

## Reforestation

### Overview

The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA) (P.L. 93-378), as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) Section 3 (d)1, directs that all forested lands in the National Forest System (NFS) be maintained in appropriate forest cover with species of trees, degree of stocking, rate of growth, and conditions of stand designated to secure the maximum benefits of multiple use sustained yield management in accordance to land management plans. It further requires the Secretary of Agriculture to identify and report to the Congress, at the time of submission of the President's budget together with the annual report provided under section 8 (c) of the Act, the amount and location by national forest and State and by productivity class where applicable, the need to reforest areas that have been cut-over or otherwise denuded or deforested.

The Forest Service (FS) reforestation program has four major goals: (1) to maintain all forest lands within the NFS in appropriate forest cover, (2) to improve the quality and yield of the timber resource, (3) to accelerate the attainment of desired species composition; and (4) to develop and demonstrate successful reforestation methods and techniques. The program includes artificial regeneration, seeding, and natural regeneration with and without site preparation. Management objectives may be jeopardized without appropriate reforestation treatments. Untreated areas may have elevated risk to losses from future insect or disease epidemics, wildfires, and other disturbance events.

### Program Discussion

Reforestation work is time-sensitive. Without timely intervention to reforest areas, undesirable woody shrubs, grasses, and forbs can dominate, making establishment of desired tree species difficult. Once undesirable species become established, decades may pass before sufficient numbers of the appropriate tree seedlings occupy the site. Delays also increase the cost of reforestation work by necessitating expensive site preparation treatments to reduce unwanted vegetation to levels that afford satisfactory seedling survival. Delays reduce timber yields and may adversely affect meeting other resource objectives.

Prompt reforestation is required to prevent soil erosion and protect water quality in streams and lakes. Reforestation delays affect wildlife and fish species that depend on forest cover for habitat and reduces scenic quality and recreational experience. In addition, these areas are less resilient to the effects of fire and make it more difficult to protect surrounding communities.

Figure 1 shows reforestation needs and accomplishments for fiscal years (FY) 1994 through FY 2005. From FY 1994 through FY 2000 there was a steady decrease in reforestation needs and accomplishments. During this period, reforestation treatments addressed approximately 45 percent of the needs. Since FY 2000, national forest reforestation needs have accumulated in part due to large wildfires in the West and insect epidemics in the East.

Despite these increases, a smaller proportion of the needs received reforestation treatments. From FY 2000 through FY 2005, reforestation addressed about 20 percent of the reforestation needs nationally.

### FY 2005 Accomplishments and Review

During FY 2005, national forests identified reforestation needs on about 1.1 million acres. Reforestation treatments occurred on 153 thousand acres, representing roughly 14 percent of the total estimate. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, reforestation needs increased by approximately 22 percent (901 thousand acres to 1.1 million acres nationally) while reforestation program accomplishments remained constant.

In 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) completed a review of the trends on NFS lands needing reforestation and timber stand improvement and found data deficiencies. In response to this audit, staff on the national forests validated reforestation needs and accomplishment information and certified data accuracy. The FY 2005 Reforestation and Timber Stand Improvement Report, currently in progress, will address the concerns raised in the GAO report.

**Figure 1 – Trends in Section 3(d) 1 of P.L. 93-378, Reforestation Needs and Accomplishments and Percentage of Needs Treated in Each Fiscal Year**

