

Tomorrow Woods Program Part 2: Forest Management and Afforestation Assistance

By: Scott Bachman, *Virginia Department of Forestry*

Landowners in the City of Suffolk and the Counties of Dinwiddie, Prince George, Surry, Sussex, Southampton, and Isle of Wight have a unique opportunity to implement forest management on their lands. The Tomorrow Woods program can help you reach your forest management goals in a shorter period of time than traditionally expected.

This program was developed with three goals in mind: conserving working forest land, enhancing working forest lands, and assisting in the conversion of marginal agricultural lands to productive forests.

Conservation of working forest land has been explained in the companion article, which appeared in the Winter 2010 edition of the Virginia Forest Landowner Update. I will take the next few column inches to describe the remaining tools of the program; forest land enhancement and afforestation of idle lands.

The Tomorrow Woods afforestation program seeks to be a complement to the USDA Farm Bill programs which encourage tree planting on marginal agricultural lands. Occasionally some vacant agricultural acres may not qualify for these lucrative federal programs. The Tomorrow Woods program may be able to provide cost share assistance for those acres.

Unlike other programs, Tomorrow Woods does not require a cropping history on the lands that will be planted. The minimum acreage for afforestation assistance is 10 acres, with no upper limit. The program will pay 50% of the cost of establishment, up to \$75.00 per acre.



Pre-commercial thinning, such as this one conducted in a young loblolly pine plantation (thinned trees on left; unthinned on right), is an enhancement practice which may be covered by the Tomorrow Woods Program. Photos by: Jennifer Gagnon, Virginia Tech.

One popular benefit of some federally funded programs has been an annual rental payment for each acre planted to trees. Under the Tomorrow Woods program, the Department of Forestry will also have a mechanism to pay a landowner a rental payment. The payment a landowner will receive is contingent on the status of their land. Conserved lands can receive a one time payment of \$250 per acre (or 10 annual payments of \$35.00 per acre) while non-conserved lands are limited to a \$150 per acre one time payment (or 10 annual payments of \$20.00 per acre).

Those of you without open land to plant also have a place at the Tomorrow Woods table. This program includes a component to improve the growth of existing forests or to enhance the establishment of new forests on harvested lands.

To qualify for these enhancements, a landowner must show a strong commitment to continued good forest management. The test of this commitment is either a conservation easement on the property, or enrollment in an internationally recognized sustainable forestry certification program. Your local Department of Forestry contact can provide you with details on certification programs that you can participate in.

Once a landowner qualifies for the Tomorrow Woods enhancement program, the options open up greatly. Essentially, if you and your forester can imagine it, we may be able to help fund the practice. Typical projects are expected to be fertilization (non-biosolids), mid-rotation release, herbaceous weed control (other than site prep), enhanced site preparation methods and planting with improved genetic material, to name a few.

How much will Tomorrow Woods pay for these enhancements? That again depends on the status of your land. Conserved lands can receive a payment of 75% of the cost of the practice, up to \$75 per acre. Lands under a certification program will be cost shared at a 35% rate, up to \$35 per acre. There is a limit of 50 acres per landowner per year and the project must be maintained for 15 years or until the end of the rotation.

Tomorrow Woods is a new venture for the Department of Forestry. We are excited about the chance to help forest landowners meet their objectives. The Tomorrow Woods program will ensure that healthy working forests are a part of the selected cities and counties for generations to come.

Please contact the author for more information.

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