

Establishing reserves practice manual

DRAFT 4/26/2020

I. ELIGIBILITY CONDITIONS

- a. The property is within the eligible geography (see map below)
- b. Eligible land tenure and ownership type: Forest stands on private ownerships of greater than or equal to 30 acres and less than or equal to 2,400 acres
- c. Forests originating from natural regeneration (e.g. plantations are ineligible).
- d. Forest must be at least 80 years old (years since the entire project area was impacted by a stand-replacing disturbance, or since stand initiation)
- e. Eligible condition status at the time of contract signing:
 - i. Land not subject to any existing legal encumbrance (e.g. conservation easement or state/local restrictions) that excludes forest harvest activity (e.g. riparian buffers, designated reserves or no harvest areas) or the actions described in this practice
 - ii. {Insert stocking level from other practices here: 30% AGS, 2000 board feet, or revised numbers for S. New England}
 - iii. Land not subject to an existing right of first refusal or right of first offer.
 - iv. If land is enrolled in a state's current use tax program (e.g. chapter 61 or Use Value Appraisal), at least 10% of the harvestable land area must be excluded from the project area.
- f. When there are more eligible applicants than funding available for this practice, preference for enrollment will be given to project areas that meet strict ecological and landscape context criteria (see Specification below).

II. PRACTICE DESCRIPTION AND SPECIFICATIONS

- a. General description -- This practice produces carbon benefits through increased total forest carbon stocks from eliminating carbon removal from harvest activities. This practice includes a commitment to avoid harvest over a 20-year period with intent to continue beyond 20 years (with exceptions for invasive removals or novel outbreaks of forest pests and pathogens). Reserves can cover an entire parcel, or can occur on part of a parcel through enhanced or wider riparian/wetland buffer strips beyond legal requirements and best management, or through foregoing management on a portion of a harvestable area.
- b. Specifications:
 - i. The landowner will sign a 20-year term contract that includes an assignable right of first offer, allowing but not obligating conservation organizations (including land trusts and state land agencies) to purchase and conserve the land in the event that the landowner decides to sell the land during the contract period
 - ii. Within 1 year of contract signing, the participating family forest owner will develop a 20-year property-wide forest management plan, including a

communication and/or estate plan for communicating the intention to maintain the project area as forest and to maintain forest reserve management even after the management plan ends. Forest management plans will be prepared in consultation with a professional forester approved by the Family Forest Carbon Program. Existing management plans may be submitted for approval, with the addition of a communication plan.

- iii. During the course of the contract period, this practice:
 1. limits any forest harvest within the enrolled area, with exceptions below for invasive plants and pests/pathogens;
 2. allows for treatment of invasive plants, and of native competing vegetation such as hayscented fern that limits the ability of new seedlings or saplings to grow;
 3. requires the retention of any downed wood on site, unless related to a novel pest or pathogen outbreak;
 4. allows for the use of fencing, or tree shelters to control deer and moose browse.
- iv. If landowner is enrolling only a portion of the project area, this portion must be at least 1/3rd of the total harvestable area (excluding steep slopes, wetlands, and other areas that cannot legally be harvested)
- v. When there are more eligible applicants than funding available, preference for FFCP enrollment may be given to:
 1. Land that is in VT Conservation Design¹ interior forest blocks or MA BioMap2² forest cores (or updated versions of these maps/documents as they become available) and/or,
 2. Land on untilled forest soils in MA (Harvard Forest map showing lands where soils are thought to never have been tilled) or equivalent data sets in VT and/or,
 3. Land that is adjacent to an existing, permanently protected, forest reserve and/or,
 4. Land where a FFCP-approved forester can attest that all of the following features are present:
 - a. Multiple large-diameter trees (greater than or equal to 25 inches³
 - b. Well-developed understory (sufficient regeneration to replace the overstory)
 - c. Abundant snags (greater than 5 snags >10 inches dbh per acre⁴

III. CONTRACT PERIOD AND PAYMENT SCHEDULE

- a. Timeline to implement practice and commitment period to maintain practice: 20 years.

Payment per acre
TBD

- b. Incentive/cost-sharing payment amount and schedule:

Project Year	Payment
1	\$TBD for management and communication plan, plus 20% of implementation agreement value
10	30% of implementation agreement value
15	20% of implementation agreement value
20	30% of implementation agreement value

IV. MONITORING AND VERIFICATION

- a. Landowner will ensure specific monitoring actions:
 - i. Initial (prior to contract signing) attestation that all eligibility criteria are met
 - ii. Year 1: 20-year management plan, developed and submitted to FFCP for approval
 - iii. Years 10, 15, and 20: Attestation by a FFCP-approved forester that all contract terms are still being met.
 - iv. If it becomes necessary to sell the land (e.g. an estate requirement following a death in the family), notification of FFCP is required, any assigned partner (land trust, agency, municipality) has the ability to act on the right of first refusal.
- b. Monitoring actions that shall be undertaken by program staff or representatives:
 - i. Initial (prior to contract signing) verification that all eligibility criteria are met.
 - ii. Year 1: Review and approval of management plan
 - iii. Review of landowner attestations
 - iv. Potential periodic remote sensing and site-level verification of compliance with approved management plan in effect
- c. Commitment to ongoing program level validation: The landowner will reserve to FFCP staff and representatives the right to access the property to carry out the site level monitoring actions specified above, and to establish long-term monitoring plots on enrolled stands to directly measure and monitor the impacts of the practice to improve FFCP program-level reporting.

References:

- ¹ Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. 2018. *Vermont Conservation Design: Maintaining and Enhancing and Ecologically Functional Landscape*. Retrieved from: <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/conservation/vermont-conservation-design>
- ² Commonwealth of Massachusetts-DFG and The Nature Conservancy. 2010. *BioMap2: Conserving the Biodiversity of Massachusetts in a Changing World*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/biomap2-conserving-the-biodiversity-of-massachusetts-in-a-changing-world>
- ³ D'Amato and Catanzaro. 2007. *Restoring old-growth characteristics*. UMass Extension publication, retrieved from: https://masswoods.org/sites/masswoods.org/files/pdf-doc-ppt/Restoring_Old_Growth_Characteristics_2.pdf

⁴ Forest Guild. 2010. *Forest Biomass Retention and Harvesting Guidelines for the Northeast*. Retrieved from: www.forestguild.org/publications/research/2010/FG_Biomass_Guidelines_NE.pdf

V. Eligible Project Areas

