Tree Farm, Forestry Incentive, and Conservation Reserve Programs

Nelson L. Ayers, Division of Forestry and Wildlife, Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources

The Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) Division of Forestry and Wildlife supports environmentally responsible forest resource management on private lands. The state Tree Farm Program and the federal Forestry Incentive and Conservation Reserve Programs provide a mixture of resource management options for private landowners in Hawaii.

The state Tree Farm Program helps private landowners to grow and harvest new trees for commercial use according to a tree farm management plan that is approved by the Department. Landowners receive no program funding and it is strictly voluntary. Under this program, a condition was recently added to allow approved landowners the right to harvest new trees grown for commercial timber. Additionally, landowners can petition their county to receive a real property tax rate for their tree farm dedication similar to what is being offered for pasture use.

The federal Forestry Incentive Program (FIP) is a federal and state partnership designed to increase the nation's supply of timber products by sustaining the management of non-industrial private forest lands, implementing cost-effective forest improvement practices, and enhancing other forest resources. The USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) has recently been assigned to administer the FIP program nationwide. The Division of Forestry and Wildlife will help landowners complete a FIP management plan requirement with NRCS to qualify for program funding. In Hawai'i, NRCS plans to restart this program in October 1997.

The federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) helps landowners of highly erodible cropland conserve and improve the soil and water resources on their farm or ranches. This program is administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency. The Division of Forestry and Wildlife assists landowners interested in growing trees under CRP to complete a conservation plan for their property. But historically there has been no interest in this program. With the program's low cost-share rate per acre coupled with Hawai'i's high land values, it is difficult to convince landowners that it makes sense to convert their revenue-producing cropland into permanent vegetative cover for a minimum of ten years.

Questions

Q: Concerning FIP, one of the reasons you may not have had any takers, when I went in and asked for information on the program, they told me they not only didn't have any information, but they didn't have any money. That may be why you're not getting any people applying. The question I had is, if you go through the FIP program and you get an approval of your management program, does that automatically make you a tree farm, or do you need to apply as well?

A: You need to apply as well. I think the components of planting trees in the reforestation effort would apply to your tree farm management plan. I would say that perhaps components of your FIP, the tree component, would apply to tree farming. Let me just say that the tree farm program is a state program. Counties control how they run their real property taxes concerning tree farming, so it's not a very good mix sometimes. Not all counties are like that, but I heard one county wants ownership. Maybe that's the reason for the little interest, even though we've added the right to harvest in the law.

Q: We're at a stage now in the history of Hawaii when we're looking at partnerships and getting away from the "us" and "them" approaches we've taken in the past. I was wondering if you saw an opportunity for maybe having information on these kinds of things available in quantities at the county extension offices so they can encourge the forest stewardship and tree farm programs?

A: Hawai'i County is here; I can send them or give you a whole bunch.

Response: I think they're the first line of exposure to a lot land managers and landowners, so it would be great if they could do some of this missionary work.