



Eastern Region State and Private Forestry Grants and Agreements Update
February 27, 2019

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This is a year of changes for State and Private Forestry in the Eastern Region. Our year starts with the formal merger of the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry into the Eastern Region (R9). This action follows a two year pilot program and will continue to ensure the integration of the U.S. Forest Service mission and goals with State and Private Forestry (SPF) objectives across the eastern regional landscapes. This merger coincides with the closure of the Newtown Square, Pennsylvania office and the transfer of staff and duties to the Milwaukee, Wisconsin Regional Office. The transition of work and files began in early 2018 and shall continue until the Newtown Square office closes its doors on August 31, 2019.

Our newest staff member, John LaBounty, joined the staff at the Milwaukee office February 19, 2019. John will ultimately have full responsibility for the grants and agreements grouped with the St Paul Field Office for State and Private Forestry. Having transferred from Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, John is currently awaiting U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Grants Management Specialist credentials and certification. For the interim John is studying the U.S. Forest Service Manual and Handbooks regarding grants and agreements policy and direction. We will continue to expand staff at the Milwaukee Regional Office until there is a full complement of Grants Management Specialists serving the entire Eastern Region State and Private Forestry program.

The USFS Washington Office continues to provide assurances to the field grants management staff and offices that our transition to the new departmental wide "EzFed Grants" (EFG) is proceeding. This will be a largely automated system with the ability to support mobile device access. Initially this transition was thought to be scheduled for 2017 but due to un-foreseen and uncontrollable, but necessary, adjustments with the program and contracts, there is hope that the transition will begin late Fiscal Year 2020. We don't have an exact date or timeline for this process but know it must move forward. We will continue to provide updates which will include training announcements as, and when, those sessions are scheduled.

This will require that our current system be frozen on some future date to be decided with no additional payments, modifications, reports, etc. The USFS will be required to manually load each open award to the EFG system. This will be a massive undertaking across the entire agency. The details and requirements for this activity have yet to be established. There are currently 1,115 open awards that will require transfer to EFG for the Eastern Region SPF alone. For this reason, the USFS Grants staff will continue to push through as many grant close outs in fiscal year 2019 as possible which includes final bills and reports.

This brings me to the topic of reports and invoices. Most awards have annual reporting requirements. This means the progress and financial (SF425) reports are due no more than 90 days after December 31. But early submission is encouraged, as appropriate and able.





When an award has reached the end of its period of performance, when submitting a final invoice, the USFS does not encourage payment of the final invoice without submission of the final accomplishment report. In general, we recommend a grant recipient wait for the final invoice payment so that the final financial report is accurate and only requires one submission without corrections. Remember, the SF425 should also be received before the end of the 90 day period. It is recommended that final invoices and progress reports should be submitted within the first 30 days of expiration of the award. This allows for payment and receipt to process timely to reflect properly in the final SF425.

Consolidated Payment Grants (CPGs): For CPGs, progress reports may be one multiple page report that covers each program but is separated out and clearly identify for goals and accomplishments for that past year. This is acceptable and preferable as it consolidates the paperwork not only for you but also for our staff for review and processing. The SF425 should be a consolidation of the funding in total and not individual SF425 for each core program funding line. One page that reflects the entire award is acceptable and preferable, again for both your processing and our review. Multiple SF425s will be rejected and returned for consolidation to one page. When invoicing on the SF270 – please clearly annotate at the header column block each funding program currently requesting payment for the time period of the invoice. The SF270 may be more than one page so long as the total for that request is reflected on only one total column of the set (either the first or the last page). The intent of Congress in authorizing a consolidated payment grant system under the Cooperative Forestry Act was to reduce the burden of paperwork on the states. But it also can also reduce the burden to the USFS for program over-sight if the reports and invoices are very clear about programs being reported/invoiced and reporting takes place once a year in a concise and clear manner easily tracked by both the state program and the USFS program staff.

