

## **STRATEGIC GOAL 5: PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE NATION'S NATURAL RESOURCE BASE AND ENVIRONMENT**

The management of our natural resources, both public and private, is a continual balancing act between sometimes contrary and competing concerns. In maintaining this balance, it is imperative that a portfolio approach be utilized that incorporates various conservation management tools including technical assistance, cost-share, incentive, land retirement, easement and regulatory assistance programs. In ensuring these program funds are spent effectively and leveraged wisely, continued and increased cooperation with State, local, and Tribal governments, as well as private for-profit and not-for-profit partner organizations is needed.

### **Objective 5.1: Implement the President's Healthy Forest Initiative and Other Actions to Improve Management of Public Lands**

USDA has stewardship responsibility for the natural resources on 192 million acres of Federally managed lands. Policies are carried out to ensure sustainable forest and rangeland ecosystems and natural resource amenities that are resilient to natural and human disturbance. We manage our natural resources for a sustainable flow of uses, products, and services for the American public, using science-based criteria for and indicators of sustainable development. Under Federal multiple-use principles, USDA-managed lands also support activities of national economic and security significance—oil, natural gas, timber, recreation, tourism, mineral production, and livestock grazing.

USDA is dedicated to implementing the President's Healthy Forest Initiative, which is based on a common-sense approach to reducing the threat of catastrophic wildfires by restoring forest and rangeland health. We are committed, with the Department of the Interior (DOI) and State and Tribal governments, to a ten-year interagency, intergovernmental strategy to reduce risk and damaging effects to resources and communities from wildland fire. We will continue to work with these partners to identify priority areas that will benefit from hazard reduction.

#### **Performance Measures**

Restore, rehabilitate, and maintain fire-adapted ecosystems, using appropriate tools to provide sustainable environmental, social, and economic benefits.

*Baseline:* 1999 — 24 million acres of land with vegetative fuels were at low risk of catastrophic fire (fuel levels within historical levels), 44 million areas were at moderate risk, and 29 million acres with natural fuels were at high risk. (Note: Acres determined by Fire Regime Grouping identified in the 10 Year Implementation Plan developed jointly by USDA and the Department of the Interior.)

*Target:* 2007 — Will treat 11 million acres (cumulative), moving them from a moderate/high risk to a lower risk of catastrophic fire.

Ensure that acres covered in Federal fire management plans are in compliance with Federal Wildland Fire Policy.

*Baseline:* 2001 — 51% were in compliance with the Federal Wildland Fire Policy.

*Target:* 2007 — 100% will be in compliance with the Federal Wildland Fire Policy.

Restore, rehabilitate, and/or maintain rangeland ecosystems within grazing allotments to achieve desired condition objectives established in Forest Plans, using appropriate management tools to provide sustainable environmental, social, and economic benefits.

*Baseline:* 2002 — Rangelands within grazing allotments total approximately 72,300,000 acres. 44 million acres of land with range vegetation management objectives are presently either meeting or moving towards desired conditions.

*Target:* 2007 — Will treat 6 million acres (cumulative), moving them from acres of unknown condition or lands not meeting desired conditions to lands that are either meeting desired conditions or are moving towards desired conditions.

Reduce threats to human health and the environment from hazardous materials that have contaminated USDA-managed lands.

*Baseline:* 2001 — Identified 2000 sites requiring cleanup.

*Target:* 2007 — Will cleanup 150 sites.

### **Actionable Strategies**

In addition to continuing to provide effective technical assistance, technology development, and maintain a resource inventory, future actions will:

#### **Managing Fire**

- Complete Federal fire management plans, and cooperate in developing State plans, in compliance with Federal Wildland Fire Policy.
- Develop and maintain an accurate prioritized list of all communities designated by States as being at-risk for wildland fire, including contact information.
- Improve procedures for developing and implementing fuels treatment and forest restoration projects in collaboration with Federal, State, Tribal, and local governments.
- Improve fire suppression decision-making training for line officers, fire suppression officers, and responsible officials.
- Provide supplemental assistance for the training, equipment, safety awareness, and services provided by rural, volunteer, and other firefighters who work in the wildland/urban interface, and report those findings to Congress.
- Reduce overlapping environmental reviews with combined analyses and clearances.
- Develop guidance for weighing the short-term risks against the long-term benefits of fuels treatment and restoration projects.
- Apply consistent National Environmental Policy Act procedures for fuels treatment and restoration activities.

#### **Managing Rangelands**

- Develop strategy for completing National Environmental Policy Act analysis in a timelier manner for grazing allotments in need of updated or new analyses.
- Improve monitoring of project actions and/or instructions to ensure project prescriptions are implemented.

### **Managing Cleanups**

- Promote partnerships with Federal and State agencies, Tribal organizations, and private individuals in prioritizing planning, and carrying out environmental cleanups and related activities.
- Conduct all work in a way consistent with the Superfund National Contingency Plan.
- Before spending funds under the Hazardous Materials Management Program or other appropriated funds, seek appropriate contributions toward cleanup costs from those responsible for the contamination.

## **Objective 5.2: Improve Management of Private Lands**

Farmers, ranchers and private forest owners manage more than 70 percent of the Nation’s land. These groups are the primary stewards of soil, water, and related resources on those lands. We provide a portfolio of services to help owners be good stewards. These services include research, education, and technical assistance; cost share and incentive payments for conservation practices; and rental payments or easements to protect fragile or environmentally important land. We develop conservation technology tailored to local conditions based on continuing agency resource assessments and response to local needs and priorities. USDA’s field staff works in partnership with local conservation districts, extension universities, Tribal and State staff, and volunteers. Many Federal and State agencies rely on our technical expertise and conservation technology. We play a key role in protecting property and natural resources on non-Federal lands by increasing preparedness, mitigating hazards, and preventing fires. Over the next few years, we will work collaboratively with our partners to sustain past environmental gains while increasing efforts to address new and emerging environmental concerns. We will adopt a holistic approach that ensures compatibility of conservation and trade policies and effective coordination of conservation and farm policies.

### **Performance Measures**

Protect the productive capacity of agricultural and forestland.

*Baseline:* 2001 — 530 million acres of cropland and grazing land needed additional conservation treatment to handle degrading quality and long-term productivity problems.

*Target:* 2007 — Needed treatment will be applied to a total of 130 million acres in the period 2002 through 2007.

*Baseline:* 2001 — Stewardship management plans have been developed for landowners of non-industrial private forestlands for 23.5 million acres cumulatively from 1991-2001.

*Target:* 2007 — Provide stewardship management plans covering an additional 10 million acres (cumulative 2002 through 2006) of non-industrial private forestlands.

*Baseline:* 2001 — Forestry Best Management Practices had a national implementation rate of 86%, with 17 States conducting effectiveness monitoring.

*Target:* 2007 — Will increase national implementation rate to 92%, with 35 States conducting effectiveness monitoring.

Manage watersheds to provide clean and abundant water supplies.

*Baseline:* 2002 — Owners and operators of an estimated 257,000 animal feeding operations needed help to carry out comprehensive nutrient management plans to protect water and air quality.

*Target:* 2007 — 50,000 owners and operators of animal feeding operations will have initiated implementation of comprehensive nutrient management plans.

*Baseline:* 1997 — Annual erosion was 1.06 billion tons. Part of that eroding soil moved beyond the field to contribute to sediment problems in waterways.

*Target:* 2007 — Will reduce annual erosion to a nationwide level of 0.9 billion tons.

*Baseline:* 2001 — Helped to improve irrigation water management on 1.2 million acres (about 50 million acres of the Nation’s farmland are irrigated).

*Target:* 2007 — Will help improve irrigation water management on a total of 9 million more acres.

Ensure diverse wildlife habitats.

*Baseline:* 2002 — A cumulative total of 1,075,000 acres of wetlands enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Acres enrolled in the WRP play an important role in reducing the average annual net loss of wetlands to agriculture.

*Target:* 2007 — Will increase wetlands protection by enrolling in the WRP 1.2 million acres of wetlands identified as high priority by states.

*Baseline:* 2001 — New management practices that improved wildlife habitat were applied on 11.6 million acres and an additional 19.2 million acres had rental agreements or easements in place that provide long-term protection for habitat.

*Target:* 2007 — Will apply new management practices to improve wildlife habitat on 20 million acres of working land, and have rental agreements or easements on 24 million acres to provide long-term protection for habitat.

### **Actionable Strategies**

In addition to continuing to provide effective technical assistance, technology development, and maintain a resource inventory, future actions will:

- 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 landowners and producers who receive financial assistance under our conservation programs.
- Increase program efficiency and help producers to comply with local, state, and national regulatory requirements through education and by streamlining procedures for applying to conservation programs and administrative processes.
- Increase incentives to help minority, limited-resource, and beginning producers to practice conservation in their operations.
- 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.
- Focus our land retirement programs more on protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat.

- Expand support of research that addresses the measurement, fate and transport of agricultural pollutants and the associated policy, social and economic aspects.
- Develop nationally comparable definitions for identifying at-risk wildland/urban interface communities and for prioritizing communities within State or Tribal jurisdiction.

### **Key External Factors for Strategic Goal 5**

Agricultural lands are co-mingled with urban and developing land as part of watersheds and ecosystems. Activities taking place in parts of forests, lands or watersheds outside USDA influence can offset the effects of improved management on agricultural land, so that the state of the whole watershed may fail to improve as much as expected.