

Kentucky Forest Stewardship Program

By Diana Olszowy

No one needs to tell you how beautiful your woods are, or how much cleaner they make the air and water—or that they are home for wildlife or a wonderful place to relax and unwind. And no one needs to tell you that, if you wish, they can provide you with firewood for the stove, maple syrup for the table, and lots of other products. If you're like most people, these are the joys and motivations that made you a woodland owner in the first place.

Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that our heirs will be able to enjoy these blessings as we have. In Kentucky today, insects and diseases brought here from other continents are killing trees by the thou-

sands. Invasive, exotic plants are outcompeting and taking over native forests. Wildlife species are slowly declining as their habitats change, shrink, and disappear. And with increasing frequency, heirs are forced to sell off timber, or even their land itself, simply to pay estate taxes. As these pressures mount, the future of our forests lies with those who own 78% of them, the private individual or family woodland owner.

The Kentucky Forest Stewardship Program recognizes the importance of these private forestland owners by providing them with information, education, and technical assistance in managing their

Photo courtesy of Kentucky Division of Forestry



woodlands. Developing a Forest Stewardship Plan is easy, and it's a great way to accomplish three things:

First, it ensures that you will get the maximum possible enjoyment from your woodland, since you decide what the goals of your plan will be. Do you want to know what kinds of wildlife live in your woodland and where? Do you want to make your wildlife habitat better and get a few cords of firewood at the same time? Do you want interesting, beautiful trails your family and friends can enjoy? Do you want to be sure that the stream in your woodlands stays clean and is the best fish habitat it can be? Whether you want to pursue active management of your woodlands, or simply wish to know more about the land you live on, stewardship planning can turn your goals into reality.

Second, stewardship planning can ensure that your heirs will be able to enjoy the woodlands as you do. A stewardship plan takes the long view, anticipating and watching for problems like foreign insect and disease attacks or unwanted changes in habitat conditions. It can also include estate plans, such as helping your heirs avoid unnecessary estate taxes or growing some high-value timber that can be sold and harvested in an environmentally sound manner when some dollars are really needed.

Finally, stewardship planning is more than words—it is action. By protecting and enhancing your woodlands, you are creating environmental benefits like clean air, water, and wildlife habitat that make the entire community a better place. Your Stewardship Plan demonstrates to your family, your friends, and the entire community that you are a responsible and proactive conservationist.

The Stewardship Plan

A Forest Stewardship Plan is an actual document developed by you and a professional forester. If you own 10 acres or more and follow a few simple guidelines, you are eligible for the Forest Stewardship Program. A typical plan has four basic parts:

Stewardship Goals: Deciding on and articulating your stewardship goals are the essential first steps, and no one can do them but you. This statement defines where you want to go so the plan can take you there. Your goals need not be elaborate but must communicate the essence of what you care about and want from your forest. The Kentucky Division of Forestry has professional foresters who are available for no charge to come out to your property and help you identify options, alternatives, and potential forest stewardship goals.

Maps: Maps are valuable products of a stewardship plan.

A typical plan includes an in-depth map that identifies the forest cover types that occur on your property and also adds features like woodland

The Kentucky Forest Stewardship Program



The wise use and management of our Commonwealth's greatest renewable resource for our benefit and for generations to come.



A cooperative effort of Kentucky's environmental community.



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Kentucky Division of Forestry District Offices



roads, existing or proposed trails, and the locations of various habitat or conservation activities your plan calls for. Many woodland owners find themselves making photocopies of their stewardship maps and taking them on walks through the forest. They are amazed at how these maps allow them to see their forest with new eyes, to learn about and enjoy their forest in whole new ways. For many families, as time passes, their stewardship maps become irreplaceable family treasures.

Forest Inventory: As part of the planning process, your forester will conduct a professional forest resource assessment, resulting in a wealth of important, useful information. You will know what plant species occur in each plant community, their ages, overall health, and history of the site and how the site has changed over time. You will know where your high-quality wildlife habitats are and where opportunities exist to make habitat better. You will know more about your stream and wetland resources, including vernal pools and fish habitats. And you will learn more about special areas of your forest with unique plant communities, potential scenic vistas or trail sites, and more. If you want your stewardship plan to include timber management, you will also receive detailed information on stand density, timber volume, and other important planning data for those cover types involved.

Recommended Stewardship Activities: Once the inventory is done, your forester will match your goals to your forest and begin to identify opportunities you can do to make your goals a reality. This step is the real meat of the planning process and one you will probably want to actively participate in. By taking advantage of your resource assessment and your forester's knowledge, you can develop a list of activities you hope to complete over the next few years that are feasible and that will truly allow you to enjoy your forest more.

Once completed, your Forest Stewardship Plan will provide you with both knowledge and direction. No longer will you have to make your best guesses as to what to do or not do in the forest. Every decision you make will be an informed one, and every action both positive and productive. Your Forest Stewardship Plan will attest that you are an informed and responsible steward of the land.



Photo courtesy of Kentucky Division of Forestry

How Do I Apply?

The Kentucky Division of Forestry has professional foresters who can visit your property and discuss forest stewardship options with you for no fee. Other professional forestry assistance is available from private consulting foresters with the Kentucky Association of Consulting Foresters. Whichever professional assistance you choose, for most woodland owners, this is the ideal first step to begin your stewardship planning process.

Some stewardship activities (such as the harvest of firewood, timber, maple syrup, or other products) can earn you an income if you choose to build them into your plan. Others do not, however, and can take time, effort, and even some dollars. Often, government cost-share programs are available to assist with the cost of these kinds of stewardship practices. By keeping you informed about these opportunities, the Forest Stewardship Program remains your partner throughout the life of your stewardship plan. Forestland owners who follow their plan are eligible to become a Kentucky Certified Stewardship Forest. This honorary program recognizes forestland owners who demonstrate a stewardship ethic on their properties.

Clean air, clean water, wildlife, and forest products are important entities that all of society needs, and yet they are dependent on private, family-owned woodlands. Making wise decisions in the management of your woodland can greatly increase its long-term timber value and overall health. The Forest Stewardship Program recognizes that when forest owners like you practice sound stewardship, everyone benefits.

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