

"It's just a bunch of trees, right?" Fortunately, woodland owners across Kentucky don't agree and are increasingly looking for information to guide them in their understanding and management of their forests. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Kentucky has seen a steady increase since 2008 in the number of applicants to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) under the State Forestland Initiative. EQIP is a financial-assistance program crafted under the 1985 Farm Bill provisions, designed to address resource concerns on our nation's crop, pasture, forest, and wildlife lands. Kentucky receives on average, \$10 million dollars a year, obligated statewide on private lands to complete recommended conservation practices.

Kentucky NRCS understands the issues and concerns facing woodland owners and has set aside a portion of our annual financial assistance allocation since 2008 to meet those needs. The problem, until 2013, was not enough woodland owners were hearing the message and applying for financial and technical assistance through EQIP. Finally,

vice Providers (TSP) that will complete the inventory and prepare the CAP-FM. EQIP participants receive a payment incentive to have the CAP-FM prepared by a TSP. The participant must provide a copy of the forest-management plan to their local NRCS office for inclusion in the NRCS case file, and to certify the financial assistance payment. The TSP will include recommendations of the conservation practices needed. Most of these conservation practices are eligible for financial assistance under the EQIP State Forestland Initiative. A forestland owner can then make application to implement the recommended conservation practices through the EQIP State Forestland Initiative.

KY NRCS requires woodland owners to have a forest stewardship or forest-management plan to rank as a high priority applicant under the EQIP-Forestland Initiative. Plans can also be obtained through the KY Division of Forestry and private consulting foresters. Local NRCS

NRCS Programs

by Jerry Adams

through the Outreach efforts of NRCS staff and its conservation partners (KY Division of Forestry, UK Forest Extension, and KY Dept. of Fish and Wildlife), more forestland applications were received than could be funded in Fiscal Year 2013.

First and foremost, woodland owners need a plan. A forest stewardship or forest management plan is essential as the first step toward achieving a sustainable forest. A professional forester will inspect and conduct a sample inventory of the woodland, and then based on the owner's objectives, make recommendations to improve forest health and productivity. No plan? No problem! Woodland owners can apply for a Conservation Activity Plan-Forest Management (CAP-FM) through EQIP. Once approved, the owner selects from a list of certified Technical Ser-

The Kentucky Natural Resources Conservation Service provides numerous programs to help woodland owners care for their woodlands.

staff will assist woodland owners with review of the plan and understanding the forester's recommendations as well as what conservation practices are eligible for financial assistance through the EQIP State Forestland Initiative.

Applicants that are approved for funding, sign a federal contract that obligates EQIP dollars to complete the conservation practices in their woodlands.

The participant is responsible for bearing the burden of the expenses to complete the practices up front. Financial assistance will be approved once the completed



Photo courtesy:
Jerry Adams

practice(s) have been certified by NRCS to meet certain standards and specifications as set forth in the EQIP contract. Payment incentive rates have been calculated to approximate 75 percent of the actual cost of completing the needed treatment. The contract participant can choose to either complete the treatment(s) themselves or hire a contractor/vendor to do so. Kentucky coordinates its payment incentive rates with several adjoining states to ensure consistency.

The most common EQIP – Forestland Initiative practices applied for include:

Forest Stand Improvement (FSI) – Typically recommended by foresters to alleviate overcrowding and provide the best trees of form and value more room to grow. Foresters will mark the trees to deaden (mechanical and chemical) or fell to open up the spacing between crop trees and allow more sunlight to penetrate the forest canopy. FSI is often repeated in the same stand over 10 year periods, to eventually reach a level of 40-60 of the best trees that will be harvested. Payment incentive rates are paid by the acre.



Photo courtesy: Harry Pelle

This beech tree was marked (orange paint) for treatment. The woodland owner used hack and squirt practice to kill the tree. Note the dye in the hacks helps keep track of treated trees.

Brush Management – A treatment used to address woody species within the forest that are adversely affecting the growth or regeneration of the stand. Most commonly prescribed by Central Kentucky foresters in woodlands where bush honeysuckle has invaded. This invasive species can become so heavily infested within the forest stand that no regeneration of the native species can initiate. Almost no sunlight reaches the forest floor. The treatment involves mechanical removal of the plants along with chemical application to prevent sprouting. Payment incentive rates are paid by the acre.



Photos courtesy: Jerry Adams



Brush management is a frequently used treatment to address woodlands that are being overtaken by invasive shrubs such as bush honeysuckle (left). After the area has been treated (right) native trees will have a chance to become established.

Kentucky Natural Resource Conservation Service's financial and technical assistance programs 2010 through 2013					
	Estimated Cost Requested	Application Acres	Contracts Obligated	Obligation Amount	Contracted Acres
2010 Totals	\$1,501,000	-	59	\$465,148	2,699
2011 Totals	\$1,222,305	10,041	82	\$762,585	5,223
2012 Totals	\$1,046,771	4,405	81	\$699,687	2,950
2013 Totals	\$1,204,505	14,749	121	\$727,168	11,148
All Years	\$9,949,160	29,195	686	\$5,309,175	44,039

Tree and Shrub Planting – Areas previously in cropland or pastureland that the owner would like to convert permanently to woodland. Sites are matched by their soils to tree species most compatible and the long term objectives of the participant. Foresters may also recommend “enrichment” plantings where the desired oak/hickory component is missing from the forest stand. Payment incentive rates are paid by the acre.

Fence – Necessary where pastureland or grazed areas adjoin woodland. Exclusion of livestock will make an immediate impact on the forest flora and regeneration of seedlings. Typically, a five-strand barbed wire fence is the minimum accepted. Payment incentive rates paid by the linear foot installed.

The Farm Bill is under review and revision by USDA and legislators, but those involved have indicated they support a strong emphasis on private non-industrial forestland. Kentucky woodland owners should continue to seek out technical and financial assistance from NRCS and its partners to ensure the sustainability of our nation’s forests. Please stop by your nearest USDA Service Center or local Conservation District office to inquire about the EQIP State Forestland Initiative for 2014.

About the Author:

Jerry Adams works with the Kentucky Natural Resources Conservation Service as their state forestry coordinator. KY NRCS, 771 Corporate Drive Suite 210, Lexington, KY 40503; Phone: 859.224.7381; E-mail: jerry.adams@ky.usda.gov