

Summary of Responses to Discussion Topics
Stewardship Advisory Committee Meeting
March 10, 2010

Prioritization

Given limited resources and a strong federal push to develop “priority areas”, how should we distribute stewardship program delivery?

Summary: Committee leans heavily towards prioritizing according to likelihood of conversion from forest. Secondary theme is to be guided by wildlife habitat needs. Also mentioned; water, forest products and job creation. One nod to landscape scale focus.

Resource concerns

What worries you the most about the future of family woodlands?

Summary: Fragmentation/parcelization/development/conversion by far the biggest concerns of the Committee. Underlying that are generational transfer, economic stress, tax burden, lack of markets and loggers, and loss of connectedness to the land.

What are the most important resource concerns (examples: soil erosion, fish habitat, invasive species, etc) facing Maine in the next 5 years?

Summary: Repeated concern about fragmentation and conversion; also strong mention of invasive species, water quality (including threat from bottled water industry) and wildlife issues (loss of biodiversity and connectivity). One somewhat unique concern involves the comparative economics of stewardship and liquidation/conversion: right now stewardship loses.

Practices on the ground

What are the exemplary practices that should be modeled and/or rewarded?

Summary: pretty good list covering a good range of general activities, but not much in the way of specifics. Worth noting: families that handle generational transfer by passing on knowledge of the woods should be rewarded.

What practices are the most/least needed?

Summary: Most members responded to the “most” side of the question. Generic thoughts include maintaining diversity, enhancing heath and productivity, etc. In the specific, controlling invasive species was top of the list, with related mention of reducing hardwood competition by chemical methods. Also mentioned: management plans, using a forester, affordable certification, maintaining large blocks of contiguous forest, replacing

impaired culverts. Interesting point made about controlling invasive species on parcels less than 10 acres, to reduce infestation of larger surrounding properties.

On the “least” side, only one practice was mentioned: deer management in southern Maine, due to overpopulation. (Could argue this indicates a greater need for a certain type of deer management.)

What do woodland owners want to do?

Summary: Interesting that the answers are more on the broader philosophical side than specific actions or practices. “Enjoy their land. Retain ownership. Make money. Trust their forester to tell them the right thing to do. Be respected for their stewardship efforts. Share their land. Usually something other than forest management, per se.”

Building a better education and outreach program

Name the top 3 three things MFS can do to help family forest owners:

Summary: Most answers are the activities that MFS is already doing; the Committee wants us to keep up the good work and or do more of it. A few are outside our purview (property tax abatement). One somewhat interesting reply involves identifying the “social capital” in communities and using it to inspire other landowners.

Are forest management plans the most effective way to promote stewardship for family forest owners?

Summary: Overwhelming support for FMPs, with additional overwhelming sentiment that plans are not enough by themselves. The necessary added elements include effective incentives for implementation, [continued] contact with professionals, and information and incentives for conservation easements. Although the question was not framed as such, the context is individual landowner/parcel FMPs, not “landscape”.

What are optimal rates (% or other) for incentivizing management plans and practices?

Summary: Limited number of responses here; three called for 75% or greater, one recalls another state where the state forestry agency provided Stewardship Plans free, as a public service) with a small donation.

If you were in charge, how would you design an assistance program? How would it look and feel?

Summary: “One that was easy to use. That followed a management plan. A quicker more responsive system to serve motivated landowners would be much better. We should be able to strike while the iron is hot!!!! Throw much more resources in the form of personnel. Consider using a whole cadre of AmeriCorps volunteers with forestry

background for some efforts. Focus efforts on both conservation of forestlands (e.g., conservation easements) and on proactive management of forestland through traditional cost-share programs. Emphasize working with the Social Capital of communities to help build up local support for these activities. The importance of this social connectedness can not be understated. Without local support, it will be much more difficult to succeed in conserving and proactively stewarding our forestlands.”

Where should the funding come from for forestry assistance?

Summary:

“Knowing that taxes are not an option I would say forestry assistance should come from its own lottery ticket, like the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund.”

“I think from a variety of sources: Federal, State, and through private dollars. We need to look at corporate sponsorships to help fund incentive programs. The concept of a ‘Landscape Auction’ that is being developed by the White River Partnership in Vermont should be considered. Landscape auctions are specifically tailored to place-based needs, and can result in, for example: a) support for private landowners to manage landscape elements on their land; and b) support conservation groups to purchase development rights or to buy land for conservation.”

*“Regional ecosystem services funds
Public funds-ecosystem services”*

Subsidy from wood consuming markets (self interest)

“USFS. Forestry assistance from the USDA should come from the USDA Forest Service, the agriculture department’s forestry agency, because it has the forestry educated personnel. Not all forest owners are farmers (only a small %) and the [farmer-oriented] agency does not have forestry personnel.”

*“Taxes on land sales!!!
Penalties for removing land from tree growth.”*

Communication

Does MFS communicate effectively? Too little/too much? What do you think about the MFS Website? List-servs? Fair handouts? Other?

Summary: Generally positive responses. Kudos for the media spots. Mixed reviews on the web site. The fact that two of the members are apparently not on any of our list servs is telling. Again, there is a call for more effort in this area.

Additional bonus topic

What would you like to be doing more of that promotes stewardship? What would make that possible?

Summary: More social science research. Peer to Peer network building. Develop “social capital”. Maintain and expand wood markets, especially for small woodlots.