

STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING: Q's and A's

What is stewardship contracting?

The Forest Service and the BLM received a new authority to implement stewardship contracting and agreements in the 2003 appropriations act (P.L. 108-7). Ultimately, these contracts and agreements will help make forests and rangelands more resilient to natural disturbances, such as wind, flood, fire, insects, and disease. New provisions under this authority include:

- allows exchange of goods for services
- facilitates land restoration and enhancement efforts by using value of traded goods for important work on the ground
- requires contracts to be awarded based on “best value”
- contracting period of up to 10 years may be utilized; this should help prospective contractors qualify for and obtain loans and equipment opportunities for local communities to respond to contract proposals

What are the goals of stewardship contracting?

Stewardship contracting is intended to achieve key land-management goals that improve, maintain, or restore forest or rangeland health; restore or maintain water quality; improve fish and wildlife habitat; reestablish native plant species and increase their resilience to insect and disease; and reduce hazardous fuels that pose risks to communities and ecosystem values through an open, collaborative process. The legislation also requires that projects meet local and rural community needs in addition to the land management goals.

Does stewardship contracting replace other programs, like the timber sale program?

No. Stewardship contracting is not a program, but a tool for the contracting toolbox to accomplish work on the land as part of the Healthy Forests Initiative and to achieve broad land management goals.

How does stewardship contracting affect the role for public input and other aspects of the NEPA process?

Because projects must meet local and rural community needs, collaboration with local interests is emphasized. However, every project will include adherence to the appropriate NEPA process, and there is no change to the public comment process. We will continue to comply with all laws such as Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and Clean Air Act, and projects will meet the direction of FS and BLM's land use plans, and management policies relating to existing special designations (e.g., Wilderness).

What are the Forest Service and BLM announcing?

Both the Forest Service and the BLM are announcing the direction that they will be issuing to their field units on how to develop and implement stewardship contracts and agreements. This new direction builds on lessons learned by the Forest Service.

What does the direction contain?

The Forest Service/BLM direction delineates

- project design goals and objectives;
- office roles and responsibilities;
- direction for use of excess offset value;
- emphasis that generation of monies is a secondary consideration to restoration activities;
- direction for project submission, accomplishment reporting, and project financial tracking; and
- direction for monitoring, coordination, and collaboration.

How does the stewardship contracting language in P.L. 108-7 affect the Forest Service and the BLM?

The legislation authorizes the Forest Service and the BLM to

- exchange goods removed for restoration services provided;
- enter into stewardship contracts for periods of up to 10 years;
- use multiparty monitoring to assess the program and report to Congress on the results; and
- award contracts based on “best value,” which allows for consideration of performance as well as bid price.

What do the terms “timber sale,” “service contract,” and “stewardship contracts” mean in the legislation and the direction?

A **timber sale** is the sale of commercial forest products, always with return of receipts to the U.S. Treasury. **Service contracts** are contracts for services (such as pre-commercial thinning, trail maintenance, and fuel reduction), that are funded with appropriated dollars, and do not return revenues to the U.S. Treasury. **Stewardship Contracts** are contracts by the FS and BLM for services (such as pre-commercial thinning, trail maintenance, and fuel reduction) in which some of the costs may be offset by the value of vegetative material removed and may not return revenues to the U.S. Treasury. In addition, any excess receipts could be used for other stewardship contracts.

1/14/2004 3:25 PM