



Forest Stewardship and Forest Legacy Programs

Karl Dalla Rosa, Division of Forestry and Wildlife, Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources

The Hawai'i State Forest Stewardship and Federal Stewardship Incentive Programs provide technical and financial assistance to owners of nonindustrial private forest land committed to the stewardship, enhancement, and conservation of their forest resources. The information and assistance provided to landowners under these programs is intended to help them understand and implement management practices to enhance and protect the timber productivity, wildlife habitat, water quality, recreational values, and/or aesthetics of their forest properties.

The state Forest Stewardship Program was adopted through Act 327, as enacted by the 1991 Legislature, and provides state funds to assist private forest landowners financially. The Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Forestry and Wildlife administers this program under advisement from the state Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee. This committee is made up of resource professionals and private landowners. It is mandated by the program's authorizing acts to review applications to the federal Stewardship Incentive and state Forest Stewardship programs and to recommend to the State Forester the selection of qualified projects for funding.

The federal Stewardship Incentive Program was established by the Forest Stewardship Act of 1990. The program is administered by the USDA Forest Service at the national level, and by the Division of Forestry and Wildlife and the USDA Farm Service Agency at the state and county levels. The Forest Stewardship Program has expanded rapidly since its establishment. As of this year, 16 landowners had enrolled and more than 1600 acres are now being restored or managed under the program. Both small and large landowners are participating in the program, and their objectives are varied. Many landowners are reforesting former sugar plantations or degraded pastures with high-value hardwood species, while others are improving the health of their forest resources by removing undesirable non-native vegetation and promoting the regeneration of native species.

As part of the 1990 Farm Bill, Congress created the Forest Legacy program to identify and protect environmentally important private forest lands threatened with conversion to nonforest uses—such as subdivision for residential or commercial development. Forest Legacy was set up to authorize the USDA Forest Service to acquire permanent conservation easements on private forest lands that are at risk of being converted to non-forest uses. Easements are purchased only from willing landowners at fair market value.

Hawai'i became eligible to enter the Forest Legacy program in 1994, when its Assessment of Need for the program was approved by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. However, federal funding limitations have prevented the establishment of an active Forest Legacy Program here.

Questions

Q: Can you use that money to lease or purchase land?
A: No, the landowner has to already own at least five acres. Lease land can be assisted under the program, but there has to be at least a ten-year lease. I've also been coordinating the Forest Legacy Program. I forgot to mention it because we haven't really gotten the program off the ground here in Hawai'i. We spent quite a bit of time developing an assessment of need for the state of Hawai'i for this program. The Forest Legacy Program is set up to acquire conservation easements to properties, primarily intact forest areas, that are considered to be threatened by conversion to non-forest uses such as development for hotels, perhaps clearing for agriculture, something like that. The government will purchase a certain number of land-use rights that are transferred from the landowner to the government in perpetuity, and the government pays fair market value for those use rights. The idea being that the landowner retains title to the land, maintains most of the rights to the land except for those uses that are considered to be threatening to the forest. In this way it ensures that this forest area will be productive and useful but also conserved for future generations. We developed an assessment of need, we



were approved, and officially we're part of the National Forest Legacy Program. Because of recent years of congressional cutbacks in budgets for these things, there's been such limited funding that we really haven't been able to seriously consider starting a forest legacy program here in Hawai'i yet. Perhaps the status of the federal funding will change, but we're ready to go if and when we do get more support for that program.

Nelson Ayers: There is a Forest Legacy Program, but due to a lack of funding most of the monies go the East, like Connecticut, Rhode Island, Maine. In the West, California and Hawai'i have completed our assessment of need, but because of lack of funding to purchase, most of the monies went to the East Coast. So there is a Forest Legacy Program, but in the West we don't have monies to purchase.

Q: Under the Forest Stewardship Program, you're not allowed to cut any trees down while you're in the program? Is that correct?

A: No, that's not correct. Usually, it's a ten year committed program, so you wouldn't be harvesting during the time you are officially enrolled in the program. We assist landowners with the establishment of forest resources. We encourage wise stewardship, but we have no requirements that limit the landowner in how to use that forest in 20 or 30 years. They perhaps require the landowner follow best management practices that the Division's currently establishing, something like this. I think that might be a good idea. The public is very concerned that some of the public money might be spent to establish forests that might be harvested unwisely in the future, so there may be some attempt to do that in the near future. I can say right now that most of the landowners that have enrolled in the program, and if you see the way the program's set up and what they have to go through, most are people that are very environmentally minded and I doubt very much that anyone would go in and just clearcut or do something in the future that was detrimental to the forest. I think most people are concerned with the health of the forest.

Q: But there's no assurance that that could happen?

A: Not right now, there's no assurance.

Q: In this program, if you sign up, are you relegated to doing forestry only, or can you do companion planting with, for example, a koa-coffee mix? Would you qualify

for the Forest Stewardship Program?

A: You would. However, the Forest Stewardship Program would only fund the koa establishment portion of that project. The program does not assist with the establishment of orchards or what are considered under the program to be orchards. The forestry portion would be funded.

Q: You mentioned the Division has management practices. Have you established management practices?

A: Yes. Those are in this handbook. We have nine categories of management practices that are eligible for funding under the program, and under each one of those there's particular practices that are eligible for funding, and under those we've established hold-down or maximum cost-share rates that are allowable to be funded.