

STRATEGIC GOAL 5: PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE NATION’S NATURAL RESOURCE BASE AND ENVIRONMENT

Exhibit 40: Resources Dedicated to Protect the Nation’s Natural Resource Base and Environment

USDA Resources Dedicated to Strategic Goal 5	FY 2003		FY 2004	
	Estimate	Percent of Total USDA	Estimate	Percent of Total USDA
Program Level (\$ Mil)	10,424	9%	10,220	10%
Staff Years	52,339	47%	51,664	47%

Goal 5 addresses both stewardship and technical assistance responsibilities for the nation’s natural resources and the environment. The stewardship role on federally owned land is to sustain the capacity of the natural resources for current and future generations. USDA also serves an advisory role on state and privately owned land in matters dealing with the natural resources and the environment. These matters include a wide range of issues, from soil and water protection and enhancement, to vegetation cover and wildlife populations and habitat, as well as issues related to crops and grazing.

OBJECTIVE 5.1: IMPLEMENT THE PRESIDENT’S HEALTHY FOREST INITIATIVE AND OTHER ACTIONS TO IMPROVE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS

Table 41: Resources Dedicated to Implement Forest Initiatives

USDA Resources Dedicated to Objective 5.1	FY 2003		FY 2004	
	Estimate	Percent of Goal 5	Estimate	Percent of Goal 5
Program Level (\$ Mil)	5,308	51%	4,788	47%
Staff Years	36,144	69%	34,430	67%

USDA must manage the 192 million acres of Federally owned land under our stewardship to sustain our long-term capability to meet the needs of society while protecting the environment. USDA is guided in its stewardship by, for example, the National Forest Management Act, the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act, the President’s *Healthy Forests Initiative*, the interagency, inter-Department *10-Year Fire Strategy*, inter-agency working agreements on hazardous materials management and the *Resources Planning Act Natural Resources Assessments*, a scientifically-based compilation of 25 years of trend data of natural resources and their conditions.

In FY 2003 and 2004, USDA will continue its systematic efforts to evaluate, prioritize and cleanup sites contaminated with hazardous substances that threaten human health or the environment.

Improve Fire Management

Wildland fire is of major interest to USDA as a natural component of ecosystem processes and, conversely, as a threat to both communities and the environment. The Department’s challenge is to manage wildland fire within its place in natural systems as well as reducing the risk of losses from catastrophic fire. This complex challenge is addressed both through the planning that identifies when and where priority work can be implemented and the specific field level projects that affect future fire behavior. USDA, State foresters and local fire departments through the FIREWISE Program assist community property owners in the wildland/urban interface in preventing fires and increasing the survivability of their homes from wildfires.

Exhibit 42: Reduce Risk of Catastrophic Fire

Annual Performance Goals and Indicators	Fiscal Year					
	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Actual	2003 Target	2004 Target
5.1.1 Continue to restore, rehabilitate and maintain fire-adapted ecosystems by treating hazardous fuels in both the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and non-WUI areas (Mil of acres)	1.4	0.8	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.4
5.1.2 Ensure Federal fire management plans are in compliance with Federal Wildland Fire Policy (Percentage)	N/A	N/A	N/A	50%	75%	100%
5.1.3 Control unplanned and unwanted fires during initial attack (Percentage)	N/A	N/A	N/A	99.0	99.0	98.5

Means and Strategies

Planned actions for achieving these performance goals and related objective include the following:

- Develop a Fire Management Plan template that incorporates the objectives and priorities established through the 10 Year Strategy, and determine an implementation schedule.
- Develop and implement a process for Federal, State, Tribal and local governments to collaborate on the annual selection of fuel treatment projects within their respective jurisdictions.
- Assess the regulatory process governing projects and activities done in conformance with the 10 Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan, and identify measures to improve timely decision-making.
- Implement the Memorandum of Understanding signed in January 2003 by the USDA FS, USDI Bureau of Land Management/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/National Park Service, the National Association of State Foresters and the National Association of Counties to ensure a collaborative fuels treatment program across federal and non-federal boundaries.
- Develop an improved technical assistance program to promote commercial uses for small-diameter materials.
- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding among Federal wildland fire agencies and the National Association of State Foresters for promoting FIREWISE programs to more wildland urban interface communities.
- Maintain fire preparedness levels matching those established in FY 2002 to ensure a high initial attack success rate.

Key External Factors

The likelihood of loss from natural or man-made causes depends upon the vulnerability of the ecosystems at the time of the event. To mitigate loss from unexpected events, ecosystems must be returned to and maintained in a resilient state. Natural factors including prolonged drought and lower than average annual precipitation contribute significantly to the risk of wildland fire. Other factors include arson and accidental human-caused fires, as well as administrative appeals of proposed fuel treatment projects and litigation. Projected fuel treatment acres for FY 2004 are less than FY 2003 due, in part, to increasing unit costs associated with treatments in the wildland urban interface.

Managing Sustainable Grasslands

USDA is responsible for managing federally owned grasslands to assure the sustainability. Land managers base their management decisions on information derived from environmental analyses and assessments of land conditions. Implementing decisions based on the National Environmental Policy Act on National Forest Systems Lands provides for the appropriate maintenance, restoration, or rehabilitation of grazing lands. There are approximately 90 million acres of rangeland within grazing allotments.

Exhibit 43: Maintain Rangeland Allotments

Annual Performance Goals and Indicators	Fiscal Year					
	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Actual	2003 Target	2004 Target
5.1.4 Allotment acres administered to 100% of standard (Mil of acres)	N/A	45.0	44.0	21.0	24.5	22.6

Means and Strategies

Planned actions for achieving this performance goal and related objective include the following:

- Implement a strategy for completing National Environmental Policy Act analyses for grazing allotments pending renewal.
- Improve monitoring and management of grazing allotments in force.

Key External Factors

Past grazing practices, Endangered Species Act concerns, riparian area concerns, state listed sensitive species concerns and expanding deer and elk populations have led to a decline in available forage. Appeals and litigation of decisions have increased substantially in recent years, resulting in a decline in the number of animals that are permitted to use National Forest System lands as a source of annual forage. This situation has also diverted human resources from implementing recent management decisions in allotment management plans and has resulted in lower than expected restoration and maintenance accomplishments.

Cleanup Hazardous Wastes

Many sites with environmental contamination directly or indirectly threaten human health or the environment. Contamination limits the quality or quantity of benefits and services ecosystems and watersheds can provide—sources of drinking and irrigation water, recreational activities, subsistence hunting and gathering and havens of biodiversity. It also impairs local economies and impedes community revitalization efforts. As of 2001, more than 2,000 of these sites—most resulting from the activities of others—were estimated to remain on USDA-managed lands. By law, USDA uses public funds for environmental cleanups when the actual responsible parties will not or cannot do so. Reducing threats to human health and the environment provides a safe and healthy place for people to work or visit, makes it possible to return important natural resources to service, improves environmental security, and eases community development or revitalization.

USDA uses five-year performance goals to address the inherent uncertainties in this complex program expected to take decades to complete. The first intermediate goal was to complete 150 Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) cleanups by 2002. That goal was exceeded by 10 percent, with 165 cleanups actually completed. The new goal is completing another 150 CERCLA cleanups in the five years between 2003 and 2007. If this goal is met, 10-15 percent of the total CERCLA cleanup program should be complete.

Exhibit 44: Cleanup USDA Managed Lands

Annual Performance Goals and Indicators	Fiscal Year					
	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Actual	2003 Target	2004 Target
5.1.5 Cleanup CERCLA sites on USDA-managed lands and facilities (Cumulative percent of five-year goals to complete 150 cleanups)	44	60	91	110 ¹	26	51

¹ 5-year goal exceeded.

Means and Strategies

Planned actions for achieving this performance goal and related objective include the following:

- Promote partnerships with Federal and State agencies, Tribal organizations and private parties in prioritizing planning and carrying out environmental cleanups and related activities.
- Conduct all work in a manner consistent with the Superfund National Contingency Plan.
- Support other USDA goals and initiatives relating to the health and security of natural resources, environmental quality, overall security and the safety of the Department's workforce and the general public.

Key External Factors

Environmental cleanups vary widely in cost and duration. They require extensive coordination with other federal agencies, states and stakeholders who often have different and conflicting objectives. Deferral can dramatically increase cleanup costs and simultaneously increase the risk of enforcement actions against USDA. Diverting the necessary resources to perform timely cleanups on lands that are not now managed by USDA may jeopardize the cleanup program on USDA-managed lands. The Department may be liable under CERCLA for environmental contamination that resulted from historical USDA activities on lands owned or managed by others, including private land.

OBJECTIVE 5.2: Improve Management of Private Lands

Exhibit 45: Resources Dedicated to Improve Management of Private Lands

USDA Resources Dedicated to Objective 5.2	FY 2003		FY 2004	
	Estimate	Percent of Goal 5	Estimate	Percent of Goal 5
Program Level (\$ Mil)	5,117	49%	5,432	53%
Staff Years	16,196	31%	17,234	33%

In FY 2003 and 2004, USDA will continue to focus on implementing the new and expanded conservation programs authorized by the 2002 FSRIA. The Act represents the single most significant commitment of resources toward conservation on private lands in the Nation’s history. It applies to all natural resources—including increased emphasis on air, wildlife and energy, in addition to the traditional support for soil and water conservation.

Maintain Resource Health and Productive Capacity

Good management of natural resources on private land will help to ensure that the Nation’s crop, grazing and forestlands can continue to be used efficiently to produce adequate food, fiber and forest products to meet today’s needs without reducing the capacity of those lands to meet the needs of future generations. The conservation of working cropland and grazing land reflects the actions farmers and ranchers take in a given year, with technical assistance from USDA, to address specific resource needs. The practices applied each year will continue to protect the resource base in following years so long as the practices are properly maintained. USDA’s assistance to individual farmers and ranchers is a partnership activity in which USDA delivers assistance through local conservation districts in cooperation with State conservation agencies. The performance indicator for cropland and grazing land retired from production reflects land protected under long-term contracts. The projected declines in rates of application of practices on working land in FY 2003 and FY 2003, compared to FY 2002, are based on analysis of the workload associated with each task in implementing the increased financial and technical assistance authorized by the 2002 FSRIA. The increase in time required to evaluate applications and administer contracts associated with the increased financial assistance is projected to limit the staff time available for assistance in planning and application of practices, at least in the initial years of implementation. In FY 2003 and 2004, USDA will also continue to place emphasis on strengthening the delivery of services through its basic Conservation Technical Assistance and water resources programs, which provide the comprehensive resource assessment and conservation planning needed to ensure sustainable use of the natural resource base.

Forest Stewardship management plans are prepared by non-industrial private forestland owners with technical and financial assistance from USDA provided through the State foresters. These plans identify owners’ management objectives and activities required for good management. Each State forester, with USDA assistance, has also developed forestry best management practices to protect water quality. Annual monitoring of a sample of forest activities allows the USDA and State foresters to determine the level of compliance with these conservation practices.

Exhibit 46: Maintain Productive Health of Land

Annual Performance Goals and Indicators	Fiscal Year					
	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Actual	2003 Target	2004 Target
5.2.1 Protect the productive capacity of agricultural and forestland:						
• Protect against degradation (Mil acres)						
- Reduce erosion and the associated sediment by 80 million tons (5 percent) annually on the 232 million acres of cropland requiring conservation treatment.	N/A	20.7	21.8	25.6	16	16
- Highly erodible and other environmentally sensitive cropland and grazing land under long-term land retirement contracts (Cumulative)	29.8	31.5	33.6	33.9	34.4	36.3
• Total erosion prevented (Mil tons)	368	470	506.8	479.5	474.5	498.5
• Non-industrial private forestlands under approved stewardship management plans (Acres) ¹	1,866.0	1,437.3	1,617.0	1,640.0	1,618.0	3,197.0

¹ The FS's State and Private Forestry office is revising measures to focus on desired key outcomes. The agency is planning to provide new measures in the FY 2005 budget submission.

Means and Strategies

Planned actions for achieving this performance goal and related objective include the following:

- Provide comprehensive planning assistance to help producers identify all natural resources issues for their operation as a basis for sustainable management.
- Provide high-quality, site-specific technical assistance to producers, enabling them to apply needed conservation practices to meet their production goals and protect the resource base.
- Ensure that current, locally tailored technical guidance is readily accessible to producers and to technical service providers.
- Implement opportunities the 2002 FSRFA provides to stimulate innovation by supporting new approaches.
- Provide increased incentives and appropriate technical advice to help limited-resource producers and beginning producers to practice conservation in their operations.
- Continue to administer the conservation compliance requirement for highly erodible land.
- Conduct continuous and periodic general Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrollment.
- Use innovative technology in a Common Computing Environment to automate program management processes such as the calculation of the Environmental Benefits Index and integrate the use of geospatial information system software in Service Center record-keeping and land treatment analyses.
- Continue to pilot and adopt promising electronic technologies such as geographic positioning systems to streamline processes, reduce costs and improve quality of technical assistance to landowners.
- Collect and disseminate science-based information on management practices related to private farmland.

Key External Factors

Concern about the global economy and political situation and uncertainty about the strength of the Nation's economy could reduce producers' ability or willingness to make increased investments to protect long-term productive capacity of their resource base. Conversely, sharp increases in demand, driven by stronger global markets or development of new uses for agricultural commodities, could encourage rapid expansion of produc-

tion without adequate accompanying increases in conservation management. Severe and prolonged adverse weather could hamper producers' ability to apply new conservation practices.

Clean and Abundant Water Supplies

Comprehensive, locally-led watershed planning and management can ensure that the Nation's watersheds provide adequate supplies of clean, well-managed water to meet the multiple needs of the Nation's people. Demand for water is growing nationwide; the needs for competing uses must be considered to find the best balance. Water quality in many watersheds, furthermore, is inadequate for the ways people want to use it. Livestock or crop production activities can cause water pollution. Weather conditions can make problems worse: each year, droughts and floods adversely affect farms, ranches and communities and public health and safety. To manage water supplies sensibly, people must work together to plan for a watershed as a whole. USDA's activities to improve management of water supplies and protect water quality are carried out in cooperation with Tribal governments, State conservation agencies, resource conservation and development councils, conservation districts, irrigation districts, the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Reclamation and the EPA.

Most of the performance measures are set in terms of conservation measures applied to land, which are intermediate indicators of improvements in resource health and environmental quality that will occur in time as a result of the improved resource management. The indicator for sheet and rill erosion measures the estimated annual reduction in erosion that results from placing environmentally sensitive land under long-term protective cover. The indicators for reduction in nitrogen and phosphorus applications measure the estimated annual reduction that results from placing environmentally sensitive land under long-term conservation. The projected declines in rates of application of practices on working land in FY 2002 and FY 2003, compared to FY 2002, are based on analysis of the workload associated with each task in implementing the increased financial and technical assistance authorized by the 2002 FSRIA. The increase in time required to evaluate applications and administer contracts associated with the increased financial assistance is projected to limit the staff time available for assistance in planning and application of practices, at least in the initial years of implementation.

Exhibit 47: Ensure Clean and Abundant Water Supplies

Annual Performance Goals and Indicators	Fiscal Year					
	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Actual	2003 Target	2004 Target
5.2.2 Manage watersheds to provide clean and abundant water supplies:						
• Animal feeding operations with comprehensive nutrient management plans (Number)*						
- Developed	N/A	6,314	6,206	5,214	4,556	3,015
- Applied	N/A	4,405	4,315	3,352	4,242	2,885
• Working land with conservation measures applied to reduce potential for off-site pollution by nutrients (Mil acres per year)	2.7	4.3	5.4	5.5	4.1	3.9
• Sheet and rill erosion prevented (Mil tons per year)	175	201	214	215	216	220
• Reduced nitrogen applications on land under long-term land retirement contract (Thousand tons)	552.7	605.2	633.5	681.3	691.3	737.0
• Reduced phosphorus applications on land under long-term land retirement contract (Thousand tons)	80.0	86.7	99.1	104.1	105.8	113.3
• Land in buffers under long-term retirement (Mil acres)	1.2	1.3	1.7	2.1	2.4	2.9
• Land benefiting from application of improvements to irrigation management (Mil acres)	N/A	1.25	1.25	1.9	1.5	1.4

Annual Performance Goals and Indicators	Fiscal Year					
	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Actual	2003 Target	2004 Target
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carbon sequestered in soil and vegetation through long-term retirement of crop and grazing land (Mill metric tons per year) 	14.6	15.5	16.1	16.3	16.8	17.8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase national implementation rate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forestry best management practices (Percentage) - States conducting effectiveness monitoring 	Not Tracked	87% 17	Not Tracked	Not Tracked	89% 26	90% 29

* Technical guidance for CNMPs was first implemented in FY 2002. The data for FY 2000 and 2001 are for waste management systems, which may be less complex and comprehensive than CNMPs.

Means and Strategies

Planned actions for achieving this performance goal and related objective include the following:

- Work with State agencies and local sponsors to develop watershed-level plans to enhance water supplies, protect water quality, mitigate drought and flood hazards and enhance wildlife habitat.
- Educate and help producers to comply with State, local and national regulatory requirements to protect the environment.
- Provide high-quality, site-specific technical assistance to producers and other resource managers, enabling them to meet their production goals and protect the quality of the environment.
- Implement provisions authorizing private sector vendors, non-profit organizations and public sector agencies to provide education and technical assistance to producers who receive financial assistance under mandatory conservation programs.
- Continue emphasis on enrolling water quality enhancing buffers in land retirement programs.
- Design market-oriented policies that leverage Federal resources by enabling the private sector to invest in the provision of environmental goods and services.
- Expand research and program accounting USDA-wide to improve the measurement of agricultural pollutants and project the costs and benefits of conservation.
- Assist state foresters to monitor and compile data on compliance with Forestry Best Management Practices.

Key External Factors

Watersheds comprise co-mingled agricultural, urban and developing lands. Activities in parts of a watershed outside USDA influence can offset the effects of improved management of agricultural land, so that the watershed as a whole may fail to show the expected improvement. State governments have the primary responsibility for water quality. The budget constraints facing many State governments may hamper their conservation programs and reduce opportunities to leverage Federal dollars.

Wildlife Habitat

The rural landscape provides critical habitat, food and safety for much of our Nation's wildlife. Many of the conservation practices that farmers and ranchers apply to cropland and grazing land as part of comprehensive plans to manage their operations productively also improve the habitat those lands provide for wildlife. In addition, protecting specific ecosystems and landscapes—including wetlands, grasslands, floodplains and certain types of forests—can help support wildlife and aquatic species and provide benefits in the form of recreation, hunting and other forms of agro-tourism. The 2002 FSRIA authorized ex-

panded incentives to protect wetlands and other important habitat. USDA’s activities for protecting wetlands and fish and wildlife habitat are cooperative actions conducted in partnership with Tribal governments, State agencies, private sector organizations and interest groups and Federal land-management agencies.

The following performance indicators reflect the annual progress towards the long-term goal of no net loss of wetlands to agriculture and the actions that farmers, ranchers and others take each year to maintain and improve habitat for wildlife on their lands.

Exhibit 48: Improve Wildlife Habitats

Annual Performance Goals and Indicators	Fiscal Year					
	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Actual	2003 Target	2004 Target
5.2.3 Ensure diverse wildlife habitats:						
• Increase protection of wetlands by enrolling in the Wetlands Reserve Program wetlands identified as high priority by States (Mil acres, Cumulative)	0.785	0.934	1.074	1.27	1.5	1.7
• Wetlands and associated upland under multi-year CRP contracts (Mil acres)	1.3	1.5	1.7	1.7	1.9	2.1
• Apply new management practices to improve wildlife habitat on working cropland, grazing land, forest and other land (Mil acres)	N/A	7.5	8.1	10	7	7
• Land retired from cropping and grazing and restored to ecosystems with high benefits for wildlife, including threatened and endangered species (Mil acres, Cumulative)	1.6	2.5	3.0	3.3	3.5	3.9

Means and Strategies

Planned actions for achieving this performance goal and related objective include the following:

- Implement opportunities for improving and expanding habitat provided by the 2002 FSRIA.
- Expand partnerships with State wildlife agencies and private sector organizations to leverage Federal funds.
- Continue to require agricultural producers to protect wetlands values in order to remain eligible for USDA programs.
- Cooperate with the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to develop methodology to compare the costs and benefits of establishing an acre of wetland under each of the agencies’ programs.

Key External Factors

The habitat of many wildlife species includes areas of agricultural, urban and developing lands. Activities in critical parts of habitat outside USDA’s influence can offset the effects of improved management of agricultural land.