

Forest Fuels Treatment Program

FAQs

Q. What is the purpose of the Forest Fuels Treatment Program?

A. The primary objective of the Forest Fuels Treatment Program is to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires by conducting fuels reduction projects and silvicultural treatments in areas that are determined to be at high risk for wildfire. Other benefits include the improvement of forest health and wildlife habitat.

Q. What are fuels reduction projects and silvicultural treatments?

A. These activities mechanically thin overcrowded forests to remove ladder fuels and create space between trees. Forest thinning is an example of a silvicultural treatment that removes trees that are damaged or diseased or are crowding other trees. Ladder fuels are woody forest fuels such as small trees and branches on larger trees that create an avenue for a surface fire to reach the crowns of large trees. Removing ladder fuels reduces the forest's susceptibility to wildfire and improves overall forest health by reducing competition for water and nutrients, removing insect and disease damaged trees, and retaining the best trees as seed sources to ensure quality forest regeneration.

Q. What types of forested areas does the program cover?

A. The focus area for this program is in the "Wildland-Urban Interface" (WUI) – areas where homes and other structures are located at the edges of forested land. This includes rural subdivisions, ranches, recreational areas, and other places where people and forests meet and mingle. It also includes access roads and trails that emergency fire equipment and crews can use when they respond to wildfires. Some burned areas qualify for the Burned Forest Restoration or the Burned Land Fuels Reduction programs, which provide cost share for reforestation of burned areas and removal of heavy woody fuels along emergency access roads and near structures.

Q. Does my property qualify for the Forest Fuels Treatment Program?

A. Some of these programs are only open to landowners who own forested land in the Niobrara Valley and Pine Ridge areas of Nebraska. Other programs are statewide.

Q. What types of projects are NOT eligible for the Forest Fuels Treatment Program?

A. All projects under this program must begin and end with a forest. Therefore, these funds cannot be used for "pasture clearing" or for the complete eradication of eastern redcedar in areas where there are no other trees. These funds may not be used to remove slash or chips left from previous activities.

Q. How can the Forest Fuels Treatment Program help me?

A. The Forest Fuels Treatment Program provides up to 75% cost share to eligible forest landowners to implement forest fuels treatment projects on their forested land. Eligible projects include thinning of forest stands and volatile fuels adjacent to buildings; thinning dense stands of trees with emphasis on

removing ladder fuels, and fuelbreaks; and, in burned areas, removal of heavy woody fuels (including burned trees) near structures, roads, and surviving pockets of ponderosa pine. In addition to the cost share, participants receive a Forest Stewardship Plan, tailored to their individual property, which provides recommendations for activities that can create and maintain healthy, productive forestland.

Q. How does the Forest Fuels Treatment Program work?

A. The landowner requests an initial property visit to determine program qualification and to discuss project objectives. Upon approval, a project boundary is determined and approximate acres are calculated. Specifications for tree removal are developed.

The landowner contacts contractors to obtain estimated project costs on a per acre basis. Included in these bids are costs associated with thinning, slash piling, and pile burning or thinning and mulching. It is recommended that the landowner solicit two or more bids to create competition and get the lowest bid possible. The landowner awards the contract and has an agreement directly with the contractor. NFS provides cost share funds to the landowner, but cannot directly pay contractors. If a landowner wishes to perform the work himself/herself, then two bids are required from other contractors and the landowner must underbid both contractors. Each fiscal year there is an established maximum bid per acre allowed for cost-share on a project. If a bid is over the maximum, the landowner is responsible for payment of 100% of the overage amount.

Prior to the commencement of work, the landowner submits an application for cost share to the NFS to allocate funds to the project based on planned acres and associated bid per acre. A few requirements of this agreement include maintenance of the project area for 10 years from the date of completion, having a forest stewardship plan on file with the NFS, and a W-9 form completed for processing payments.

Inspections are conducted by the NFS during thinning operations to ensure the work is done in accordance with project objectives, specifications, and best management practices. Upon completion of the project, the NFS Forester will conduct a final inspection and measure the actual completed acres. This is the figure the NFS uses to reimburse the landowner.

Payments are made based on actual costs, but no more than the bid amount used to estimate costs in the application for cost share, and the completed acres certified by the NFS Forester. In order to process cost-share payments, proof of payment to the contractor from the landowner, as well as a copy of the bill for all work completed, must be submitted to the NFS. For landowners who complete their own work, a bill must be submitted that reflects actual costs accumulated on the project. In the case of wood products as a form of payment (whether by itself or in combination with a monetary amount), load tickets showing monetary timber value are accepted and must be shown for the whole project, not just the landowner contribution part. After final approval of the completed project and corresponding documentation is turned in, processing of paperwork takes approximately 10 business days until a check is mailed to the landowner.

The agreement specifies that the project area must be maintained for a minimum of 10 years after the work is completed. The landowner agrees to allow NFS staff to inspect the project area periodically during that time to document compliance. If the maintenance requirement is not met, NFS may require the cost-share funds to be returned to NFS.