

Background

According to Forest Service PMAS data, the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) has provided 238,000 management plans to landowners for the management of more than 27 million acres across the U.S. On the surface these numbers appear impressive but they become less so when we attempt to define what they really mean and how they relate to our core program goal: "...to encourage the long-term stewardship of nonindustrial private forest lands..." How many of these 27 million acres are actually being managed? Where are they? What forest resources are being managed?

Since its inception, the FSP has been delivered by State agency partners to non-industrial private forest owners on a largely first come-first served basis. This customer-friendly approach has benefited many landowners but it is not conducive to the tracking of management impacts nor does it provide for the efficient, strategic use of limited program resources where they will produce the most benefit in terms of important forest landscape features and resource values. Both the Administration and Congress have made it clear that the future of the Forest Stewardship Program will depend upon our ability to track program outcomes, in terms of affected forest resource values on the landscape through time and our ability to strategically direct available program resources.

SAP and Web-DET

The pilot phase of the Spatial Analysis Project (SAP) arose in the Northeastern Area, out of a desire to measure the impact of Forest Stewardship Program on forest resources across the landscape, coupled with a desire to strategically deliver the Forest Stewardship Program in the future. With SAP, the States of Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland and Missouri can now spatially display existing Stewardship Plans, and their relationship to important forest and watershed areas. The States of Delaware, Indiana, Iowa, Rhode Island and West Virginia in the Northeast along with Alaska, Oregon and Colorado in the West have begun their SAP efforts this year. State agency personnel from the four pilot States are mentoring the new State participants and the Forest Service has identified regional SAP coordinators.

The Forest Service is also currently working with Colorado State Forest Service and Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI) to develop a web-based data entry tool (Web-DET) that will automatically store spatial and resource data for individual properties as Forest Stewardship plans are written. Web-DET will also serve to remind field foresters and consultants when prescribed management activities are due to be carried out and store accomplishment and resource trend data over time. All of this data can be automatically fed into State, Regional and National data-bases so that various reporting needs are met on a continuous basis and data is always current. While Web-DET would prescribe to a minimum core set of data and management plan elements for National program and reporting purposes, individual States will be able to add data fields to accommodate unique individual or State standards and requirements.

Key Benefits of SAP and Web-DET

- Allows States and the Forest Service to graphically illustrate and assess how the FSP is affecting the landscape through time.
- Allows States to identify areas of highest Forest Stewardship potential so that limited resources can be used to produce most program benefit.
- Utilizes and enhances existing State GIS capabilities and can accommodate a variety of related forestry and watershed programs.
- Provides field foresters and consultants with a useful plan writing tool.
- Promotes management plan standard consistency, while automating the collection of data for State and National reporting needs.
- Promotes landowner follow-up assistance and the monitoring on plan implementation accomplishments.
- Allows us to measure and market program outcomes in a way that is acceptable meaningful to Congress and the Administration.
- Protects privacy of landowner information.
- Provides states with an analytical tool to address their current and emerging issues and resource opportunities through FSP and in collaboration with other resource management programs.

Pilot State Comments

“We intend to use SAP results, from a programmatic perspective, to target programs toward those areas of greatest potential benefit”. **Fred Borman, CT**

“We have incorporated [SAP] into our reporting system to demonstrate to our Commission where the work is getting done and where the funds are being invested”. **Bob Krepps, MO**

“Without these maps, we couldn’t even begin to ponder our future and current policy. The SAP has given us a tool to analyze resource information in a way we have not been able to do before”. **Steve Koehn, MD**

“From a land conservation perspective, [SAP] indicates potential for conserving larger blocks of forest resource, though encouragement of forest planning on private lands”. **Jim DiMaio, MA**

State Concerns

- ❑ **States vary greatly in how they prioritize and define important forest resources.** During the statewide assessment period, States can add uniquely important forest attributes – or data layers – that respond to or reflect unique State resource values. States can then apply weights to their various forest resource data layer attributes, that reflect state level resource management priorities.
- ❑ **How will SAP affect future program funding allocations?** As stated above, the Forest Service is being pressed to tie budgets and funding allocation factors to defined resource target areas and management outcomes. Through SAP, we can work with our State partners to accomplish this in a way that accounts for the unique resource management priorities and needs of each State while minimizing accomplishment tracking and reporting burdens. The Forest Service does not intend to use SAP to define National priorities for the purpose of allocating funds.
- ❑ **Strategic program delivery approach will exclude some tax paying forest owners who need assistance.** SAP is not intended to result in landowners being turned away. It will, however, allow States to identify high potential areas where outreach efforts and limited resources can achieve the greatest public benefit. States can also use SAP to strategically address landowner request backlogs.
- ❑ **How will landowner identity and privacy be protected?** The Forest Service will not have access to individual landowner particulars such as name, address and telephone number. Relevant SAP data related to accomplishments and forest resource attributes will be tied to unique case file identifier numbers. Landowner privacy will thus be protected and SAP data will not be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Proposed Action Plan

It is important that we invest now in the expansion SAP so that we can work with our State partners to strategically deliver program assistance, while illustrating and tracking program outcomes in a meaningful and consistent manner. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is currently evaluating all programs through its Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process that focuses on an agency’s ability define and track intended program outcomes. In its Credibility through Accountability (CTA) initiative, the Forest Service is developing program specific business plans that attempt to define program outcomes and tie them to budgets and funding allocations. The timely expansion of the SAP to address these pressing program accountability needs will require National and regional coordination and investment. The Washington Office proposes the establishment of a National SAP Steering Committee that will develop a feasible, tactical strategy and budget for getting all States on board with SAP within a reasonable period of time.

The Alternative

Many argue that SAP is expensive and that its development will divert funding support from already tight State service forestry budgets. However, the cost of not investing in SAP will ultimately be much higher if one takes into account the reductions in program funding levels that have resulted from unfavorable OMB PART evaluations, and which are likely, given our current inability to assess program outcomes in a meaningful, consistent way. SAP is the only tool we have for addressing this situation in a timely, effective manner.

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