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TREE FARMING IN WESTERN MARYLAND

Did you ever wonder the purpose of those rows of plastic tubes that can be seen standing in groups along roadways and streams? The answer—CREP. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program is managed by the state of Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Farm Service Agency. Its purpose is to establish grasslands and forests along streams that will improve water quality and provide wildlife benefits.

According to Dan Hedderick, Forester, “The idea of the CREP program is to create buffer areas and then pay the landowner an annual rental payment for 10 to 15 years.” The program initially pays for 87.5% of the costs, but a completion bonus and other payments means that almost 100% of the total costs are not paid by the property owner.

The plastic tubes are technically “tree shelters” that vary in size between 3 and 5 inches in diameter. Their plastic composition is designed to degrade over time, providing the trees do not exceed the maximum diameter of the tube. If the seedlings do outgrow their plastic protection, the tubes are removed. Repeated experience has shown that without the shelters animals often destroy the seedlings before they can mature. Dan Hedderick points out, “the tubes also act like a nursery to the seedling.”

Seedlings are selected based on what the Forest Service deems to be best for the site and also what the landowner wants. “Diversity makes more of a forest than a monoculture, so we primarily select hardwoods that are one to two years old but also some pines and shrubs are used. Our seedlings come from the John S. Ayton State Forest Tree Nursery located in Preston, Maryland. We provide the program but



Dawne Fox and Ronnie Clapp, area tree farmers, with “tubes”.

private contractors do the planting work and site preparation.” The growth of the seedlings is monitored by the state while the property owners are required to maintain them. According to Dan, “We were doing 100 acres a year in Allegany County but we have covered most of the available sites where land owners were interested.”

The state of Maryland has been concerned with forest conservation before the current CREP program; in fact conservation efforts began with the creation of the Forestry Department in 1906. Some of those programs were designed to manage public lands while others encourage private landowners to take part in environmentally friendly practices through the use of incentives. This is important for comprehensive forest management because 90% of Maryland’s woodlands are privately owned. Evidence that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forestry Service programs are successfully working to assist property owners today, while ensuring long term conservation benefits for tomorrow, can be counted by the number of residents who are taking part in them.

One of the most popular current state initiatives is the Forest Stewardship Program. According to Bernie Zlomek of the DNR Forest Service, “Stewardship is intended to assist private property land owners in managing their resources.

When foresters prepare plans they must determine what the owner’s objectives are. We don’t want to tell the property owners what their objectives should be; we want to meet their objectives. Some owners want to grow trees; others are interested in improving the habitat for wildlife, or to improve water quality.”

Ronnie Clapp, a Flintstone, Maryland resident who owns 111 acres, stated, “I got interested in the programs about 15 years ago through a neighbor. My main concerns were

for the timber and the wildlife on my property. So, I became part of the Stewardship Program in 1994. The state took aerial photographs and then developed a plan in 2000. The plan was developed from an inventory of the forest and natural resources on the property. Basically, the Stewardship program creates incentives to keep the forest area from being commercially developed. I give the Forestry service a lot of credit; they are great guys to work with.”

Ronnie’s friend, Dawne Fox, also took part in FLEP, Forest Land Enhancement Program, a state program developed strictly for woodlands that consist of more than five acres of property. Unlike the Stewardship program that Ronnie took part in that used private funding to plant trees, state funds were used to subsidize under FLEP, so flexibility is trademark of the Maryland’s incentive programs.

Henry and Nancy Maier, who live on 100 acres of property near Oldtown, Maryland, have also been working with the state, first with Henry’s mother in a 15 year program and now in both the Stewardship and FLEP programs. “You apply and the state customizes a comprehensive management program. Complying with the written plan means that you receive substantial tax incentives.” Henry and Nancy’s forestry practices extend beyond state initiatives because they offer demonstrations and programs throughout the year including horse logging, food plots for wildlife, timber stand improvements, and practical surveying exercises for Allegany College of Maryland



Henry and Nancy Maier, at their tree farm, pose with Percherons, Bob and Barney. Along with other awards, Henry has recently been chosen as the Conservation Farmer of the Year.



forestry students. According to Dan Hedderick of the state of Maryland Forestry Service, Henry and Nancy Maier were designated Maryland State Tree Farmers of the Year in 2004, an award “we fully supported because of all the activities that Henry and Nancy have taken part in. The programs were great educational tools for students and neighbors.”

Bernie Zlomek notes, “There are hundreds of Allegany County landowners in the Stewardship program because of the incentives. Filing and implementing a plan is a tremendous tax savings. If a forest owner does not have a plan prepared by a licensed forester, their land is assessed at residential values. If a landowner has a management plan prepared by a licensed, professional forester and the recommendations are followed, their assessed value falls significantly. It’s a win-win situation.”

Another ongoing state program is provided by the John S. Ayton State Forest Tree Nursery. The DNR Forest

Service makes tree seedlings available for spring delivery through the state nursery. The seedlings are sold to customers on a first come, first served basis. Some of the species available are oak, pine, dogwood, green ash, persimmon and shrubs. Deciduous trees are sold in bundles of 100 and conifers in bundles of 50. All seedlings must be planted in Maryland for conservation purposes including watershed protection, wildlife habitat, buffer and soil protection. Trees purchased from the state nursery are not to be used for landscaping or ornamentation.

A host of state of Maryland conservation and management plans may be viewed by visiting the DNR website at www.dnr.state.md.us.

