

SDA Forest Service

Report on Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) Program

Background

The Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program helps States pursue innovative, landscape scale projects that focus on priorities identified in their [State Forest Action Plans](#). There are over 525 million acres of non-Federal forest lands¹ in the United States, totaling approximately three quarters of the Nation's forests. These working forests benefit all Americans - they generate millions of dollars in revenues from forest products and recreation spending; provide well-paying rural jobs; protect surface drinking water sources for cities and rural communities; and support imperiled wildlife and fish species.

The FY 2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act enacted the LSR budget line item. Prior to implementation of LSR, from FY 2008 through FY 2013, the Forest Service provided \$13 to \$20 million annually through a process known as "State and Private Forestry Redesign." Redesign-funded projects focused on issues and landscapes of national importance, and on activities that provided meaningful outcomes. The Forest Service drew funds for Redesign projects from multiple budget line items and program authorities, including Forest Stewardship, Urban and Community Forestry, Cooperative Forest Health, and State Fire Assistance. This process yielded many successful projects and leveraged over \$125 million of partner funds and in-kind contributions over that initial 6-year period.

The Redesign competitive process provided opportunities to address complex issues, but was limited by the need to provide funds at specific amounts in each of the applicable budget line items. Analysis of State Forest Action Plans revealed that forest management priorities differ across, and even within, State boundaries. Surveys conducted in conjunction with the National Association of State Foresters showed that many States would change the configuration of Forest Service grant dollars they received if they were allowed. LSR created the flexibility to fund priority projects without the limits contained within specific program funding, and allowed the use of all applicable Forest Service authorities. This program has enabled States to target priorities identified in their Forest Action Plans, further increasing the pace and scale of restoration on the Nation's forest lands. The LSR program facilitates cross-boundary, cross-program, multi-jurisdictional projects that would be difficult to arrange through the traditional method, within individual program areas. Working across landscapes is essential to address large-scale conservation issues such as the protection and restoration of watersheds, reduction of wildfire risk, and protection of at-risk species.

¹ Oswalt, Sonja N.; Smith, W. Brad; Miles, Patrick D.; Pugh, Scott A. 2014. Forest Resources of the United States, 2012: a technical document supporting the Forest Service 2010 update of the RPA Assessment. Gen. Tech. Rep. WO-91. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Washington Office. 218 p.
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Project Development, Execution and Administration

Project Development

LSR funds are competitively awarded to States through grants and cooperative agreements. Through the application process, States develop innovative cross-boundary project proposals that address their top priorities identified in their Forest Action Plans. Projects are developed through close collaboration with State and Territorial forestry agencies, and in partnership with diverse stakeholders (nonprofit organizations, universities, and local government agencies) with local knowledge and expertise.

To be eligible for LSR funding, projects must be cross-boundary; however, LSR funds can only be spent on nonfederal lands within the project area. Cross-boundary is defined broadly, and can include any combination of landownerships, (e.g., multiple private landowners; private and State landowners; State and Federal landowners; State and Tribal landowners; or rural to urban). It does not require the inclusion of federal lands.

Project Selection and Execution

The Forest Service and States work together to evaluate and select LSR projects, and funds are allocated on a competitive basis. This approach ensures that federal funds are spent on projects that are focused in priority areas identified in each State's Forest Action Plan, as well as address nationally and regionally significant issues or landscapes.

The State and Private Forestry Board, comprised of the Executive Committee of the National Association of State Foresters and Forest Service State and Private Forestry Deputy Area leadership, issues national LSR guidance annually to the regions. Each geographic region (Northeast, South, and West) follows the national guidance when designing their competitive process, including the establishment of interagency competitive teams.

Projects are reviewed and ranked by regional competitive teams in accordance with national and regional criteria. Projects that involve more than one State (multi-state projects), or that cross Forest Service regions, are generally encouraged within the competitive process. Other criteria include maximizing the federal investment by leveraging non-federal resources, collaboration with multiple stakeholders, improving the delivery of public benefits in coordination with complementary State and Federal programs, and delivering clear and measurable outcomes.

After the regional team reviews the proposals, it submits a list of ranked projects to the Forest Service national office for funding consideration. A portion of LSR funds is also competitively allocated by the Deputy Chief of the Forest Service State and Private Forestry Deputy Area for priority projects. These funds are used to catalyze or expand national and regional cross-boundary partnerships that support landscape restoration. When the Forest Service receives its final annual appropriation, funding is allocated to the corresponding Forest Service regional office, which works with the State to execute the grant.

Program Administration and Accountability

The Council of Western State Foresters (CWSF) and the Southern Group of State Foresters recently transitioned to a web-based proposal submission, evaluation, and search system known as [ForestryGrants](#). This new system simplifies the project submission and review process, and provides a more user-friendly interface for applicants and reviewers. It also includes a searchable database that can be used to create reports on how, where, and when LSR investments are spent. With the transition of the CWSF State Fire Assistance Wildland Urban Interface grant program to Forestry Grants in 2016, information about these three Forest Service competitive grant programs is now available online and in one location. Comprehensive information about the Northeastern LSR process including archived proposals, funded project lists, and applicant resources is available online at: <http://na.fs.fed.us/rfp/index.shtm>.

Recipients of LSR funding are required to communicate the results of the federal investment and demonstrate meaningful outcomes. The Landscape Scale Restoration reporting tool, or LaSR, is the official national reporting system for all LSR competitive grants. The LaSR captures both narrative and spatial accomplishments in a searchable online database. The system also provides a clear and searchable means to describe how the projects align with Forest Service priorities, and includes the amount and source of leveraged funding. States report on individual projects annually online at <http://apps.fs.fed.us/SMART>. Since 2015, States have been required to upload or create a spatial footprint or impact area of the project, which allows users to visualize and quantify where these projects influence change on the ground. All data entries must be fully completed no later than December 31 of each year.

A new publicly-accessible search tool of LSR projects was released in FY 2017. Project reports are now available online and searchable by funding year, State forestry organization, and/or keyword. Interested parties can search and download LSR project reports from <https://apps.fs.usda.gov/formap/public>. These project summary reports describe the project purpose, recent accomplishments, and include a map of the area impacted by the project.

LSR funds are obligated through grants and cooperative agreements and therefore adhere to federal financial assistance requirements. As the grantor, the Forest Service reviews and approves payment requests, and conducts periodic monitoring to assess progress towards award objectives. Once all the terms of the grant award are met, and the LSR funds have been expended, the Forest Service and grant recipient work together to submit and approve final financial and performance reports and close out the grant award. All grant related documentation is stored in the Forest Service's Natural Resource Management database, a system of database tools for managing Agency data across the Forest Service, including grants and agreements.

Implementation of the projects may take up to three years, although grants may be extended to 5 years if needed. All projects are leveraged by non-Federal contributions on at least a one-to-one basis; however, Forest Service data on partner dollar and in-kind contributions demonstrates that projects are often matched on a more than one-to-one basis each year.

Program Funding and Expenditures

An accounting of LSR projects awarded between FY 2014 and FY2017 is included in the attached spreadsheet. Projects are sorted by fiscal year and alphabetically by State. Data was sourced from two official Forest Service databases: the Landscape Scale Restoration reporting database (LaSR) and Natural Resource Management.

Landscape Scale Restoration Program Accomplishments

The LSR program's work contributes to the continued health and resilience of our Nation's forested landscapes. By addressing threats to forest sustainability, like protecting lands from damaging wildfires or the spread of insects and disease, these projects also benefit adjacent National Forest System lands. Since the program's inception, the Forest Service has awarded 245 competitive LSR projects to 44 States, the District of Columbia, and two territories. These projects range from improving water quality on Tribal and private forestlands in Kansas, to identifying best management practices to ensure sustainability of southern bottomland forests, to building capacity for forest-based recreation and improved forest stewardship in New England. Projects transcend program boundaries and landscape jurisdictions, focus on restoring healthy, resilient landscapes and communities, and effectively leverage the agency dollar. Here are just three examples:

Resilient Forests in the Columbia River Gorge Wildland Urban Interface

Innovative projects include the 2014 Resilient Forests in the Columbia River Gorge Wildland Urban Interface (FS funds: \$300,000; nonfederal match: \$705,820). Recognizing the presence of emerging forest health threats and the risk of severe wildfire in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), Oregon and Washington are working together through a multi-state partnership to build community capacity to respond to these shared threats. The Columbia River Gorge forms the boundary between the two States. A bark beetle outbreak, storm and wildfire damage, and overstocked forest conditions in the Columbia River Gorge Region pose a threat to the region's trees and forests. Project partners provided forest health training and technical assistance to 500 private landowners and 98 natural resource professionals, raising awareness of forest health and wildfire risks, and encouraging management actions to reduce those risks. Private forest landowners completed fuel reduction treatments on 718 acres along roads and around homes in priority landscapes in Klickitat (WA), Wasco (OR), and Hood River (OR) counties to reduce wildfire risk. With project funds, the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Underwood Conservation District established a cost share program to remove pine trees killed by bark beetles that pose a threat to homes and critical infrastructure. The City of Mosier, hard hit by the bark beetle outbreak, used the funds to pay for



Figure 1: On June 3, 2016 an oil train derailed and caught fire in Mosier immediately adjacent to where the dead pine trees had been removed (circled in red) along the rail road tracks. According to the City Manager, the project work was critical to the survival of the town.

the removal of 100 hazardous trees. Lessons learned during the life of the project will be used to refine and replicate these services in other WUI landscapes in eastern Washington and Oregon.

Chicago Region Trees Initiative- Improving the Urban Forest



Figure 1: Volunteers from Enablon helped the Chicago Regional Trees Initiative plant trees on the University of Illinois in Chicago campus to replace trees lost in a wind storm the previous year. Courtesy photo by Chicago Region Trees Initiative/ Melissa Custic

Invasive species, the impact of the region's large population of eight million inhabitants, and the lack of forestry training and resources threaten to change the extent and composition of Chicago's urban forests. Without effective action to address these threats, the social, economic, and environmental benefits of this urban forest will decrease. The Chicago Region Trees Initiative (FS funds:\$411,000; nonfederal match:\$425,000) is a public-private partnership working across a seven-county area to improve the health of the urban forest by leveraging funds, knowledge, skills, and expertise. This LSR project expands the capacity of the region's public managers by increasing the forestry and tree care skills of land managers, volunteers, and homeowners through mentoring, training, and networking. The project also helps strengthen local policies (e.g., tree protection and green infrastructure ordinances) and partnerships that support the urban forest. Recent accomplishments include the creation of the Community Tree Network mentoring program, and an ordinance and management template which is helping communities initiate urban forest management plans through comprehensive public/private management. More than 100 individuals completed the Urban Forest Basic Training program, and the Morton Arboretum staff has worked with 57 communities to teach them basic forestry skills ranging from developing a tree nursery to working with their Tree Boards.

Shortleaf Pine Restoration in the Southeast

Found in 13 States in the south, shortleaf pine has the broadest distribution of the southern pines. These forests are important sources of high quality forest products, and provide habitat for a wide range of wildlife species, including the federally endangered red cockaded woodpecker. These forests are disappearing at an alarming rate; in the last 30 years there has been a 50 percent loss of shortleaf across its entire range. Approximately 60 percent of shortleaf pine-dominated forests are found on non-industrial private land. In response, State and Federal agencies, non-industrial private landowners, and other stakeholders have come together to begin the recovery of shortleaf pine habitat.



Figure 2: Shortleaf Pine cone and leaves. Courtesy photo by National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Two LSR projects are leveraging a total of \$1.1 million to restore shortleaf pine habitat. In Arkansas and Oklahoma, land managers are putting fire back on the landscape. Shortleaf pine restoration requires a prescribed burning regime that is more intense than traditional pine management. Modeled after successful efforts to restore longleaf pine, the 2014 Shortleaf Pine Restoration Implementation Teams project (FS funds:\$1,070,228; nonfederal match:\$1,070,228) established two fully equipped teams to carry out restorative prescribed burning and develop educational resources. These teams function on nonindustrial private forest lands across the Ouachita and Ozark Plateaus, Arkansas River Valley, and Crowley's Ridge landforms in Arkansas and Oklahoma. To date, more than 20 landowners -- who collectively own more than 10,000 acres -- have been contacted about implementing prescribed burns. Approximately 850 acres have been burned, and another 322 acres are enrolled and waiting for the right conditions to burn. Additionally, the Arkansas Forestry Commission has assembled and equipped a traveling prescribed burn team. Recognizing a shortage of quality shortleaf pine seeds in Georgia, the 2015 Shortleaf Pine Seed Orchard Establishment project (FS funds: \$30,000; nonfederal match: \$30,000) will ultimately establish a new shortleaf pine seed orchard with the capability of providing millions of seedlings across the region for reforestation projects.. Given the current and future interest in shortleaf pine reestablishment, a genetically isolated, shortleaf pine seed orchard is critical. A quality site for the orchard has been acquired by the Georgia Forestry Commission, and the orchard will be planted and completed this fall.

Fiscal Year 2017 Projects

In FY 2017, this program focused on cross-boundary competitive projects that address priorities and needs identified in States' Forest Action Plans, and deliver meaningful outcomes on the ground. In FY 2017, the Forest Service competitively allocated \$14 million for 63 projects in 30 States and two Territories. Funding was provided in the FY 2017 Appropriations bill enacted in May 2017, and funding was provided to States in July 2017.

As in previous years, the demand for assistance from States outweighed program capacity. Projects in FY 2017 address critical needs such as protecting communities around Santa Fe, New Mexico, at risk of high severity wildfires and post-fire flooding through education, preparedness, and hazardous fuels treatments; promoting longleaf pine restoration on private lands in the southeast (North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia), where development and incompatible land use pose a threat to military installations and operations; and increasing tree canopy in two impaired priority watersheds in Iowa to mitigate the negative effects on water quantity and quality caused by an emerald ash borer infestation.