to agricultural producers, into NRCS technical manuals and guides, or into the private sector.

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE FUNDED?

CIG generally supports pilot projects, field demonstrations, and on-farm conservation research. The 2018 Farm Bill also added community colleges carrying out demonstration projects, urban farming, and monitoring practices as eligible projects and applicants. Funds are awarded to non-federal partners for single or multi-year projects of up to three years.²² They must promote on-the-ground conservation related to forest stewardship or agricultural production, and can include activities like:

- Field tests of promising approaches.
- Conservation outreach and education that improves the accessibility or adoption of practices among under-served communities.
- Development of new tools to measure the conservation benefits of certain practices.

HOW IS CIG FUNDED?

CIG is authorized in the Farm Bill and uses EQIP program funding. Applicants must provide at least a 50% match of total project costs through non-federal cash or in-kind resources.²³

HOW DO I APPLY?

There are two funding pools to which state and local governments, joint operations, tribes, non-governmental organizations, and individuals are eligible to apply: a national CIG and a state-based pool.

- The national CIG funding pool is offered on a yearly basis. Project scopes may be at the

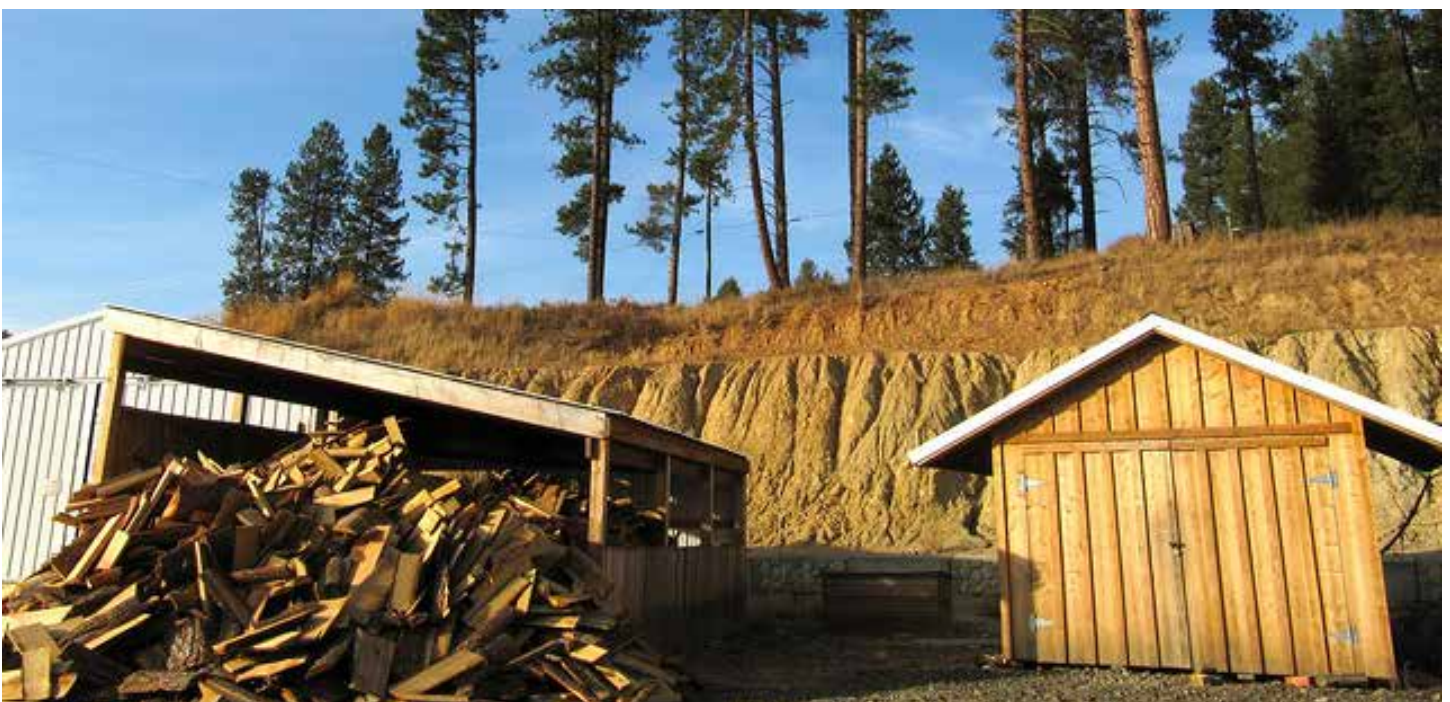


Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

watershed, regional, multi-state, or national level.²⁴

- As of 2017, NRCS State Conservationists were authorized to use up to 5% of their yearly EQIP allocation for a state-based round of CIG funding. Depending on the state, funding may be made available every year, or less frequently (every few years). Application deadlines are typically publicized through the state NRCS offices.²⁵ Allowable project scopes are multi-county, small watershed, or statewide.

CIG MUST DOS

- Directly address one or more of the annually selected natural resource priorities, as outlined in the Request for Proposals. There are usually several priorities each year (e.g. water quality, soil health, environmental markets).²⁶
- Involve EQIP-eligible farmers or ranchers.²⁷
- Include a 1:1 match of the federal award through non-federal and/or in-kind contributions, as well as all necessary technical assistance.²⁸

THINGS TO KNOW

The average annual national CIG pool of funding totals approximately \$20 million, with individual projects receiving up to \$2 million in federal resources.²⁹ State-level projects can be awarded up to \$75,000.³⁰

Up to 10% of the national pool funding can be directed to underserved populations, such as tribes, military veterans and beginning agricultural producers and forest landowners.³¹

On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials are a new addition to the CIG program that feature collaboration between NRCS and partners to

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Deliverables should be specific** and have a clear connection to the funding being requested. Make a clear case for how the project 1) connects to a future technology transfer, 2) could be scalable by NRCS, or 3) is a conservation practice standard modification.
- **Focus on partnerships!** Long-standing or creative partnerships make a proposal more attractive, particularly as partners can assist with meeting match requirements
- **Consider applying to state funding rather than national funding**, if the maximum allowable award is sufficient for your needs. State funding processes can be less competitive and provide more pre-application assistance.

implement on-the-ground conservation activities and then evaluate their impact. Producers can receive incentive payments to offset the risk of implementing innovative approaches. One sub-program, the Soil Health Demo Trial, focuses exclusively on the testing of conservation practices and systems for soil health.³²

GETTING STARTED

- Your NRCS state program manager is a helpful resource when applying to either pool of funding.
- Potential applicant webinars are offered by NRCS headquarters during every application period.
- Application and webinar information is available on the national CIG website.

ASK AN EXPERT

GARY BURNETT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR HEART OF THE ROCKIES INITIATIVE

In his previous role as Executive Director of Blackfoot Challenge, a watershed stewardship group in Montana, Gary administered three Conservation Innovation Grants related to wildlife, water or irrigation, and forestry.

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CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

NRCS

WHAT IS IT?

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides financial incentives for private landowners and operators to maintain and improve existing conservation systems, or adopt additional conservation activities, on their land. Participants such as forestland stewards, producers, and landowners enter into five year contracts³³ with NRCS, and earn payments based in part on their conservation benefit - the higher the performance, the higher the payment.³⁴

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE FUNDED?

A voluntary program, CSP provides incentives for landowners to invest in additional conservation practices, above and beyond existing efforts. Forestry-related enhancements can include brush management for wildlife or fish habitat, forest stand improvement, extension of riparian forest buffers, prescribed burns, and weed management.³⁵

HOW IS IT FUNDED?

CSP is funded through the Farm Bill, and was allocated \$700 million in mandatory funding in fiscal year 2019, which increases gradually to \$1 billion in fiscal year 2023.²⁶ Individual contracts can be awarded up to \$40,000 per year or \$200,000 over the life of the contract;³⁷ a joint operation can receive up to \$80,000 a year or \$400,000.³⁸

HOW DO I APPLY?

Eligible applicants include individuals, legal entities, joint operations or tribes.³⁹ CSP can enroll various land uses, including non-industrial private forestland, grassland, rangeland, pastureland, tribal agricultural land, and cropland.⁴⁰ Applicants must meet the “stewardship threshold” for at least two priority resource concerns on their land at the time of application. Additionally, they must agree to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one

other priority resource concern by the end of their contract period.⁴¹

Applications are accepted on a continual basis, reviewed in periodic batches by the state office, and ranked with a focus on an application’s actual and expected increase of conservation benefits as well as cost, if needed to distinguish among similar applications.⁴² Participants seeking a contract renewal are now required to compete with new applications, whereas previously their acceptance was guaranteed.⁴³ The NRCS national office establishes at least one ranking period annually. Reach out to your local USDA Service Center for more information on applying.

THINGS TO KNOW

- The 2018 Farm Bill increased payments for certain activities including the adoption of cover crops, crop rotations, advanced grazing management, and comprehensive conservation plan development.⁴⁴ It also provides targeted assistance for organic and transitioning-to-organic production activities.⁴⁵
- A new Grasslands Conservation Initiative nested under CSP provides financial assistance for certain producers who have maintained, and commit to continue conserving, cropland base acres.⁴⁶
- Participants receive payments after October 1 of each fiscal year that cover contract activities completed in the previous year. Advance payments are available for historically underserved producers (beginning or economically and socially disadvantaged farmers, as well as military veterans).⁴⁷
- Contracts are for five years, with an option to renew one time. If renewed, applicants are required to address additional resource concerns beyond those in their previous contract.⁴⁸

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Consider starting small.** Although not required, it's common for operators to get started with other USDA programs, such as EQIP, and graduate on to CSP.
- **Write a forest management plan.** Since CSP is designed to build upon the existing conservation efforts of landowners and operators, it may be smart to convey that active management is already being performed on your property.
- **Take a look at the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Self-Screening Checklist** to see if you meet CSP's stewardship thresholds.



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

NRCS

WHAT IS IT?

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) supports landscape-scale conservation projects developed and driven by local partners and is intended to coordinate conservation practices across regions and landscapes. The first program of its kind, RCPP previously consolidated several existing NRCS programs, but as of the 2018 Farm Bill it is funded independently.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Partners apply for RCPP funding and then work with NRCS to deploy those resources among targeted agricultural producers and forest landowners in their project area. Projects must address a specific resource priority in a given watershed or region. The agreements between NRCS and partners generally can last up to 5 years, but there are allowances for longer projects, project renewals and extensions.⁴⁹

HOW IS IT FUNDED?


Since the 2018 Farm Bill, RCPP has a dedicated budget, rather than utilizing resources from various programs. The program was allocated \$300 million in annual mandatory funding through fiscal year 2023. The 2018 Farm Bill also created RCPP-specific contracts in an attempt to simplify the program.⁵⁰ Partners are expected to contribute significant non-federal resources, whether through cash or in-kind services such as monitoring or technical assistance. Although there is no official definition of “significant contribution,” partner proposals receive higher rankings in the selection process with greater non-federal leverage.

HOW DO I APPLY?

At the time of this guidebook’s publication, NRCS was restructuring its administration of RCPP to conform with the most recent Farm Bill changes.

An updated funding announcement is expected to be posted on the program’s website later in 2020. In general, partners apply to NRCS state or national offices, then use contracts to fund eligible conservation activities on private lands. Qualifying partners include agricultural producer associations or cooperatives, local governments and conservation-driven nonprofits.⁵¹ Partners design and submit project proposals to one of two funding pools:⁵²

- A state and multi-state project pool.
- A pool for critical conservation areas (CCA) that have their own priority resource concerns and are selected by the USDA (e.g. the Columbia River Basin).



“The best way to push boundaries is to find an example of a successful project somewhere else that did what you are trying to do.”

- Bob Christensen, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

THINGS TO KNOW

- RCPP-eligible activities are similar to conservation activities associated with other programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Healthy Forests Reserve Program and PL 83-566 Watershed Program.
- The latest Farm Bill updates provide opportunities for alternative funding arrangements and grant agreements as well as additional flexibility on the make-up of a partner's project contribution; guidance and reporting requirements; and agreement renewals.⁵³ Funding can also be advanced to partners for outreach activities and partners can be reimbursed for agreement development.⁵⁴
- Applications can be given higher priority based on stakeholder diversity, applied conservation, consistency with existing watershed and habitat restoration plans, and the bundling of program contracts with producers.⁵⁵

LEARN MORE

- Reach out to your State Office's NRCS Leader for Programs, or equivalent position, to discuss your project ideas.
- Information on application deadlines, forms, informational webinars, and past awards is available on the national RCPP website.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Work closely with your NRCS State Conservationist and state office while developing your proposal.** They can advise which funding pool to apply to and how to strengthen your overall application given existing efforts and past RCPP awards. At the same time, you can make a case for why your project fits into the RCPP mission.
- **Stress the outcomes resulting from proposed activities,** and have landowners/operators ready and willing to engage in the project if approved.
- **RCPP funds can support technical assistance for third party providers** (such as staff support for community-based organizations), but they are tightly coupled with expectations of helping private landowners utilize NRCS programs.



Field crews for the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership. HNFP received \$2 mil. from the Alaska State RCPP fund in 2015. Photo Credit: Bethany Goodrich.

ASK AN EXPERT

BOB CHRISTENSEN, REGIONAL CATALYST SUSTAINABLE SOUTHEAST PARTNERSHIP

Bob coordinated the successful application of the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership to the RCPP Alaska State fund. He now coordinates the project's implementation in Southeast Alaska.

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LANDSCAPE SCALE RESTORATION PROGRAM

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

The Landscape Scale Restoration Program is a competitive grant program that encourages collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes.⁵⁶ The program supports landscape-scale projects on state and private forest lands that address state-identified forest management priorities and leverage public and private resources.⁵⁷

WHAT KIND OF PROJECTS ARE FUNDED?

To receive funding, proposed projects must align with priority issues and/or landscapes identified in their respective state Forest Action Plan.⁵⁸ Prescribed fire and forest thinning, invasive pest interventions, and the development of multi-resource management plans are all examples of eligible project activities.⁵⁹ Research-related activities, land purchases and construction cannot be paid for using LSR grant funds.^{60,61}

HOW IS THE PROGRAM FUNDED AND ADMINISTERED?

State and Private Forestry dollars support the LSR Program.⁶² Funds are allocated among the three state forester regions (Western, Northeast-Midwest and Southern) and applications are reviewed by Forest Service and state forestry officials who produce funding recommendations.⁶³

HOW DO I APPLY?

While a variety of entities can apply for funding, proposals must be submitted through the appropriate state forestry agency.⁶⁴ According to regional guidance, each state will receive no more than 15% of the total funds awarded.⁶⁵ For more specific information on how to apply to this grant program, contact your state forestry agency and Forest Service region.

MUST-DOS

- Tie your project directly to issues and goals identified in the state Forest Action Plan.⁶⁶
- Ensure the scope of your project will meaningfully address the restoration objectives stated in the application.⁶⁷
- Clearly describe the priority landscapes and issues the project will address.⁶⁸
- Check for state or region-specific criteria and timelines, such as requiring draft proposals or abstracts in advance of the national application deadline.⁶⁹

THINGS TO KNOW

- Projects must have a 1:1 match from the grant recipient and the match cannot come from other federal sources.⁷⁰
- LSR projects are cross boundary and include a combination of land ownerships (including federal). However, LSR grant funding and the associated match must be spent on non-federal forest lands that are rural, which can include lands owned by tribes, state or local governments, or private entities.⁷¹
- The regions can define minimum and maximum funding amounts per proposal. For example in the western region individual project proposals are capped at \$300,000.⁷²
- Project implementation can extend up to three years.⁷³
- The 2018 Farm Bill made a few key changes to the Landscape Scale Restoration Grant Program. First, it requires projects to focus on rural forest land, defined as any area where forest cover exists or where trees could grow, and where the population is less than 50,000. Second, projects are encouraged to address one or more “landscape objectives” outlined in the

Farm Bill.⁷⁴ Those include reducing the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires, improving fish and wildlife habitats and measuring ecological and economic benefits, including air quality and soil productivity.⁷⁵ Proposed activities should also align with the State and Private Forestry programs and authorities.⁷⁶ Lastly, the Farm Bill explicitly included forested lands owned by tribes as eligible for LSR grant funding.⁷⁷

- Further changes tied to the 2018 Farm Bill are expected to be implemented in the fiscal year 2021 LSR grant cycle, so be sure to check for updates to national grant guidance.⁷⁸



Field crews for the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership.
Photo Credit: Bethany Goodrich.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Take a look at previous grant proposals to learn what types of projects tend to be funded.** Past proposals from the Southern and Western regions can be accessed at forestrygrants.org and proposals from the Region 9 Landscape Scale Restoration Grants website.⁷⁹
- **Proposals will receive higher consideration for collaborating with multiple entities,** involving a combination of land ownerships, and coordinating with other landscape-scale projects on federal or state land to achieve larger impacts.⁸⁰ Multi-state projects are allowed and encouraged.⁸¹
- **Working with your state forestry agency and Forest Service region** will help in crafting a proposal that best meets all program criteria.⁸²
- **Starting well in advance of the application deadline** will ensure there is time to select the best project proposals and fine tune them before the final grant application is due.⁸³

ASK AN EXPERT

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NATIONAL FIRE CAPACITY

MITIGATION FUNDING (FORMERLY STATE FIRE ASSISTANCE)

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

Collaborative, cross-boundary fire management is the driving focus of this category of National Fire Capacity (NFC) funding. Distributed through the State and Private Forestry program, these mitigation dollars support a broad range of strategic wildfire risk reduction activities, from fire and vegetation treatments to education, outreach and community planning activities. National Fire Capacity is the only federal fire program that provides funding for fuel reduction on non-federal lands, regardless of their proximity to federal lands, making it an important tool for reducing risks for communities.⁸⁴

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Funding is distributed to the states via regionally determined grant programs, which differ slightly in their specific application processes and criteria. However, they all require some alignment with the state's Forest Action Plan and the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy's focus areas of resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities and safe and effective wildfire response. Landscape-scale action that engages with federal and local partners and communities is also encouraged.⁸⁵ Developing or updating a Community Wildfire Protection Plan, creating defensible space around homes and implementing wildland-urban interface (WUI) education programs are all examples of projects that would qualify for this funding.⁸⁶ Grants require a 1:1 match from non-federal sources⁸⁷ and grant dollars cannot be spent on federal lands.⁸⁸ This money cannot be used to fund research or economic development projects, capital improvements or purchases of land, large equipment or buildings.⁸⁹

WESTERN REGION: WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE GRANT PROGRAM

In the 17-state western region, National Fire Capacity mitigation funding is distributed through the Wildland Urban Interface Grant Program.⁹²

Managed by the Council of Western State Foresters, the program funds projects that address hazardous fuels reduction in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), outreach and education related to wildfire risk mitigation, community wildfire planning, and locally-driven project monitoring.⁹³ The bulk of each year's grant funding (not less than 70%)⁹⁴ is awarded to fuels reduction projects. Eligible applicants include fire departments, local governments, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations.⁹⁵ All WUI Grant Program applicants must submit through the appropriate state forestry agency, which may establish its own project ranking criteria and deadlines.⁹⁶ Project funding requests cannot exceed \$300,000 and proposals must link to the objectives of an existing Community Wildfire Protection Plan, as well as the state's Forest Action Plan.⁹⁷ For more information visit the Council of Western State Foresters' webpage.



Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

NORTHEAST/MIDWEST REGION: WILDFIRE RISK REDUCTION GRANT PROGRAM

In the Northeast-Midwest region, the Forest Service-

managed Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant Program acts as the vehicle to distribute National Fire Capacity mitigation dollars. State forestry agencies, forest fire compacts, groups of states, nonprofits, academic institutions and tribes are eligible for this funding. Applicants need a letter of support from the state forester, but do not need to apply through the states, as is required in the Western region.⁹⁸ Projects must align with the state's Forest Action Plan as well as one or more "Northeast Regional Action Plan options" that link to the National Cohesive Fire Management Strategy goals. Proposals should highlight innovative approaches, incorporate community outreach and account for current and future drivers of fire risk such as development and climate change.⁹⁹ Funding requests can range from \$25,000 to \$150,000 per project.¹⁰⁰ For more information visit the Northeast Area State and Private Forestry's Grants webpage.

SOUTHERN REGION

In the Southern region, which aligns with Forest Service Region 8, state forestry agencies are the primary recipients of mitigation funding. States are then free to make the funding available to other entities through their own sub-grant processes. Unlike other regions, these National Fire Capacity dollars are distributed to southern states based on a predetermined formula. However, a review committee does vet proposals to ensure they meet federal grant requirements. The southern region's scoring criteria emphasize funding areas that have developed or are developing community wildfire

protection plans, FEMA hazard mitigation plans, or other collaboratively developed hazard mitigation plans. Non-state entities should contact your state forestry agency to find out how to apply for these funds.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **To learn more about Hazard Mitigation Funding opportunities**, contact your state forestry agency or regional Forest Service cooperative fire specialist. These staff can provide the best information on state and regional processes for accepting, reviewing and prioritizing applications and can provide valuable advice on crafting a proposal to meet the established criteria.⁹⁰
- **To find out what types of projects received funding in the past**, take a look at previous proposals, which can be accessed for western projects at forestrygrants.org and for Northeast/Midwest projects on the Northeast Area State and Private Forestry's Cohesive Fire Strategy webpage.
- **Some states and regions encourage applicants to submit a draft application.** This allows for collaboration between agency staff and applicants to fine tune the proposal before final submission.⁹¹

ASK AN EXPERT

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Maris' responsibilities include administering the State Fire Assistance Program to the 20 Northeastern states as well as working in other cooperative capacities.

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JAMES FORTNER, ACTING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR COOPERATIVE FORESTRY/ FOREST SERVICE STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY

As the Cooperative Fire Program Manager with the Forest Service's Washington Office, James is responsible for managing the National Fire Capacity and Rural Fire Capacity programs as well as working with state foresters and other national level partner organizations to assist communities in mitigating the risk of wildland fire.

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“In my experience, keys to success are often more about people than programs. Having a district ranger that is willing to take risks, line officers that can be flexible in staff time investments, and field staff who are good listeners and patient with collaboration, community groups, businesses, and other individuals that have a vested interest in project success. These relationships are essential.”

- Bob Christensen, Sustainable Southeast Partnership



AUTHORITIES

GOOD NEIGHBOR AUTHORITY

FOREST SERVICE & BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

WHAT IS IT?

The Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) allows the Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to pass-through federal dollars to state agencies, counties or tribes to implement watershed and forest management activities on federal lands, as well as utilize the revenue from timber sales to further additional projects. Permanently authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill, GNA expands limited federal capacity to plan and implement projects, and addresses shared priorities like fire-risk reduction, invasive species control, and water quality enhancement. All work conducted under GNA must have a restoration purpose. The federal agency retains decision making authority in planning, even if a state assists.

By using the authority, states, tribes, and counties can conduct work such as:

- Emergency watershed stabilization on federal lands
- Planning and data collection required in a NEPA process
- Hazardous fuels treatments
- Road decommissioning
- Vegetation management for restoration
- Restoring fish habitat and water quality

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Good Neighbor Authority itself is an authority, not a program, and as such carries no dedicated funding. Rather, funds for projects have come from a variety of sources, including appropriated funds from the National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, states, and revenue generated from timber sales.

State agencies that have signed master agreements with the Forest Service can then develop forest-level Supplemental Project Agreements to outline and accomplish specific work and budgets. This authority allows states to use their own procurement and contracting mechanisms to conduct work.¹⁰¹

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Engage your state agency partners** in order to build relationships, trust and understanding early on (a good idea regardless if there's a GNA agreement already in place).
- **Help monitor!** Because GNA is relatively new, there are important opportunities for partners to help monitor the efficiencies, effectiveness, and differences between state and federal implementation on particulars such as cost, time, and quality of work. You can encourage agency partners to share information on costs and revenue.
- **Evaluate new methodologies** other than those prescribed in USFS handbooks and guidance documents. These are great first opportunities to explore different approaches to project implementation (e.g. timber sale layout and marking).
- **States like Oregon and Montana have made complementary investments in federal forest health**, either financially (e.g. Oregon's Federal Forest Restoration Program) or with staff time (both have hired state liaisons), paving the way for new models of cooperation.

GNA does not have a matching funding requirement, although an investment from the state is often crucial to cover up-front costs and build the state capacity necessary to get a project off the ground.¹⁰²

WHAT IS THE ROLE FOR PARTNERS?

Although there is no requirement to collaborate, partners can play an important role in guiding appropriate use of the authority by tracking and informing the use of program revenue. Additionally, collaborative venues may serve as important opportunities for developing stronger working relationships between state and federal agencies.

THINGS TO KNOW

- GNA began as a pilot in 2009 with the states of Colorado and Utah, and was expanded to all 50 states and Puerto Rico in the 2014 Farm Bill. The 2018 Farm Bill and the 2018 Omnibus Appropriations Act made several changes to GNA. Most notably, the Farm Bill extended the authority to counties and tribes.¹⁰³ It also allows states, but not counties or tribes, to retain and manage revenues from a Good Neighbor project.¹⁰⁴ Those revenues can be used on future federal lands-based restoration activities that are completed under the Good Neighbor Authority.¹⁰⁵ The 2018 omnibus law also extended the authority to allow for restoration-related road reconstruction and repair.
- Any funds that a state has generated from timber sales associated with previous Good Neighbor projects can only be used on National Forest System lands.¹⁰⁶ However, the Wyden Authority can be cited alongside Good Neighbor Authority to allow for federal funds to be spent on non-federal lands adjacent to a GNA project as long as the funds meet the intent of both authorities.^{107,108}

- Counties and tribes can also get involved in GNA projects by subcontracting with the state to perform work on federal lands within their boundaries or by performing service work directly for a federal agency.¹⁰⁹
- All federal environmental laws and planning laws still apply to any management action achieved through GNA. However, because state and federal laws have differing provisions for procurement and contracting, there may be a difference in sale contracts, wage requirements, labor laws, and protection for small business owners included in state and federal contracts.



Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

ASK AN EXPERT

TYSON BERTONE-RIGGS, POLICY ANALYST RURAL VOICES FOR CONSERVATION COALITION

Tyson previously worked for the Oregon Department of Forestry utilizing GNA and has since authored a report for RVCC on the status of implementation of the authority around the West. He continues to track the evolution of the authority, both through legislative changes and roll out of projects and agreements in the field.

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STEWARDSHIP AUTHORITY

FOREST SERVICE & BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

WHAT IS IT?

Stewardship contracts and agreements are designed to support Forest Service and BLM projects that incorporate social, ecological, and economic benefits to public lands and nearby communities. The stated purpose is to “achieve land management goals for the national forests and the public lands that meet local and rural community needs.”¹¹⁰ Initially piloted in 1999, the now permanent authority is widely used across the National Forest System and BLM lands, leading to creative and efficient bundling of timber and service activities.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The stewardship authority provides several unique ways for federal agencies and community members to design, package, and offer innovative forest stewardship treatments. Defining features include the ability to combine timber sales and service work into one contract or agreement, and the requirement of collaborative input. In addition, stewardship allows the Forest Service (BLM) to:

- Award long-term contracts/agreements (up to 20-years in project areas where the majority of federal land is within Fire Regime Groups I, II, and III).¹¹¹
- Exchange the value of forest goods for the cost of services.
- Use “best-value” criteria to guide contracting decisions, meaning the federal agency must consider the best value to the government based on factors such as past work experience, work quality, technical approach, and expected community benefits, not just price.
- Focus on the “end result” desired, allowing contractors flexibility to determine the best approach.
- Reinvest remaining funds from the sale of forest products (‘retained receipts’) in additional restoration projects.

Activities performed under stewardship contracts or agreements can include vegetation removal, road and trail maintenance or removal, watershed restoration, and fish and wildlife habitat improvement.

WHAT IS THE ROLE FOR PARTNERS?

The stewardship authority was structured around the principles of community and collaborative engagement. Although federal land managers retain final decision-making authority, interested parties can collaborate throughout the process, from concept to design, through implementation and monitoring. Partners can get directly involved with stewardship projects via agreements or they can be helpful in the development of desired end results, in determining “best-value” criteria and multi-party monitoring. As with many tools, partners also play a critical role as liaison to local community interests and knowledge.

WHEN IS THIS THE RIGHT TOOL, AND WHEN IS IT NOT?

Many factors determine whether stewardship is the right approach for a given project.

Scope: The scope of a project may determine if it is more cost effective for the Forest Service to bundle contracts and activities in order to treat a larger landscape, or issue smaller discrete contracts instead. Stewardship contracts are most efficient and effective where the scope of activities match the capabilities of existing contractors, or where contractors have a track record of working cooperatively according to their individual proficiencies.

Specialization: For tasks with a high degree of specialization, it may be beneficial to use a service contract focused on that single task. This allows the Forest Service to assign a subject matter specialist to manage the complex contract, rather than expect a contracting officer to manage a complex project in addition to a broad workload.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Include community benefit.** The Forest Service considers local community benefit in the evaluation of stewardship contract offers.
- **Begin with small projects** and move toward larger projects. This creates a strong foundation for future partnerships.
- **Use stewardship and Wyden authorities in a complementary fashion.** Retained receipts from Stewardship can be used to fund restoration work on private land within a watershed that also benefits public lands. The use of Stewardship funding should be identified in the planning stages of a Wyden authority project.¹⁴

THINGS TO KNOW

- The decision to create a stewardship project can come before or after the NEPA process, and is not part of the NEPA process.
- An Integrated Resource Timber Contract (IRTC) is used when the value of the timber being removed exceeds the value of the service work; an Integrated Resource Service Contract (IRSC) is used when the cost of the service work is more than the value of the timber removed, and receipts cannot be retained.
- The 2018 Omnibus bill allows the Forest Service to give procurement preference to contractors to “promote an innovative use of forest products.”¹²

STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENTS

Along with contracting authorities, the authorizing legislation for Stewardship also provides for stewardship agreements. Generally more flexible than contracts, agreements must have mutual interest and mutual benefit for the federal agency and the non-agency partner. Both the USFS and BLM have implemented stewardship agreements around the nation, typically in partnership with state or local governments or NGOs. The non-agency partner must contribute a minimum 20% match to the project and can have different levels of involvement in implementation, depending on the project. For example, the non-agency partner can do the work themselves or contract it out.¹³ Regardless, the partner should expect to work cooperatively with local Forest Service staff throughout the life of the project.

LEARN MORE

Many partners have developed excellent guidance, recommendations, and case studies for stewardship contracting since the tool was first created, including RVCC. Some key references include:

- Sustainable Northwest’s Stewardship Contracting Guidebooks - three guidebooks focused on best value criteria, best practices for collaboration, and multi-party monitoring.
- National Forest Foundation stewardship contracting resources.
- The Pinchot Institute for Conservation conducts annual programmatic monitoring of stewardship contracts and agreements across the country. Annual reports of the organizations findings are available on its stewardship contracting webpage.

ASK AN EXPERT

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Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

WYDEN AUTHORITY

FOREST SERVICE & BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

WHAT IS IT?

The Wyden Authority allows the Forest Service and BLM to conduct restoration work on non-federal lands if the work provides tangible benefits to watersheds on public lands. Projects must advance agency goals and objectives, and should include protection, restoration, and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and other resources; or reduction of risk for natural disaster where public safety is threatened; or both.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Forest Service or BLM can enter into agreements with landowners, non-profits, state, local or tribal governments, and other federal agencies to improve fish and wildlife habitat or reduce the risk of a natural disaster. Unlike the Good Neighbor Authority, cost-sharing and mutual benefit between the parties is usually required. The Wyden Authority has often been used for projects such as riparian restoration, fish passage, watershed assessments, surveys, and monitoring.

WHAT IS THE ROLE FOR PARTNERS?

The expectation of mutual benefit and the application to private lands make partnerships essential. Community groups and collaboratives interested in a project that might benefit from the Wyden Authority should work closely with their local forest staff.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **The Wyden Authority does not appear to be very well understood** either with partners or internally - there is some ambiguity and potential flexibility.
- **Some forests have applied retained receipts from stewardship contracts** to implement restoration work on adjacent private lands, using the Wyden Authority as justification.

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Wyden Authority is always used in conjunction with an agreement, whether participating, cooperative, or another type.
- The Forest Service and BLM use different approaches and policies for establishing agreements based on the Wyden Authority. What might work for one agency won't necessarily work for the other.
- The authority does not come with dedicated funding. Any funds must come from existing appropriations.

ASK AN EXPERT

JOHNNY SUNDSTROM, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR THE SIUSLAW INSTITUTE, INC.

As one of the first pilots for Stewardship Contracting, the Siuslaw National Forest and its partners have long been recognized for exemplary leadership in creating, initiating, utilizing, and maintaining improvements in the application and use of the Authority. Johnny and his partners were also the first to successfully challenge the agencies (USFS & BLM) to allow the Wyden Amendment Authority to be applicable for retained receipts from contracts. Since this use was approved in 2003, 40% of all retained receipts from this Forest have been utilized on private lands when the management practices can be shown to provide benefit to the nearby federal lands as well.

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TRIBAL FOREST PROTECTION ACT

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

Through the Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA), eligible tribes may propose a specific project to the Forest Service that addresses a resource concern originating on federal lands but impacting adjacent tribal trust land or tribal communities. Resource concerns include fire, insect infestation, disease, and other threats. Projects can include but are not limited to on-the-ground restoration projects, technical assistance, and trainings. USDA and the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) are authorized to give special consideration to projects proposed by tribes under the TFPA.¹¹⁵

HOW IS IT FUNDED?

TFPA is an authority, not a funded program, and therefore it does not receive separate appropriations. Activities conducted within a TFPA project may be funded by an appropriate line item or program (e.g. using the Hazardous Fuels line item to pay for prescribed fire), or other non-appropriated sources, such as Title II funding under the Secure Rural Schools Act or retained receipts from timber sales. Third parties, such as community partners, may also be involved in funding and doing work on the ground.

HOW DO I APPLY?

Tribal partners are encouraged to work with local Forest Service units prior to submitting a letter of intent and proposal, such as by organizing collaborative dialogue and field trips with district rangers. Non-tribal partners interested in launching or supporting a TFPA project can offer this assistance to tribal partners in their region.

Proposals are accepted on a continual basis, and your local forest unit can supply the appropriate templates, if required. Projects are reviewed by forest supervisors and then recommended to the regional forester for approval. Applicants should receive a response within 120 days.¹¹⁶

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Submit proposals before the beginning of a new fiscal year.**
- **Know your role as a partner.**
- **While federally recognized tribes must propose a TFPA project, other stakeholder groups can become partners in the project or provide support on applications.** Tribes may also look to subcontract work to non-tribal entities, which represents another opportunity for partner involvement.¹²³
- **For more background on this program and its opportunities and challenges,** consult the report “Fulfilling the Promise of the Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004,” written by the Intertribal Timber Council in consultation with the USFS and Bureau of Indian Affairs.

THINGS TO KNOW

- TFPA requirements, including those related to adjacency, can be flexible. A project to address a resource threat from non-adjacent federal lands (such as invasive species) may still be eligible if the risk extends to tribal lands.¹¹⁷ In addition to on-the-ground restoration projects, TFPA can support trainings and technical assistance.¹¹⁸
- TFPA is underutilized. Though Forest Service records are incomplete, since passage of TFPA in 2004, only 17 proposals have been approved by the Forest Service nationwide, and only about nine have been completed or are underway.¹¹⁹ If a local forest unit is not familiar with utilizing this authority, the Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations or the Intertribal Timber Council can provide assistance.
- The USFS can use “best value” contracting on



Celebration of Haida culture at the 2015 Hydaburg Culture Camp in Southeast Alaska. Photo credit: Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership.

TFPA projects, allowing for consideration of factors such as the status of a tribe, its land, and other cultural, traditional and historical aspects when awarding contract work.

- Tribes have an opportunity for further engagement in TFPA projects thanks to a provision in the 2018 Farm Bill that extended the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act authority. The provision paves the way for tribes or tribal organizations to contract with the Forest Service or BLM to perform

management, administrative or other functions related to a TFPA project.¹²⁰ This delegation of authority is intended to not only speed work, but also build capacity and offer training opportunities for tribes.^{121,122}

LEARN MORE

Additional information on USDA resources for tribes can be found in the USFS guide for tribal governments. Reach out to your local forest unit for more information on proposing a project.

ASK AN EXPERT

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AGREEMENTS



AGREEMENTS

FOREST SERVICE & BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Forest Service agreements serve to formalize a working relationship between parties and are a commonly used tool in the realm of collaborative forestry. They are more binding than memorandums of understanding, offer more flexibility than contracts and involve greater Forest Service engagement than grants. In most cases, agreements are intended to have mutual benefit and are defined by substantial involvement and/or contributions from both cooperators.¹²⁴ They are non-competitive and are largely based on local resources and priorities as opposed to any national direction or mandate.¹²⁵

Agreements are a key tool for implementing the objectives of Forest Service funding programs and authorities.¹²⁶ The goals of a project, the benefits expected and the source of the funding largely determine the type of agreement to be used. The type of work allowed under any particular agreement also depends on the congressional authority or authorities that legally enable the Forest Service to enter into the partnership and spend federal dollars in that manner.¹²⁷

All agreement types have similar basic structures. One common format is a master agreement that encompasses a broad landscape – a state, a region or a forest, for example – establishing a general commitment to work together. Supplemental Project Agreements, or SPAs, are tiered to the master

agreement and define specific work areas, tasks and budgets but can be modified as conditions change.¹²⁸ This structure is often used when the Forest Service unit expects to do a number of similar but discrete projects with a partner.¹²⁹ Standalone agreements, on the other hand, do not have SPAs but can be modified in a similar way and contain similar specifications.¹³⁰

THINGS TO KNOW

General appropriations are the main funding source for Forest Service contributions to agreement projects, though retained receipts from timber sales, Secure Rural Schools Title II funds or recreation fee dollars can also be tapped.¹³¹

- In all agreements that involve cost-sharing, the partners must share a mutual interest in and receive mutual benefit from the project.¹³²
- Funds generally flow only one direction under each Forest Service agreement type (from the agency to a cooperator or from a cooperator to the agency). In the case of bigger, complex projects with different objectives and resources flowing in different directions, it may be necessary to craft several agreements to cover the breadth of the work.¹³³
- Many agreements require a partner match, which can be satisfied through a cash contribution, a non-cash contribution such as donating purchased supplies to a project, or an in-kind contribution such as volunteering labor or loaning equipment.¹³⁴
- Unless allowed by a specific authority, Forest Service funds put into an agreement project cannot be used off National Forest lands.¹³⁵
- While some authorities allow for agreement projects to extend to non-federal lands, a federal environmental assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act must be completed for the entire project area because Forest Service funding or technical assistance is involved.¹³⁶ This analysis need not be as comprehensive as a federal land analysis.



Photo credit: USDA Forest Service, Region 6, State and Private Forestry, Forest Health Protection, Central Oregon Service Center.



A forest biologist observes a snag in a second growth forest, Olympic National Forest. USDA photo by Karen Holtrop.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Approach your line officer and your grants and agreements or procurement staff** with the outcome you're seeking to achieve, as opposed to the instrument you think is right. Working with staff will help you decide which tool will best achieve those goals.
- **Include your grants and agreements staff early on in a project!**
- **Agreements with community-based organizations (CBOs) provide particularly ripe opportunities for innovation and creativity**, as CBOs are uniquely positioned to help align the goals, objectives, and resources of federal and state programs with the activities of local conservation-oriented landowners and businesses.
- **If coming up with the required match is proving difficult, work with local agency staff**, including the grants and agreements specialists, about the range of contributions that could qualify as match. That could include equipment, tools, or other items that were not bought specifically for a project, but have been lent by a participant to help complete the work.¹³⁷
- **Establishing relationships with local Forest Service staff is key to successful partnerships.** Because agreements are noncompetitive and based on local priorities, it is important for partners to build networks within the agency and use those to explore partnership opportunities. Make sure the local Forest Service staff know your mission and get to know what types of projects are on district or forest-level to-do lists in the coming months and years, so you can propose partnerships that address priority items.¹³⁸

ASK AN EXPERT

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CHALLENGE COST-SHARE AGREEMENT

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

The Forest Service uses Challenge Cost-Share Agreements to partner with outside entities on mutually beneficial work that also enhances the agency's own activities.¹³⁹ Under this agreement structure, the Forest Service works cooperatively to develop, plan and implement projects across a broad range of agency focus areas.¹⁴⁰

HOW IT WORKS

Challenge Cost-Share Agreements are similar to Participating Agreements, but can be used to complete a broader range of types of partnership work and are used more widely across the agency. They are employed by most Forest Service program units, including the National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, and Forest Service Research.¹⁴¹ If a particular project seems to be eligible for both a Participating Agreement and a Challenge Cost-Share Agreement, congressional direction states that the most specific authority, and the corresponding agreement type, should be used.¹⁴²

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE APPROPRIATE?

Examples of applicable projects include forest health monitoring conducted by outside groups on federal lands, wildlife habitat enhancement work or historic structure maintenance performed by a non-profit organization and the Forest Service, and a partnership between the Forest Service and a state agency on educational programming or conferences.¹⁴³

THINGS TO KNOW

- The partner must contribute a minimum 20% match and the contribution should be

more than indirect costs like administrative overhead to qualify for a Challenge Cost-Share Agreement.^{144,145}

- Unlike Participating Agreements, the Forest Service can only reimburse the cooperator under a Challenge Cost-Share Agreement (advance payments are not allowed) and the agency can only reimburse for actual costs incurred for materials and/or labor, not for volunteer labor or donated supplies.¹⁴⁶ This could prove challenging for smaller organizations that cannot cover the upfront costs of a project and then be reimbursed.



Audrey Mechtenberg performing sensitive beetle & butterfly surveys, Olympic National Forest. photo by Karen Holtrop.

COLLECTIONS AGREEMENT

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

A Collection Agreement allows the Forest Service to accept contributions, mainly cash, from a non-federal partner to perform work that benefits the partner as well as national forest land.¹⁴⁷ Enabling authorities associated with Collection Agreements allow them to be used for conservation projects related to land administration, evaluation, improvement, management protection, or reforestation.¹⁴⁸

HOW IT WORKS

Under a Collection Agreement, a cooperator can pay the Forest Service to complete or facilitate the agency's own forest management activities, or the cooperator can pay the Forest Service to do work that is the cooperator's responsibility but will have some public benefit.¹⁴⁹ While the non-agency entity is generally less involved in direct implementation of the project than they would be under a Participating

Agreement or Challenge Cost-Share Agreement, both parties are encouraged to share or balance responsibilities according to their strengths.^{150,151}

THINGS TO KNOW

- Collection Agreements may be used to perform work on national forest land or on non-federal land as long as the property is adjacent to federal land or the project has direct impact to Forest Service land.¹⁵²
- Cooperator contributions are most commonly cash but can include real or personal property in some circumstances and can cover all or part of a project's total cost.^{153, 154}
- Potential partners in Collection Agreements include local and tribal governments, conservation districts, watershed councils, schools, businesses and utilities.¹⁵⁵
- The Forest Service cannot request voluntary contributions - the offer must be initiated by the partner.¹⁵⁶

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE ALLOWED?

Possible activities appropriate for Collection Agreements range from forest surveying and monitoring to habitat improvement to protection of Forest Service lands from disease, fire and insects.¹⁵⁷ Example projects include a state contributing money to support a fish passage project on federal lands, a nonprofit donating trees and funding toward a Forest Service replanting project, and a neighboring property developer funding a land exchange survey.¹⁵⁸



Aquatics monitoring crew sieve stream substrate samples to assess the quality of resident and anadromous fish spawning habitat in Big Bear Creek, Salmon-Challis National Forest. Forest Service photo by David Deschaine.

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT

FOREST SERVICE



Participants in the Central Oregon Training Exchange gather to learn from each other and share expertise in prescribed fire management. Photo credit: Lisa McNee, BLM

WHAT IS IT?

Cooperative Agreements allow the Forest Service to transfer money, property, services or anything of value to a non-agency entity to support work that accomplishes public benefit.¹⁵⁹ Unlike the various types of partnership agreements, Cooperative Agreements support activities that do not directly benefit the Forest Service.¹⁶⁰

HOW IT WORKS

Cooperative Agreements are used for work that happens off Forest Service lands and are mostly used by the State and Private Forestry, Forest Service Research and International program units of the agency.¹⁶¹ These agreements differ from grants in the level of expected Forest Service involvement. While the agency is largely limited to monitoring recipient performance under a grant, it is expected to have substantial involvement in planning and implementing work performed under a Cooperative Agreement.¹⁶² Cooperative Agreements are also different from procurement contracts, which are used by the Forest

Service to acquire goods or services for the direct benefit of or use by the federal government and don't aim to produce a broader public good.¹⁶³

THINGS TO KNOW

There are also Cooperative Fire Protection Agreements, Cooperative Forest Road Agreements, and Cooperative Law Enforcement Agreements that allow the Forest Service to work cooperatively with fire organizations, state, county, or local public road authorities and state and local law enforcement agencies on issues related to wildland fire, federal disasters, forest roads and law enforcement.

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE ALLOWED?

Cooperative Agreements can be used for a number of different activities including the development of recipient-led demonstration or training projects that are of interest to a broader professional field, or research that doesn't directly benefit the Forest Service.

COOPERATIVE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

Cooperative Research and Development Agreements (CRADAs) allow the federal government to combine resources and work with non-agency parties on research and development projects meant to produce commercial products or services. This acts as an avenue for advancing research and development programs, enhancing collaboration between federal laboratories and industry and transferring technology developed in federal laboratories to the private sector.¹⁶⁴

WHO CAN BE INVOLVED?

Potential parties to these agreements are federal laboratories and state and local governments, educational institutions, or the private sector entities. All cooperators must share mutual interest in the work, though they may experience different benefits.

THINGS TO KNOW

- The project must have public benefit.
- There is no matching requirement for CRADAs.
- Both cooperators may provide personnel, services, facilities, equipment or other resources toward the project. While the Forest Service is prohibited from transferring funding to the cooperator, the cooperator can reimburse the Forest Service for expenses.¹⁶⁵
- The Federal Technology Transfer Act of 1986, which authorizes CRADAs, gives non-agency parties to the agreement the right of first refusal to commercialize or use government technology on an exclusive or nonexclusive basis as long as they have a plan to transfer that technology to the marketplace.¹⁶⁶ The Forest Service always retains the non-exclusive, irrevocable, royalty-free right to use, republish or reproduce the invention.



A Lab Technician tests soybean seed viability at the National Laboratory for Genetic Resources Preservation. USDA photo by Neil Palmer.

COST REIMBURSABLE AGREEMENT

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

Cost Reimbursable Agreements enable the Forest Service to procure certain goods or services from qualified colleges and/or universities without going through competitive bidding. The goods or services must be used to carry out agricultural research or teaching activities that are of mutual interest to both the Forest Service and the cooperator.¹⁶⁷

HOW ARE THEY FUNDED?

Cost Reimbursable Agreements related to research must be supported through Forest Service Research and Development appropriations, while teaching activities can be supported via funding from any program area, as long as the activities benefit that program.¹⁶⁸

THINGS TO KNOW

- There is no required match from cooperators and only reimbursements are allowed under this agreement. All Forest Service-acquired goods and services must be available in-house at the college, university or state cooperative institution and services must be performed by the institution's own employees.¹⁷⁰ An educational institution must offer baccalaureate degrees or higher to be deemed a qualified cooperator.¹⁷¹
- If additional goods or services are required to support the primary project, the Forest Service may also procure those. Examples include facility maintenance services, janitorial services and technology services.¹⁷²
- The Forest Service may not procure real property, equipment or capital improvements. It is also prohibited from procuring a range of services including architectural and engineering; visiting or foreign scientists; and temporary hire of administrative, budgetary or secretarial-type employees.¹⁷³

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE FOREST SERVICE?

According to the Forest Service handbook, the agency may provide “work assignments, technical assistance, or scientific direction to cooperator personnel” but the cooperator retains supervisory, personnel and administrative responsibilities.¹⁷⁴



Biology instructor Dr. Courtney Ross teaching at Gwinnett Technical College, in Lawrenceville, GA. USDA photo by Lance Cheung.

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE ALLOWED?

This agreement type could be used to support teaching activities that range from developing new curriculum, to conducting workshops or conferences, to directing classroom or laboratory instruction.¹⁷⁵ Other applicable work includes research services performed by a cooperator such as a study of recreational use or the study of factors affecting the recyclability of wood pulp.¹⁷⁶ The services of laboratory technicians and aides, seasonal workers, professors, and graduate and undergraduate students are among those the Forest Service can procure through this type of agreement.¹⁷⁷

JOINT VENTURE AGREEMENT

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

Agricultural research and teaching activities are the focus of Joint Venture Agreements. Using these agreements, the Forest Service pools resources and works cooperatively with individuals or entities such as colleges and universities on research projects, conference development or teaching activities such as laboratory curriculum or new instructional approaches.¹⁷⁸

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Forest Service can partner with a range of individuals or entities on research projects but is limited to partnering with universities and colleges offering at least four-year degrees for teaching activities.¹⁷⁹
- As with many other agreement types, Joint Venture Agreements must accomplish objectives that benefit and are in the interest of both parties and partners must contribute a minimum of 20% match.¹⁸⁰
- Advanced payments to the cooperator are permitted if they are justified by the cooperator but indirect costs will not be covered by the Forest Service.¹⁸¹ If a cooperator plans to contract out all or part of their share of their work, they should be prepared to cover a “substantial” portion of the contract.¹⁸²

HOW ARE THEY FUNDED?

Joint Venture Agreements related to research must be supported through Forest Service funds specifically appropriated for Research and Development while teaching activities can be supported via State and Private Forestry, Research and Development or National Forest System appropriations.¹⁸³

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE ALLOWED?

Projects such as collaborative research between the Forest Service and a state cooperative institution on wood combustion rates, or the establishment of a university institute focused on improving access to natural resources education, would be good candidates for a Joint Venture Agreement.¹⁸⁴



Science Graduate Students talk with children about how drones are used to perform different project needs at the USA Science & Engineering Festival in Washington D.C. USDA Photo by Lance Cheung.



University of Idaho scientists conduct research to improve watershed habitat and water supplies in Moscow, ID. USDA photo by Bob Nichols.

PARTICIPATING AGREEMENTS

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

The Forest Service uses Participating Agreements to perform cooperative, mutually beneficial work with non-agency partners such as educational institutions, nonprofits, local governments, and landowners.¹⁸⁵ Projects performed through Participating Agreements generally must be completed on Forest Service lands or provide benefit to those lands.

HOW IT WORKS

Participating Agreements are authorized under the Cooperative Funds and Deposits Act, the Wyden Amendment and the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-determination Act. Together, these legislative authorities determine the categories of work allowed under a Participating Agreement. Projects performed through Participating Agreements generally must be completed on Forest Service lands or, in the case of environmental education, must have a direct benefit to the Forest Service's land management goals.¹⁸⁶ There is an exception for projects tied to the Wyden Authority, which are allowed to be carried out on non-federal land if they produce watershed-related benefits or reduce natural disaster risk.¹⁸⁷ All projects require substantial involvement from the Forest Service.

THINGS TO KNOW

- Projects must relate to specific categories of work including forest protection, prescribed fire, environmental education, workforce development, pollution abatement, and watershed restoration and enhancement.
- Like several other agreement types, partners should contribute a match of at least 20%.¹⁸⁸
- Oftentimes, Participating Agreement projects can be crafted to accomplish multiple objectives stated by the underlying authorities.

WHAT KINDS OF PROJECTS ARE ALLOWED?

Under the Cooperative Funds and Deposits Act of 1975, Participating Agreements can be used for



A firefighter from Eglin Air Force Base expertly lights a prescribed fire under directions from fire researchers. Forest Service Photo by Roger Ottmar.

projects that accomplish outcomes in four general areas: development, manpower and job training; environmental education and forest history materials; forestry protection; and pollution abatement. Examples include fuels management, a co-produced watershed educational session, forest-related job training and cooperative noxious weed control on Forest Service lands. The Wyden Amendment allows for Participating Agreements that support work on non-federal lands in a watershed as long as the project directly or indirectly benefits natural or cultural resources on Forest Service lands downstream or reduces threats to public safety posed by natural disasters. A final category of eligible Participating Agreement projects are those recommended by local Forest Service Resource Advisory Committees and approved by the forest supervisor.¹⁸⁹

VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

FOREST SERVICE

WHAT IS IT?

Volunteers can get involved in nearly every aspect of the Forest Service except law enforcement and firefighting.¹⁹⁰ A volunteer agreement is used to officially document the service individuals or groups will provide, as well as the goals, objectives, roles and responsibilities of the Forest Service and volunteers.¹⁹¹

THINGS TO KNOW

- In addition to detailing volunteer roles and services, volunteer agreements are used to establish safety requirements and procedures and log volunteer accomplishments.
- There are many ways to modify these agreements and such changes can be made at any time with both parties' consent. A volunteer agreement can be modified, an agreement can be terminated and a new agreement created, or an amendment can be added to an existing agreement.
- While volunteers are not compensated for their service, the Forest Service may reimburse some incidental expenses.

VOLUNTEER AGREEMENTS AND CHALLENGE COST-SHARE AGREEMENTS

Volunteer Agreements can be used in conjunction with Challenge Cost-Share Agreements when the Forest Service works with a cooperator to recruit, train and/or directly manage volunteers, volunteer programs, or volunteer-oriented projects that are beneficial to both parties.¹⁹²

Under this arrangement a cooperator can take on the role of recruiting, training, supervising and managing Forest Service volunteers on the agency's behalf. It also allows the cooperator to count any operating or administrative costs they incur during volunteer recruitment, training and management as part of the match required for a challenge cost-share agreement. The value of the volunteer hours associated with cooperative work under a challenge cost-share agreement may be counted towards the partner's match requirement as well.¹⁹³



A group of 16 volunteers removed approximately one mile of fencing on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest's Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, 2016. Photo courtesy of Intermountain Forest Service, USDA Region 4

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