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Woodlands-Related Funding Still Available

Kansas landowners can apply for fiscal year (FY) 2013 funds for woodland and windbreak improvement projects through U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI).

The application deadline for FY 2013 funding will be **February 15, 2013**.

Until then, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field offices housed in the Kansas' statewide network of USDA Service Centers can help landowners start their application. And, through its district foresters, the Kansas Forest Service (KFS) can help landowners complete the technical parts of the application process including project plans.

(A linked map of Kansas' Farm Service Centers is at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=KS>. Contact data for the KFS's district foresters is at <http://www.kansasforests.org/staff/rural/index.shtml>.)

"Getting in on this year's funding could be well worth the time and effort," said Bob Atchison, rural forestry coordinator for the Kansas Forest Service. Funds also are available for renovating and planting windbreaks and trees adjacent to streams.

"No one knows what the U.S. Congress will do to next year's budget. But, fiscal year 2013 forestry funding is about twice the size it was just five years ago with the addition of CCPI," Atchison said. "That's a blessing for Kansas. Statewide, our needs are becoming critical in terms of our having healthy, mature trees in place.

"We need those trees to preserve our soil resources. We need them to protect our surface water supplies from sedimentation and from the brew of pollutants that runoff can carry. Mature trees are also the basis for Kansas agroforestry income, and they provide money-saving, natural protection for our homes, roads, crops, and livestock."

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for forestland health and CCPI are the vehicles to distribute funds to help Kansans pay for conservation-forestry projects.

The producer must be engaged in agricultural production or forestry management, or has an interest in the agricultural or forestry operation associated with the land being offered for

enrollment in EQIP. Tenants can apply for the forestry funds, too, if they secure their landowner's written support.

Atchison said that the forestland program is unique to the northern High Plains states. Some years back, Kansas, Nebraska, and the two Dakotas partnered in asking USDA NRCS to back their long-term vision for Great Plains forestry through the CCPI.

"The Plains are one of the clearest examples of how everyone benefits from conservation efforts," Atchison said. "After all, if the farmer with riverside property cannot afford to install or maintain quality riparian plantings, tons of his land could end up downstream in the reservoir—shortening that lake's life as a public water supply.

"In Kansas, EQIP can provide financial assistance to remove poor quality trees," the forester said. "Or, the program can provide financial assistance for heavy equipment to remove larger, expanding stands of Osage orange, honeylocust, Asian bush honeysuckle, and/or other invasive species.

"If landowners then want to bring their forest stand up to proper stocking levels, the program can cover the cost of planting higher quality trees, including oaks and black walnuts," Atchison said. "Project plans can be ambitious enough to require more than one funding year to complete."

Forestry EQIP is also for owners whose land includes stream or river banks. It can help them to prepare for, plant, and manage riparian trees that stabilize those banks and filter runoff. As part of a riparian project, landowners can receive funding for planting seedlings, acorns, and/or walnuts.

"Renovating or restarting windbreaks is one of the program's more popular options," Atchison said. "Eligible sites include the shelterbelts that protect livestock or field crops. EQIP provides financial assistance to remove rows of old, ailing, and dead trees. The program can cover the majority of costs to plant new tree rows, apply weed barrier fabric/mulch, or dedicate a micro-drip irrigation system.

"This is a voluntary program, but it is also competitive," he said. "In general, the more the plan addresses resource concerns that sustain woodland health, water quality, and reduce soil erosion, the better the chances for funding.

"Fortunately, inviting a district forester to your place and working with that forester to complete your plan will cost you nothing.

“Even if applicants happen to miss this year’s February deadline, their work will not be a waste of time,” Atchison said. “Doing so will simply put their project proposal in line to apply for fiscal year 2014 funding.”

EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to eligible participants to install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land. Conservation practices must be implemented to NRCS standards and specifications. In Kansas, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers will receive a higher payment rate for eligible conservation practices applied.

Further information about CCPI’s forestry initiative is available by contacting Atchison at 785-532-3310 or Atchison@ksu.edu or at your local NRCS field office located in the USDA Center (listed in the telephone book under United States Government or on the internet at offices.usda.gov.) More information is available on the Kansas Web site at www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov. Follow us on Twitter @NRCS_Kansas. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.