

# 5. Small Forest Landowner Office

## 5.1 Introduction

The Small Forest Landowner Office (SFLO) serves as a resource and focal point for small forest landowner concerns and policies. Its mission is to promote the economic and ecological viability of small forest landowners while protecting public resources. The office was created as a result of the 1999 Salmon Recovery Act, when the Forests and Fish Rules were passed. These new Forest Practices Rules resulted in increased size of riparian buffers and created further measures to protect water quality and restore salmon habitat in the forests of Washington State. The State Legislature recognized that the Forests and Fish Rules would have a disproportionate economic effect on small, family-owned forests. To help small landowners retain their forestland and not convert the land to other land uses, the legislature authorized the creation of a Small Forest Landowner Office within DNR.

It is estimated that more than 215,000 small forest landowners manage 3.2 million acres of forests in Washington—more than half of the private forest and woodland acreage in the state. Their forests tend to be concentrated in the lower elevation habitats along lakes and streams, which are key locations for providing ecosystem functions. Their forests also tend to be subject to development pressures, making it especially important to support them in their efforts to maintain their land in forestry. Due to population growth and a shrinking commercial forest land base, these landowners are absorbing heavy impacts on their forests from increasing demands for timber; fish, wildlife, and water protection; recreational uses; and aesthetics.

This chapter describes the accomplishments, opportunities and challenges of the Small Forest Landowner Office's landowner assistance programs: the Forestry Riparian Easement Program (FREP); the Family Forest Fish Passage Program (FFFPP), and the Forest Stewardship Program. Another program now administered by the office, which assists both small and large forest landowners, is the Rivers and Habitat Open Space Program (R&HOSP). The description of that program can be found in chapter 7 of this report.

## 5.2 Forestry Riparian Easement Program

Provisions included in the 1999 Salmon Recovery Act established the Forestry Riparian Easement Program (FREP). This easement program acknowledges the importance of small forest landowners and the potential for a disproportionate effect of FP rules on them.

The Forestry Riparian Easement Program compensates eligible small forest landowners for “qualifying timber” in exchange for a 50-year easement. “Qualifying timber” includes those trees that the landowner is required to leave unharvested as a result of Forest Practices Rules protecting Washington's aquatic resources. Landowners cannot cut or remove any Qualifying timber during the life of the easement. The landowner still owns the property and retains full access, but has “leased” the trees and their associated riparian function to the state. Funding for the program has been allocated by the Washington State Legislature since 2002.

## **Applications and Acquisitions**

Since FREP began, funding has not kept up with demand. There has been a backlog of applications waiting for funding for the cost of acquiring the easements. During the 2013 fiscal year, 23 new applications were received and 13 easements were acquired. As a result, the backlog of unfunded applications now totals 107.

In the 2013 legislative session, DNR requested full funding to complete acquisition of the FREP backlog, which totaled approximately \$11 million at the time the request was developed. The legislature funded FREP at \$3 million for FY14-15, a significant increase from FY13 levels.

DNR updated a FREP website to provide:

- Eligibility and application process information
- Application forms
- The current list of applications in the program
- The list of all Forestry Riparian Easements acquired by DNR

The legislature directed the chair of the Forest Practices Board to form a group of stakeholders to investigate and recommend potential new long-term funding sources for the Forestry Riparian Easement Program and report to the legislature by May 31, 2012. This report is posted on the FREP website.

The Table on the following page summarizes the Forestry Riparian Easement Program's capital budget.

**Department of Natural Resources  
Small Forest Landowner Office  
Forestry Riparian Easement Program  
Capital Budget Summary**

	FY 2002-2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	Totals
	7/1/01-6/30/05	7/1/05-6/30/06	7/1/06-6/30/07	7/1/07-6/30/08	7/1/08-6/30/09	7/1/09-6/30/10	7/1/10-6/30/11	7/1/11-6/30/12	7/1/12 - 6/30/13	
Holdovers from Waiting List *	-	56	91	110	112	65	75	79	96	
Applications during the FY*	143	69	59	44	28	10	16	17	24	410
Total Applicants on List at end of FY*	143	125	150	154	140	75	91	96	120	
Number of Easements Purchased	87	34	40	42	75	0	12	0	13	303
Queue*	56	91	110	112	65	75	79	96	107	
Amount Appropriated	\$7,750,000	\$8,000,000		\$10,300,000		\$0	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000		\$28,050,000
Amount used for Administration of Program		\$300,000		\$560,000		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$277,300	\$1,137,300
Amount Spent	\$7,097,350	\$2,892,000	\$4,808,000	\$4,079,000	\$5,500,000	\$0	\$929,000	\$0	\$722,700	\$26,028,050
Acres Purchased	1,481	602	857	804	1,049	0	148	0	115	5,056
Amount Remaining	\$652,650	\$0		\$161,000		\$0	\$71,000	\$0		
Average Value of Easement per FY	\$81,579	\$85,059	\$120,200	\$97,119	\$73,333	\$0	\$77,417	\$0	\$55,592	
Cumulative Average Value of Easement	\$81,579	\$82,557	\$91,909	\$92,987	\$87,685	\$87,685	\$87,260		\$85,900	
Amount Requested from Legislature	\$10,000,000	\$13,050,000		\$13,800,000		\$10,000,000		\$10,000,000		

Dollar values include all costs associated with the easement acquisition process.

\*Number of FREP applications;

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### **5.3 Family Forest Fish Passage Program**

The Washington State Legislature established the Family Forest Fish Passage Program (FFFPP) in 2003 (RCW 76.13.150). Eliminating fish passage barriers can be costly. The program was developed to provide regulatory and monetary relief for small forest landowners to comply with the Forests and Fish Rule requirement for the removal of fish passage barriers. The voluntary program allows these landowners to sign up for assistance to correct fish passage barriers on their forest road stream crossings. The program is a continuing success, recognized as a model for interagency cooperation and for assisting landowners.

In general, the 2003 law required:

- Washington State to create a cost-share program that would provide from 75-to-100 percent of the cost of removing fish barriers on small forest landowner lands.
- Barriers are prioritized annually and repaired on a “worst-first” basis.
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- By signing up for the program, a landowner is relieved of any forest practices obligation to fix a fish passage barrier until funding is made available to complete the project.

Three state agencies and a stakeholder group cooperate to manage and fund the program:

- Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Small Forest Landowner Office is the main point of contact for program information, assisting landowners, providing outreach, and coordinating additional funding sources.
- Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is responsible for evaluating the barrier, assessing habitat quality of the stream, and ranking barriers for correction.
- The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) administers program funding and provides information on program contracts, billing, and reimbursement.
- Washington Farm Forestry Association (WFFA) represents the small forest landowner community on the steering committee; providing program oversight and assisting with project approval.

#### **WDFW Ranking of Fish Passage Barriers for the Family Forest Fish Passage Program**

Program legislation (RCW 77.12.755) directs repair of worst barriers first starting with barriers lowest in the watersheds. To identify and prioritize the worst barriers, WDFW rates the barriers enrolled in the Family Forest Fish Passage Program (FFFPP) on the following criteria:

- Number of fish species that benefit
- Amount and quality of habitat opened
- Degree of fish barrier—degree to which fish are prevented from moving up- and down-stream
- Number and location of other barriers and the degree of those barriers
- Concurrence from Lead Entity Watershed groups (groups that take the lead on salmon habitat recovery plans in the watershed)
- Cost effectiveness

Projects are scored to provide an initial list that is evaluated by the three state agencies; DNR, RCO, and WDFW. This information, along with project cost estimates, is provided to the FFFPP Steering Committee for final funding decisions.

Information on the fish passage barriers obtained during site visits is placed in the WDFW Fish Passage Barrier Inventory. The inventory includes those stream crossings that have been identified through Washington State Department of Transportation inventories, local government inventories, barriers identified in FFFPP stream surveys, and local inventories funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board.

### **Program Challenges and Opportunities**

In addition to providing adequate funding, the two greatest challenges for the FFFPP are filling data gaps in the fish passage barrier inventory information and getting the word out to landowners who would benefit from the program. DNR and cooperating partners continue to pursue funding for inventory related work. The office continues to be successful at obtaining grants to help offset state Capital Fund allocations for the program. This year, the Small Forest Landowner Office submitted a grant proposal for \$82,585.26 to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to conduct road inventories on small forest landowner properties, fix fish passage barriers, address any road surface erosion and/or sediment delivery issues, as well as promote ecologically sound forestry options to landowners. The SFLO should hear if this grant proposal receives funding sometime in August 2013. Last year’s grant proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for \$350,000 was unfortunately not funded.

In the 2013 field season, the FFFPP completed 47 fish barrier removal projects opening 161 miles of upstream fish habitat.

### **Family Forest Fish Passage Program Accomplishments Since 2003**

<b>Numbers and Costs</b>	<b>FY 2013</b>	<b>Cumulative Since 2003</b>
Eligible Small Forest Landowner Applications	78	664
Eligible Sites	96	918
Projects Completed	47	289
Stream Miles Opened Up	161	682.33
Cost of Completed Projects	\$5.1 million	\$20.85 million

### **5.4 Forest Stewardship Program**

DNR’s Forest Stewardship Program provides professional natural resource advice and assistance to help family forest landowners manage their lands. In addition to a staff of Landowner Assistance Foresters, the program also employs a full-time statewide Landowner Assistance Wildlife Biologist. The biologist advises landowners directly and also provides professional consultation to the program’s foresters.

- Technical Assistance – Over 1,000 on-site consultations are provided by foresters and the wildlife biologist each year.

- Education – DNR supports Washington State University Extension education programs for family forest owners which are attended by over 3,000 landowners annually, including:
  - Regional Forest Owners Field Day events in both eastern and western Washington. These out-in-the woods educational events cover all aspects of forest management including fish and wildlife habitat protection and enhancement.
  - Forest Stewardship Coached Planning Short courses. These courses help landowners develop an integrated, multi-resource Forest Stewardship Plan for their property. Plans address all forest resources on the site including fish and riparian habitat, water quality, wildlife habitat, and threatened and endangered species.

Supported by grant funds from the USDA Forest Service, DNR administers the Eastern Washington Forest Landowner Cost-Share Program to improve forest health and reduce the threat of bark beetle and wildfire damage in Eastern Washington. Non-federal owners of forestland in Eastern Washington, who own a total of no more than 5,000 forested acres within the state of Washington, are eligible to participate. Approximately 1500 landowners have taken advantage of this important cost share program since its inception.

DNR’s Forest Stewardship Program is part of the USDA Forest Service’s nationwide Forest Stewardship Program and is supported primarily by federal funds from that agency.

## **5.5 Small Forest Landowner Office Outreach**

The Small Forest Landowner Office communicates with agencies and the public to foster a mutual understanding, promote public involvement, and influence actions with the goal of serving as a resource and focal point for small forest landowners concerns and policies.

One of the challenges of the Small Forest Landowner Office is reaching small forest landowners to make them aware of technical, educational, and cost-share assistance programs to protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, improve forest health, reduce the risk of wildfire and help small forest landowners retain their forestland.

The Small Forest Landowner Office’s online survey requested information about the demographics of small forest landowners, such as: how many acres they own, how long they have owned their property, the purpose of the use of the forest land, whether water is present on the property, and organizations in which they are involved. So far, the major survey trends show: the majority of landowners own 100 acres or less, most manage their land for timber production followed by wildlife habitat, and most have water on their property. Survey answers will help the SFLO direct work to support these landowner goals and management objectives.

The Small Forest Landowner office also updated their [Do You Own Forestland?](#) pamphlet. This pamphlet provides information about all of the assistance programs that are offered through the Small Forest Landowner Office such as FREP, FFFPP, the Forest Stewardship Program, Long-term Applications, and Alternate Plans. It also includes a postage paid return postcard for a reader to request more information about these programs or request a site visit to the landowner’s property by a SFLO Landowner Assistance Forester or Wildlife Biologist.

The Small Forest Landowner office distributed the July, December, February, and May editions of the Small Forest Landowner News to the growing list of 3,700 subscribers. The newsletter is distributed every other month. Landowners can subscribe [on the website](#) or request by email at [sflo@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:sflo@dnr.wa.gov). Readers can also catch up on [Archived Small Forest Landowner News editions](#).

#### *Forestry Riparian Easement Program Outreach*

- The Forestry Riparian Easement Program has updated its webpage, has developed educational materials, and increased interactions with stakeholders at Timber Fish and Wildlife (TFW) and Region District Meetings to inform interested people about the changes and updates of the program.
- The program also has a [new brochure](#) to help educate and promote FREP to landowners across the state.

#### *Family Forest Fish Passage Program Outreach*

- The Family Forest and Fish Passage Program completed an educational video about the program. This video shows how local communities, fish, and small forest landowners can benefit from FFFPP. Watch the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0m0DqpZzBU4&feature=youtu.be>.
- The FFFPP has increased its presence at TFW meetings, Region District meetings, Society of American Foresters meetings, and Washington Farm Forestry Association meetings. The outreach is to help the program continually look for the best projects to ensure that the worst projects are fixed first. The program also is collaborating with fish enhancement groups to act as sponsors to the program.
- The program developed a strategic outreach plan for continuing to improve on outreach for the program. This outreach plan set goals and objectives and established a media campaign to inform the public about the program. With this amplified outreach, the program received press from 29 newspaper articles, 4 radio interviews, and one television news story.
- The program also focused on technology for delivering information and messages to widespread audiences by increasing social media use, creating an online video library, and creating a DNR Radio announcement.
- The Family Forest and Fish Passage Program created a survey to communicate with landowners who have participated in the program. The survey gathered valuable information about the construction process, as well as captured landowner experiences and comments about the program that help educate other stakeholders.
- To help evaluate the effectiveness and track the success of the program's amplified outreach efforts the SFLO updated the application and tracking form to ask landowners how they found out about FFFPP.

#### *Rivers and Habitat Open Space Program Outreach*

Though the Rivers and Habitat Open Space Program (RHOSP) was not funded for FY 2013, DNR asked forest landowners to indicate their level of interest in the program. Landowners who may be interested in applying are asked to submit a [Notice of Intent form](#). The completed forms will help DNR gauge the overall interest and illustrate to the Legislature the need for funding this program. The Small Forest Landowner Office has increased outreach activities through

attendance at stakeholder meetings, the SFL newsletter, use of the Notice of Intent form, updated website and other educational materials, and press releases that enlist media assistance in informing the public and will keep them apprised of projects and results.

*Forest Stewardship Program Outreach*

1. Collaboration outreach efforts with Washington State University Extension to host three Forest Owners Field Days across Washington State. WSU extension and DNR worked together on promotional materials for the event and work together to facilitate each event.
2. The Forest Stewardship Program promotes many of its events and classes through the SFL News.

*Long-term Applications Outreach*

The Small Forest Landowner Office has increased its presence at TFW meetings, Region District meetings, Society of American Foresters meetings, and Washington Farm Forestry Association meetings. The outreach is to inform staff members that work directly with landowners about the benefits of long-term applications to small forest landowners to encourage their use statewide.

*Small Forest Landowner Office Grant Proposals*

The Small Forest Landowner Office is continuing to seek grant opportunities to support all of the small forest landowner programs.

**Grant Applications**

<b>Grant Proposal</b>	<b>Status</b>
2013 Western Competitive Resource Allocation Grant	2 grant proposals submitted: Absentee Outreach (\$130,000 – requested and received funding), and Columbia fish passage (\$300,000 requested – no funding received)
Numerous Natural Resources Conservation Service, EQIP Grants	The grant will provide fish passage projects to landowners through NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding.

<b>Grant Proposal</b>	<b>Status</b>
2013 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation’s Conservation Partners Grant in partnership with Northwest Natural Resources Group (NNRG)	Pre-Proposal submitted April 2013 and invited to submit full proposal in June 2013. This grant will conduct road inventories on SFLO properties, fix fish passage barriers, fix road surface erosion and sediment delivery where it exists, as well as promote ecological forestry options to landowners.

The Small Forest Landowner Office goal is to continue to provide the highest quality of outreach to the small forest landowners. The SFLO will continue to pursue the use of media and social media to inform the public on the program and the resources offered. The office continues to search for external funding and grants as they become available to provide more assistance to small forest landowners. An important component of this outreach is to solicit feedback from users and track SFLO outreach activities to ensure effectiveness.