



## FY 2012 Competitive Resource Allocation National Guidance (revised 4-6-11)



### Introduction

The delivery of State & Private Forestry (S&PF) programs assumes that our collective efforts are most effective when available resources are focused on issues and landscapes of national importance and prioritized, using state and regional assessments, on activities that promise meaningful outcomes on the ground. This concept is captured as: focus + priority = outcome. The **competitive resource allocation** is an effective means of ensuring that federal S&PF dollars are invested in projects that meet this standard.

Consistent with the Redesigned Competitive Resource Allocation initiated in fiscal year 2008 (FY08), competitive allocation of funds was codified in Section 8007 of the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-234). Section 8007 outlines a process for competitive allocation of funds to State Foresters or equivalent state officials and requires the Secretary consult with the Forest Resource Coordinating Committee when determining the competitive allocation of funds.

Beginning in FY08, a percentage of the S&PF allocation was invested in projects selected through a competitive process. This process, informed by the national guidance described below, is administered through a joint effort between the state forestry and USFS leadership in the Northeast, South and West. Each geographic region (NE, S, W), based on NASF regions, designs their competitive process to address geographically significant issues and landscapes as well as the broad themes (specifically the National Themes/Priorities identified in the Farm Bill) and direction provided at the national level.

### FY 2012 Allocation Process

In FY 2012, fifteen percent of the “net available” S&PF allocation will be designated for the Competitive Resource Allocation process.

- The net available funding will consist of S&PF funds available after earmarks and national commitments are removed.
- The net available will include funds that are traditionally transferred to State Forestry agencies as well as funds that support S&PF capacity in USFS Regions/Area and the Washington Office. USFS Regions/Area will engage their State Forester partners in determining any reductions of funds that support Forest Service S&PF capacity.
- For FY 2012, the net available will include funds in the Forest Stewardship, Urban and Community Forestry, Forest Health Management- Cooperative Lands, Forest Health Management- Cooperative Lands (National Fire Plan), State Fire Assistance, and State Fire Assistance (National Fire Plan) programs. The

Competitive Resource Allocation will not include funds from Volunteer Fire Assistance, Forest Legacy, Economic Action, and Federal Lands Forest Health Management programs.

- In conjunction with the distribution of initial budget advice to the USFS Regional/Area Offices, each geographic region will be informed of the amount to be available to them for competitive project allocation based on current distribution formulas.

The Competitive Resource Allocation process shall adhere to the following national timeline:

Competitive Resource Allocation Process Timeline:

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|-------------------|---|
| - January – April | - Geographic regions identify team and develop RFP  |
| - Late April/July | - Geographic regions issue RFP  |
| - Summer          | - WO provide initial allocation to Region/Area (depending on Appropriation Committee Bills) |
| - October         | - Proposals due   |
| - November        | - Team review and rank proposals  |
| - December        | - Geographic regions leadership approve projects  |
| - December        | - Submit project list to WO   |

The geographic regions are responsible for the establishment of an interagency Competitive Allocation Team and have the flexibility for the design and implementation of a competitive process based on national guidance and regionally specific criteria. The interagency teams in each geographic region will review project proposals and recommend projects for funding to the USFS Region/Area. The projects shall be reviewed and approved by the Region/Area/State leadership in the geographic region.

When the USFS receives its final appropriation from Congress, the Deputy Chief for S&PF will notify the geographic regions regarding their final competitive allocation and request their list of approved projects to be funded. The Regions/Area, working closely with States, will recommend the appropriate mix of program funds, and will provide the list of recommended projects for funding to the Deputy Chief. The Deputy Chief will allocate the requisite funding to the corresponding USFS Regional/Area Office for grant execution.

All non-competitive S&PF funding will be distributed according to existing methodologies. Matching requirements for dollars awarded through the competitive allocation process may be met through consolidation as currently handled through consolidated payment grants (CPG). Cash and in-kind contributions for project elements that do not fall within S&PF program authorities included in the Competitive Resource Allocation may not be used as match. Cash and in-kind contributions from other federal sources may not be used as match. USFS Regions/Area will work transparently and

cooperatively with their State Foresters to determine how to equitably and effectively handle any decreases in S&PF capacity dollars.

S&PF leadership and State Foresters will work together to determine how to better incorporate USFS technical assistance and resources into the competitive process.

### Competitive Criteria

The competitive component of the Redesign approach is intended to demonstrate that federal funds are being spent on projects that address both nationally and regionally significant issues or landscapes, as described by the National Themes and identified in the Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies. Projects may be on any combination of land ownerships, although S&PF funds should be spent on non-federal lands, as appropriate based on S&PF authorities. Implementation may extend from 1-3 years. USFS Regions/Area and States shall work together when identifying and evaluating possible Competitive Resource Allocation proposals. USFS Regions/Area and States should coordinate multi-state and cross regional collaborative opportunities, while ensuring locally-focused projects address the National Themes. State and territorial forestry agencies are eligible to submit project proposals.

Cross-regional collaborative projects are to be evaluated as one whole project, rather than state-size pieces. The States and USFS Regions/Area involved decide which Competitive Grant Area will evaluate the proposal. As a general guideline, the project should be submitted for evaluation to the Competitive Grant Area that has the *largest amount of funds* within the proposal. Collaboration at this stage (*before the final proposal is written and submitted*) is critical. All involved Competitive Grant Areas should be made aware of the project proposal so that collaboration and discussions of timelines and funding can occur. In accordance with the evaluation process in the chosen Competitive Grant Area, the proposal is assigned a score and either recommended to the USFS WO for funding or not. Evaluating and recommending cross-regional collaborative projects for funding do not call for any new policies or authorities. The appropriate USFS Region/Area is responsible for funding the portion of a cross-regional project involving a state(s) within that Region/Area. As issues arise during the Competitive Grant Area evaluation, teams may make the necessary decisions to resolve them.

Projects funded should consider the following key concepts:

- Purpose Statement – Projects should effectively address the purpose statement which is to “*shape and influence forest land use on a scale and in a way that optimizes public benefits from trees and forests for both current and future generations*” and will be consistent with S&PF authorities that contribute to the Competitive Resource Allocation process (see Q&A for additional clarification).
- National Relevance – Projects should be focused on issues or landscapes of national importance as identified by the National Themes, objectives, and associated outcomes.
- Prioritization – Projects will be based on an analysis within the state or region that identifies the issue or landscape being addressed as a priority in the Statewide

Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies. In addition, the State may use Forest Stewardship Spatial Analysis Project assessments and other state or regional assessments and plans, including those completed by other agencies or partners, to help identify priority issues or landscapes.

- Project Scale – The project scale shall be a function of the most appropriate size associated with the issue or landscape of national importance, and may result in single-, multi-state or multi-region implementation.
- Collaboration – Projects should identify partners that have demonstrated a commitment and add value towards project planning and implementation. Collaboration may be qualitative in nature, and the contribution of the partners may be more important than the number of partners involved in the projects.
- Outcomes – Projects should prioritize funding and other resources toward the achievement of outcomes identified below. In addition, the geographic regions should work towards including state performance as an evaluation criterion in the future.

*Conserving and Managing Working Forest Landscapes*

1. High priority forest ecosystems and landscapes are identified and conserved.
2. Forests are actively and sustainably managed.

*Protect Forests from Threats*

3. Fire-adapted lands are restored and risk of wildfire impacts is reduced.
4. Threats to forest and ecosystem health are identified, managed and reduced.

*Enhance Public Benefits from Private Forests*

5. Water quality and quantity is protected and enhanced.
6. Air quality is improved and energy is conserved.
7. Communities plan for and reduce their risks from wildfire.
8. The economic benefits and values of trees and forests are maintained and enhanced.
9. Wildlife and fish habitat is protected, conserved, and enhanced.
10. People are connected to trees and forests and are engaged in environmental stewardship activities.
11. Trees and forests are managed and restored to help mitigate and adapt to global climate change.

- Integrated Delivery – Projects should seek to improve the delivery of public benefits from forest management by coordinating with complementary state and federal programs when possible. Regional evaluation criteria may consider projects that integrate outcomes.
- Leverage – Projects should maximize S&PF funding by using it to leverage contributions from both federal and non-federal entities. Project applications need to clearly identify Competitive Resource Allocation requested funds and associated non-federal contributions and separately document leveraged contributions.
- Influence Positive Change – Projects should include a component of outreach, training, lessons learned or related opportunities such that implementation of the

project results in skills and capability that extends beyond the life of the project itself.

### Reporting and Accountability

Performance measures are essential to demonstrating outcomes and to communicating the results of federal investments. The Redesign Implementation Council (RIC) concluded that there should be **one core set** of measures that relate to the National Themes and Objectives of Redesign to tell the story of **all SPF work** at a national level. While these measures have been approved for use, not all will be implemented immediately.

Reporting for the “New Measures” will not begin until additional work is completed, with the next phase of work beginning soon. States and the FS will continue to report on “Current Measures” as is currently required. The framework also includes “Pilot Measures.” These measures will be phased in over time as data becomes available.

Reporting on individual grants will occur online through the National Information Center (NIC) Portal and includes information on partners, deliverables and outcomes, accomplishments, deliverables in progress, challenges, and strategic issues. Reports will be requested of the States by the Forest Service at the end of the Fiscal Year in which project funds were awarded, and at the end of each Fiscal Year through the end of the project.

### Modifications to Grants

Modifications to competitively-awarded grants (whether the project is an individual grant or part of a CPG) should be handled between the signatories of the grants (i.e., the State Forester and the USFS Regional Office in question).

### Geographic Region Requirements:

In order to ensure the Competitive Resource Allocation process is transparent and fair, the geographic regions shall implement the following measures:

1. The Competitive Resource Allocation Team will:
  - a. consist of an equal number of Forest Service and State representatives with diverse skills,
  - b. develop a process to ensure consistency in proposal evaluation,
  - c. identify rotation and duration of terms for team members,
  - d. address possible conflict of interest (such as having each State representative not score his/her own projects), and
  - e. ensure projects are consistent with S&PF authorities.
2. Issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) that includes:
  - a. an overview of the review process,
  - b. composition of the review team,
  - c. scoring guidance- which incorporates the National Themes, Objectives, and Outcomes, as well as regional strategic objectives, and weights for each selection criteria,
  - d. a standard proposal template, and
  - e. for those Geographic Regions that require States to rank proposals, the RFP shall provide information explaining how the rankings will be applied during the competitive process.

3. Each geographic region shall establish proposal and/or funding limits (either per State and/or per project) for the competitive process.
4. Each geographic region shall designate a Forest Service and State point of contact to answer questions and concerns, as well as share and coordinate information to ensure consistency and clarity.
5. The geographic regions shall coordinate when evaluating cross-regional issues and projects, and will consider having cross-regional projects submitted to one geographic region, rather than submitted separately to each geographic region.
6. Multi-year projects should be fully funded in one year. If not possible, each subsequent phase will need to compete on its own.
7. The geographic regions shall collaborate during their respective evaluation processes for multi-region proposals.
8. The geographic regions shall develop a protocol for funding alternative projects when there are cost savings from completed or failed projects.

In addition, the Competitive Resource Allocation should consider the following:

1. It is recommended that the RFP include examples of high scoring proposals to give States and the Competitive Resource Allocation Team additional clarification.
2. Geographic regions are encouraged to host a workshop to disseminate information on the competitive process and assist States with proposal development.