

A Landowner's Guide to: New York's Forest Land Enhancement Program

Overview and History:

As a result of the 2002 Farm Bill, New York can launch the Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) to serve the needs of private forest owners. Also through the 2002 Farm Bill, former programs such as SIP and FIP were terminated. This document is a summary of the program. Full details are available from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation field office that serves your county or from their web site at www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dlf/. This document is specific to FLEP in New York. Other Farm Bill programs, such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), etc. are describe at www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov/ and the originating legislation is at www.usda.gov/farmbill/

The objective of FLEP is to enhance stewardship efforts that support the sustainable use of forest resources of non-industrial private lands. These private lands are critical to the health, beauty and economy of New York. Private forests represent 85% of the forest land (15% public and industrial) and provide approximately 70% of the raw material for forest industries. Private forests provide clean air and water, wildlife habitat, and recreational and enterprise opportunities. FLEP

attempts to balance the 2002 Farm Bill investment in technical assistance, cost-share assistance, and educational programming with programs already existing in the state. The balance occurs through advice provided by the State Forest Stewardship Committee to the NYS DEC State Forester.

The national focus of FLEP includes areas such as: productivity of timber, habitat for flora and fauna, soil conservation, water and air quality, wetland and riparian protection, and control of forest pests, pathogens, and invasive species. New York supports these national goals and has emphasized topics that relate to conditions in New York's forests. These conditions warrant increased attention on the management of forests for sustainable timber production and wildlife habitat, preservation of water quality, and forest health. Specific details of topics emphasized in New York are outlined in the section below on cost-share assistance and approved practices.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance provides guidance to private forest landowners by trained professionals to help put the knowledge of forest resource management into practice on the ground. The NYS DEC Bureau of Private Land Services is the primary provider of technical assistance and should be contacted before a landowner initiates any projects with hopes of receiving cost-share payments. In addition to the DEC foresters who provide technical assistance, the private sector offers



foresters who can guide landowners in their management decisions. Even if landowners don't utilize resources from the cost-share and educational programs, technical assistance helps owners achieve their goals. To receive technical assistance, contact your local DEC office. DEC foresters can make a free visit to your property for consultation and can provide a list of Cooperating Foresters. The Cornell Cooperative Extension fact sheet "Working with Foresters" is also available to help in choosing a private sector forester. View this article on www.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/forestrypage

Cost-Share Assistance

Cost-share programs reimburse forest owners for a portion of actual expenses associated with forest management practices having prior approval by the state forester. This financial assistance has proven to be an effective incentive that encourages landowners to play a more active management role than without cost-sharing and to continue management activity after approved practices are completed. Cost-share practices must be approved by a DEC forester before they are initiated by the forest owner. Forest owners need a DEC-approved Landowner Forest Stewardship Plan (see FLEP #1 below) before they are eligible for cost-sharing, but plans are developed free of charge by the DEC or with partial reimbursement from private sector foresters under FLEP practice 1, with DEC approval. Forest owners must implement their approved practice within 6 months of approval and can typically treat up to 50 acres per year, receive up to \$5,000 annually, with a maximum total of \$25,000 in cost-share payments through 2007 – the end of the current Farm Bill program authorization. Development of plans is reimbursable up to 75% of the actual cost and other practices are reimbursable at 50% or 75%, depending on the practice. It is anticipated that an average of approximately \$250,000+ per year is available for cost-sharing in New York for 2003 – 2007.

Educational Programs

Educational programs inform landowners, foresters, and other resource professionals about the FLEP, how to use the guidelines of FLEP effectively, and how forest management practices can help landowners reach their goals while practicing sustainable forest management. The FLEP educational program is coordinated by the State Extension Forester in consultation with the DEC, through the Cornell Cooperative Extension system. The educational program seeks to inform through broad-scale initiatives and to enable enhanced practices through more intensive educational initiatives. FLEP educational programs are open to all individuals and complement on-going extension education provided statewide and through county associations of Cornell Cooperative Extension and outreach efforts of DEC. FLEP educational program activities will include direct mailing to thousands of forest owners, press releases, workshops and trainings for forest owners, training for foresters, training for Master Forest Owner volunteers, and public presentations to civic and community groups. The New York Forest Owners Association will partner with CCE in delivering FLEP education programs.

Summary of Approved Practices:

Below is a summary of practices approved for FLEP cost-share assistance in New York. Full details on the practices are available in the state's priority plan from the DEC Division of Lands and Forests web site or from a DEC forester. "Approved practices" are management activities that the State Forester has recognized as consistent with the needs of New York to meet the federal goals

of FLEP. Many management activities recommended by your technical assistance provider are sustainable, but only approved practices are eligible (with prior approval by DEC) for cost-share assistance. Your technical assistance provider may recommend some practices that while sustainable aren't "approved" for FLEP, but are important to help you meet your goals. The description of practices below is only a summary and should not be used to guide specific management decisions. Log on to the DEC web site, www.dec.state.ny.us for a copy of the state priority plan and the specifications provided in that document.

FLEP 1 - Forest Stewardship Planning: Develop a Landowner Forest Stewardship Plan (LFSP) or upgrade an existing plan to meet NYS approved standards. Plans may be prepared by private sector foresters with a cost-share rate of 75% of actual costs for new plans or upgraded plans not to exceed established program maximum rates. A stewardship plan must be prepared and approved by DEC before the landowner is eligible for other FLEP practices.

FLEP 2 -Afforestation or Reforestation: To encourage regeneration of forest cover through site preparation, planting, seeding, fencing, or tree shelters for the purposes of timber or fiber production or carbon sequestration. The planting plan may be part of the LFSP. Cost-share rate is 50%. Planting is limited to non-invasive native or naturalized species and cannot be used for orchard, ornamental, nursery or Christmas tree purposes.

FLEP 3 - Forest Stand Improvement: To enhance growth and quality of wood fiber. The cost-share rate of 75% is appropriate for activities such as: tree marking, thinning, cull removal, or grapevine removal. Marking will be by an approved silvicultural prescription. Crop tree release is an eligible activity when following the approved guide.

FLEP 4 - Agroforestry Implementation: not available in NY at this time

FLEP 5 - Water Quality Improvement: To improve or protect water quality, riparian areas, forest wetlands and forest watersheds through the establishment, maintenance, renovation, and/or restoration of approved practices. The cost-share rate of 75% may be used for water control forestry best management practices, design and layout of access corridors, and soil stabilization with plants to restrict erosion and protect water quality.

FLEP 6 - Fish and Wildlife Habitat improvement: To create, protect, or maintain fish and wildlife habitat through establishment, maintenance, and restoration practices. The cost-share rate of 50% may be applied to activities such as: wildlife crop tree release, wild fruit tree maintenance, installing artificial cavities and hibernacula, creating forest openings, establishing streamside vegetation, and enhancing seeps.

FLEP 7 - Forest Health Practices: To improve, protect or restore forest health relative to detection of or damage by insects, diseases, and animals affecting established stands. The cost-share rate of 75% covers practices such as tree marking for stand improvement and thinning. Marking guidelines must be based on an approved silvicultural guide. The practice

does not include cost-sharing for applications of chemical or biological agents for control of forest pests, such as gypsy moth.

FLEP 8 - Invasive Species Control: To limit the spread of invasive species in forested environments through eradication or management practices that support the forest owner's management goals. The cost-share rate of 50% can support practices of mechanical removal or chemical control. Chemical or biological controls must adhere to label guidelines. This practice is not for orchard, ornamental, nursery or Christmas tree purposes.

FLEP 9 - Wildfire and Catastrophic Risk Reduction: not available in NY at this time.

FLEP 10 - Wildfire and Catastrophic Event Rehabilitation: To restore and rehabilitate forests following catastrophic natural events such as wildfire, wind, and ice storms. The cost-share rate of 50% includes activities such as stabilizing firebreak soils or burned areas, tree designation for stand improvement, and thinning. Tree marking and thinning must follow an approved silvicultural guide.

FLEP 11 - Special Practices: no special practices are currently approved.

Summary of Steps to Receive Cost-Share Payments:

1. Complete the FLEP cost-share application/transaction form provided by the NYS DEC (available on the NY FLEP web site). Submit to Regional DEC office.
2. Regional DEC regional office will determine if the requested practice is eligible based on the LFSP or for FLEP #1 if the acreage is eligible. If the practice request is approved, the Regional DEC office will submit the approved request to the Cost Share Disbursement Administrator.
3. The Disbursement Administrator will obligate the funds, if available, and make payment to the landowner upon written notification of the successful completion of practices from the DEC service forester.
4. If sufficient funds are not available, the Disbursement Administrator will inform the landowner in writing.
5. Applicants have 6 months to complete the practice and report its completion. The six-month starts on the date the Disbursement Administrator (i.e., NYFOA) mails notice to the landowner. One six-month extension is possible with reasonable justification. Failure to complete practices within the approved time period (original or extended) will result in cancellation of approval.

Summary

FLEP is a useful tool to help forest owners enhance and ensure the sustainable use of their forests. This in turn supports the numerous benefits that private forests provide to communities and society. Before undertaking any activity, consult with and seek approval through your local DEC forester.