

BLM STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING: Fact Sheet

Goal

Stewardship contracting projects will emphasize on-the-ground results and early collaboration with States, Tribes, communities and private sector organizations to achieve healthy landscapes, thriving communities and dynamic economies.

Authority

In August 2002, President Bush proposed as part of the Healthy Forests Initiative, to expand the use of stewardship contracts as a way to accomplish more forest and rangeland restoration. The Omnibus Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2003 authorized the USDA Forest Service and the DOI Bureau of Land Management, for a period of 10 years, to undertake stewardship end results contracting projects, also known as stewardship contracting. The stewardship end result contracting provision was passed on February 20, 2003 and authorized by Section 323 of Public Law 108-7.

Definition

Stewardship end results contracting projects are those activities used to accomplish the goals set forward in Section 323 of P.L. 108-7. This law authorizes the BLM and the Forest Service to enter into contracts or agreements, for services to achieve land management goals and meet local and rural community needs. The contracts are to be awarded on a best-value basis to achieve forest and rangeland ecological restoration objectives.

Stewardship contracting authority for the BLM was included in the President's Healthy Forests Initiative because it exemplifies the new environmentalism of partnerships and common ground envisioned by Interior Secretary Gale Norton in her 4 Cs: Communication, Cooperation and Consultation all in the service of Conservation. It seeks to add value to incidental material gathered as a part of forest or rangeland ecological restoration to help pay for the services and to engage local communities in projects that will benefit the public lands, while helping to provide sustainable economic development.

The contracts will allow private companies, communities, and others who engage in contracts to retain forest and rangeland products in exchange for the service such as thinning trees and brush and removing dead wood. Long-term contracts foster a public-private partnership to restore forest and rangeland health by giving those who undertake the contracts the ability to invest in equipment and infrastructure needed to productively utilize material generated from forest thinning, such as brush and other woody biomass, to make wood products or to produce biomass energy, all at savings to taxpayers.

Agency guidance directs that stewardship contracts must include at least one of the new authorities granted by the legislation: where the value of timber and other forest products is applied as an offset against the cost of services received (goods for services); or multi-year contract authority greater than five years but not to exceed 10 years.

What is different about Stewardship contracting?

Stewardship contracting does not replace either timber sale contracts or service contracts; it is a way to combine elements of these contracts in new ways with new authorities that make it easier to meet ecological objectives in a more efficient and collaborative manner.

Previous *Federal Register* Announcement

A notice of interim guidelines on stewardship contracting, with opportunity for public comment, was published in the *Federal Register* on June 27, 2003 jointly by the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management and the USDA Forest Service. Public input was accepted in writing until July 28, 2003.

BLM projects awarded:

The BLM already has awarded two stewardship projects. Both contracts are in Oregon and focus on fuels reduction with forest product removal. The two contracts were awarded to local contractors.

BLM projects in the contract-development stages:

Two projects (one in Elk City, ID and one in Vernal, UT) are in the contract development stages.

BLM additional project proposals approved:

Two additional project proposals have been approved (one each in California and Oregon).

BLM future projects:

The BLM's annual budget guidance will require the field to identify more projects for award in FY 2004. BLM's goal for 2004 is approximately three dozen projects.

Compliance with existing laws and policies:

Stewardship contracts must comply with all environmental and land use plan laws. Stewardship contracting projects will meet the direction of BLM's land use plans and management policies relating to existing special designations (e.g., Wilderness). They will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and all environmental laws such as Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and Clean Air Act.