

Urban and Community Forestry Under the Landscape Scale Restoration Program

A white paper prepared by the National Association of State Foresters



INTRODUCTION

The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (known as the 2018 Farm Bill) codified the Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program in section 8102. The codification of LSR was a key policy priority at the time for the National Association of State Foresters (NASF). The program originated with the 2008 Farm Bill and existed for a decade as a jointly administered program between the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) and state forestry agencies. Then and now, the program is funded through the State and Private Forestry (S&PF) appropriation.

In addition to codifying the program, the 2018 Farm Bill also stipulated a new “rural” requirement for LSR. As a result, and per a subsequent rulemaking made by the Forest Service, LSR work could only be conducted in communities made up of fewer than 50,000 people. This change significantly reduced the scope and efficacy of the program by prohibiting work in areas across the United States with legitimate need for LSR support.

The LSR rural requirement has eliminated opportunities for state forestry agencies to leverage their Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) program work in areas with populations greater than 50,000. The program’s new Quantitative Accomplishment and Target Measures requirement introduced by the Forest Service in fiscal year (FY) 2020 all but eliminated U&CF reportable activities for LSR projects. Reportable activities are now limited to acres treated, acres of tree seedlings planted, board feet of timber produced, and other metrics that exclude urban and community forestry activities. It is important that reporting and administrative guidance for LSR align with the full suite of S&PF programmatic authorities. LSR should be returned to a flexible program able to address the highest priority needs across landscapes as identified in state Forest Action Plans, without excluding communities or populations that depend on trees for their health and wellbeing, particularly in historically marginalized communities.

As the directors of forestry agencies in all 50 states, five U.S. territories, three nations in compacts of free association with the U.S., and the District of Columbia, the members of NASF provide a critical service to all Americans by improving the health and resiliency of community forests.

Forests aren’t just found on mountainsides or in wildlands, but in cities, towns, and communities as well. Community forests – especially in areas with over 50,000 residents – are shown to significantly improve human health outcomes and provide tremendous socio-economic benefits. Healthy community forests aren’t a given; they take work. For decades, state forestry agencies have helped communities manage their forests by providing technical and financial assistance for the planting and care of street, park, and other community trees. State forestry agencies and their U&CF programs are crucial to ensuring *all* people have equitable access to the many benefits of trees.

BENEFITS OF URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY

An estimated 138 million acres of trees comprise the community forests within our cities and towns across the U.S. These trees comprise 39% of the nation’s tree cover and provide critical green infrastructure and countless benefits to communities and their residents, including:

- \$18.3 billion in annual cost savings related to reductions in air pollution, energy use, and greenhouse gases.¹
- Networks of green spaces that provide a wide range of ecosystem services that help mitigate the effects of extreme weather and climate change.²
- 3% to 15% boosts to home values and tax revenue, all while providing shade, stormwater capture and filtration, and a sense of well-being.³

Community forestry management programs aim to maximize the benefits trees provide over time, while minimizing costs to realize a net positive return on tree planting and tree care programs. The LSR program has supported many successful U&CF projects in priority areas with competitive grant funding in the past. It is crucial that LSR projects can once again include U&CF work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Forest threats – like wildfire, pests, and disease – know no bounds. They don't respect city or county limits and they definitely don't stop at property lines. This means forest management can't start and stop along artificial boundaries – it must be done at the landscape scale in order to protect America's forests and the communities that depend on them.

LSR should be a flexible program that can be utilized to address the highest priority needs across landscapes, without excluding communities or populations that depend on trees for their health and wellbeing, particularly in historically marginalized communities. To that end:

- NASF supports striking the rural requirement from LSR legislative language established in the 2018 Farm Bill. This can be done through the 2023 Farm Bill or an alternative legislative vehicle.
- NASF supports the Forest Service adjusting the LSR Quantitative Accomplishment and Target Measures to allow a wider range of reportable measures that more accurately reflect all of the authorities underpinning LSR. Specifically, traditional U&CF reporting measures should be accepted.

To be as impactful as possible across ownerships and on a landscape scale, *all* lands – including cities, suburbs, and towns – should be eligible for LSR support as they were prior to the 2018 Farm Bill.

¹ Nowak, David J. and Greenfield, Eric J. "US Urban Forest Statistics, Values, and Projections." In *Journal of Forestry*, 116(2): 164-177 (March 2018).

https://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/jrnl/2018/nrs_2018_Nowak_003.pdf

² Janowiak, Maria K. et al. "Climate adaptation actions for urban forests and human health." In *Northern Research Station General Technical Report NRS-203* (July 2021).

https://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/pubs/gtr/gtr_nrs203.pdf

³ Wolf, Kathleen L. "City Trees and Property Values." In *Arborist News*, 16, 4:34-36 (August 2007).

<https://www.naturewithin.info/Policy/Hedonics.pdf>

Appendix

ORIGINAL INTENT FOR LANDSCAPE SCALE RESTORATION

The 2008 Farm Bill directed the development of state Forest Action Plans and authorized the concept for a “competitive funding” process that state forestry agencies could use to implement them. The competitive process – to become known as the LSR grant program – was cooperatively crafted by NASF and the Forest Service and first administered as part of Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act (CFAA) annual budget allocations. Starting in FY2014, LSR was administered through a budget line item with its own appropriation.

LSR monies were originally sourced from CFAA program budgets. Four core S&PF programs – Forest Stewardship, U&CF, the Forest Health Management Program on Cooperative Lands (Forest Health), and State Fire Assistance (SFA) – were each assessed a 15% “off-the-top” cut to be diverted to LSR. To ensure state forestry agencies were able to strategically address the various priorities outlined in their Forest Action Plans, LSR funding was purposefully flexible and could be used to augment the states’ work in any of the four core program areas, including U&CF, as needed.

LSR was developed to provide state forestry agencies with the funding flexibility necessary to implement their state [Forest Action Plans](#). The program’s goal remains to “encourage collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes.” Priority forest landscapes identified in state Forest Action Plans are not limited to rural America. In many states, mitigating pest and disease damage in community forests, reducing the heat island effect and improving stormwater management through urban tree canopy, and providing forest benefits to underserved communities rank among the top issues identified in their Forest Action Plans.

LSR’s program authorities still provide flexibility to implement state Forest Action Plans through the four core programs per the National LSR Manual.⁴ However, due to the limiting Quantitative Accomplishment and Target Measures requirements for reporting on LSR projects, the potential for Implementing U&CF activities under LSR has been significantly reduced. The Forest Service’s alteration of LSR reporting metrics goes beyond any requirement of the 2018 Farm Bill and limits states and partners’ ability to maximize on-the-ground impacts from this program.

⁴ The National LSR Manual was developed in response to 2018 Farm Bill codification and points to the sections of the CFAA where LSR is codified (16 USC §2109a), in addition to those governing state Forest Action Plans (16 USC §2101a), Rural Forestry Assistance, Forest Stewardship, Forest Health, U&CF, and SFA (16 U.S.C. §2102, 2103a, 2104, 2015, 2106(b)(1)-(2)).