



News Release

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BLM and Forest Service Seek Public Input on Stewardship Contracting, a Tool for Healthy Forests Initiative and Rangelands

WASHINGTON, D.C., June 27, 2003 – The Interior Department’s Bureau of Land Management and the USDA Forest Service are seeking public input on an administrative tool for stewardship contracting, which will improve and restore forest and rangeland health projects under the Bush Administration’s Healthy Forests Initiative.

"Stewardship contracts will help us focus on what we leave on the ground, not on what we take," said Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth.

Stewardship contracting, which Congress recently authorized in appropriations legislation, 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.

“Stewardship contracts are focused on collaboration – a shared vision of what the land should look like,” said DOI Assistant Secretary Rebecca Watson.

The interim joint guidelines authorize the BLM and the Forest Service to:

- exchange goods removed for restoration services provided;
- enter into stewardship contracts for periods of up to 10 years;
- maintain control of operations to ensure compliance with all applicable environmental laws and regulations;
- use multiparty monitoring to assess the program and report to Congress on the results; and
- award contracts for environmental restoration results rather than lowest bid.

Ultimately, these actions will help make forests and rangelands more resilient to natural disturbances, such as wind, flood, fire, insects, and disease.

The two agencies will consider public input before developing a final policy. A notice is published in today’s [*Federal Register*](#).

For efficiency, the Forest Service will serve as the clearinghouse for public input for both agencies. Public input must be received in writing by July 28, 2003 and addressed to: USDA Forest Service, Forest and Range Management Staff, Mail Stop 1105, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20024. Public input may also be submitted by facsimile to (202) 205-1045 or by e-mail to stewardship@fs.fed.us. If input is sent via facsimile or e-mail, the public is requested not to send duplicate written comments via regular e-mail.

President Bush announced the Healthy Forests Initiative in August of 2002, directing federal agencies to develop administrative and legislative measures that will help reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire to America's forests and rangelands. The initiative builds on a historic ten-year plan for reducing wildfire risks adopted in the spring of 2002 by federal agencies in cooperation with western and southern governors, county commissioners, state foresters and tribal officials.

For more information on the Healthy Forests Initiative, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/HFI.shtml>

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