

Comments

Tree Planters' Notes

is published quarterly by the State and Private Forestry Staff, Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250. The Secretary of Agriculture has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of public business required by law of this Department.

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Reforestation Technical Assistance for the Non-industrial Private Forestland Owner — Opportunity Knocks


With the recent shift in timber harvesting from Federal lands to private lands — especially to non-industrial private forestlands (NIPF) — nursery and reforestation workers have a tremendous opportunity to inform landowners regarding the best way to harvest and reforest their land. Historically, only about 10% of all NIPF owners avail themselves of technical assistance on preharvest planning for a timber sale and subsequent reforestation activities. Reasons include lack of agency technical assistance funds, hesitancy to accept Federal funds because of concerns about property rights, and possibly, a lack of multi-resource focus on the part of some public agencies. (Those reasons are the topic of another editorial-any takers?) What I would like to focus on now is the positive opportunity we have now to reach new landowners.

With the price of stumpage on an upward trajectory in all parts of the nation, many landowners are taking a more active interest in their forests, especially as a source of needed revenue. We professionals should make good use of this increased economic incentive to help landowners with their reforestation activities.

We are not implying that landowners are not doing an adequate job of reforesting their land or that there is this big backlog of unreforested land! But we are saying that we could take this opportunity to reach out to new landowners and inform them of the latest technologies and reforestation systems that are available. We have better information on all fronts—seed quality, seedling culture and storage, planting techniques, and preharvest planning. Informed landowners can make better decisions about what to ask for when they buy seedlings and what to look for when they plant them.

Many timber companies and private consultants are working with landowners to provide technical assistance; we support and encourage these efforts. We all need to work together in this effort to reach NIPF owners.

The development of the Forest Stewardship Program of the USDA Forest Service and State Foresters is another effort that is reaching out to new and existing NIPF owners. This program helps landowners with multi-resource options to manage their land. Making use of new or previously under-used plant species to accomplish various land-management objectives is a key activity of this program. For example, non-traditional species will be increasingly used in projects promoting wildlife habitat, recreation, ecological restoration and biodiversity projects, and streamside management efforts. We also need more information on proper planting techniques for these "new" species.



We expect this increased level of interest by NIPF regarding all phases of forestland management to continue in the future. As forestland owners, the NIPF sector owns 45% of all forests and 57% of all commercial timberlands in the United States. The role of NIPF's in supplying the nation's multi-resource needs is critical. We need to reach more NIPF's through a concerted effort to expand technical assistance and provide incentive programs and education.

Now is a great time for agencies to take a fresh look at their reforestation technical assistance programs and outreach strategies. Even if we double the percentage of landowners we are currently reaching, we will still have 80% of the 8 million NIPF owners managing their land without professional help! What a great opportunity!

Robert Mangold

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