**Massachusetts Forest Stewardship Program**

Policy on Eligible Stewardship Acres

August 2021

**Joint Stewardship/Chapter 61/61A/61B plans**: For any joint Stewardship/Chapter 61/61A/61B plan all acreage classified under the specified current use program must meet the requirements of M.G.L. Chapter 61/61A/61B. Those acres classified as Stewardship acres must meet the guidelines set forth in Section I.

**Stewardship Only Plans:** For Stewardship only plans all acreage classified as Stewardship acres must meet the guidelines set forth in Section I.

**Section I. Eligible Stewardship Acres**

1. **Forest and Accessory Land**: Areas with existing tree cover and land which is accessory to the production of forest products as defined in M.G.L. Chapter 61 Section 15.02 and 15.03 [MGL Chapter 61 302 CMR 15.00](https://www.mass.gov/doc/302-cmr-1500-chapter-61-forest-classification/download).
2. **Abandoned Fields**: Fields are considered abandoned if they are not being used for agriculture, i.e., to harvest hay or support livestock. If the field is not intended to succeed to forest, then the primary goal should be to provide early successional wildlife habitat. For an abandoned field to qualify as Stewardship acres, the stand description must contain the following information:

* Years since abandonment,
* Acres,
* Types of vegetation,
* Relative abundance and distribution of vegetation, v
* Value of area for desired wildlife species and
* Desired future condition for the “abandoned field” (stand).

The management practice narrative for the “abandoned field” (stand) must contain the following information:

* Explicitly state how desired future condition will be achieved and
* How the method, frequency and timing of maintenance will minimize adverse impacts on wildlife.

1. **Wetlands**: This includes all forested, scrub-shrub, emergent and beaver created wetlands. Stand descriptions must contain all the relevant information as required in the “*Directions for the preparation of Chapter 61 Forest Management and Forest Stewardship Plans revised July 2021*”, except the timber inventory data can be omitted if the stand is a non-forested wetland. Particular attention should be paid to the wildlife and watershed protection values of each wetland and how those values will be protected by management.
2. **Open Water Bodies**: The plan must specifically address the values of the water feature and how to protect or enhance those values.
3. **Power Lines**: Power line rights of ways are eligible. Stand descriptions must contain all the relevant information as required in the “*Directions for the preparation of Chapter 61 Forest Management and Forest Stewardship Plans revised July 2021*”, except the timber inventory data can be omitted. Particular attention should be paid to the wildlife values of the right of way.

**Section II. Non-Eligible Stewardship Acres**

1. **Houses and Outbuildings:** Exclude the area around the house or outbuildings that is mowed lawn or landscaped.
2. **Pasture**
3. **Hay fields**
4. **Tilled fields**
5. **Commercial orchards**
6. **Commercial blueberry fields**
7. **Commercial Christmas tree plantations**
8. **Areas that are considered “Incompatible with forest production”** as defined in M.G.L. Chapter 61 Section 15.02 [MGL Chapter 61 302 CMR 15.00](https://www.mass.gov/doc/302-cmr-1500-chapter-61-forest-classification/download).

**Section III. Special Considerations and *Working Forest Initiative* Cost-Share**

As in Chapter 61, the minimum number of contiguous acres needed to qualify for the DCR *Working Forest Initiative* cost-share reimbursement is ten (10). However, in contrast to M.G.L. Chapter 61, for Stewardship, only **7 of the 10 contiguous acres** must have existing tree cover. The other three (3) acres may be abandoned field or one of the other qualified types of land cover as indicated in **Section I. Eligible Stewardship Acres**. Only areas qualifying as Eligible Stewardship Acres can be included in a Forest Stewardship Plan.

If the Stewardship Plan is removed from the Program during the seven (7)- year agreement (commitment) to the MA Forest Stewardship Program, the applicant will repay any reimbursement dollars received for the preparation of the Plan.

Federally funded programs (e.g., EQIP) cannot be used to pay for the same practices on the same acres as the *Working Forest Initiative* cost-share program (this is commonly referred to as “double-dipping”). Other federally funded programs may be used on other parts of the ownership and/or to fund practices entirely different from those funded by the *Working Forest Initiative* cost-share program.