NEW ENGLAND FORESTRY FOUNDATION

New England Forestry Foundation
Large Commercial Forest Landowner Incentive Program: Round 1 Design Phase
Request for Proposals

Introduction

Through this RFP, NEFF seeks preliminary proposals from large commercial forest landowners in the project region (New England states) to participate in the Design Phase of pilot implementation of incentives to support application of qualified climate-smart forestry practices under this program. The goal of this Design Phase round of projects will be to design, test, and refine the program and inform subsequent rounds of incentive delivery, related modeling, and Measurement, Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MMRV) with large commercial landowners.

This program will provide approximately $10.5 million in climate-smart forestry incentives on commercial forestlands across the region. These funds will be awarded based on 3 rounds of projects, with RFP's issued on the following approximate schedule to be adjusted as needed: April 2024 for pilot round and then early in 2025 and 2026.

Small forestland owners throughout New England who are interested in incentives for climate-smart forest management are encouraged to apply to the Family Forest Carbon Program as funded by NEFF through this program. In addition, smaller-acreage forestland owners in southern New England will be eligible for an incentive program offered by NEFF for southern forest types.

Application Deadline: June 7, 2024
Submit applications to: Catrina Vear, at cvear@newenglandforestry.org with the email heading "NEFF Round 1 Design Phase Application_(your organization name)"

Project Context & Background

In May 2023, the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) was awarded $30M through the USDA's Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities Program—a highly innovative grant program linking verifiable climate-smart production practices on working lands with market development for the resulting commodities. With $3 billion in funding, this program represents a massive opportunity to pilot scalable, carbon-saving practices that benefit producers of all sizes.
Through this paradigm-shifting award, the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) is anchoring a 5-year partnership which will launch a groundbreaking and nationally relevant pilot program in New England to build a climate-smart forest-based economy as a powerful tool for climate action. The project builds on a foundation constructed over decades by partners in the forestry and forest products sectors, and has three major components:

1. Implement forest management practices that store more carbon in the forest and in wood products that can be substituted for fossil fuel-based materials,
2. Quantify the resulting carbon gains, and
3. Build markets for climate-smart forest products so that such practices will eventually be self-sustaining and economically viable.

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The project will realize nationally significant climate benefits from New England, expand forest products markets, and benefit economically distressed rural communities. A climate-smart supply chain will deliver:

- Economic benefits at the stump and in commodity wood markets
- Improved forest ecosystem health and climate change resilience
- Growth of more merchantable and better-quality wood
- Increased longer-term carbon storage in living forests and wood products over time
- Benefits to people in urban and suburban areas through using locally grown, healthy, low-carbon building materials to help meet the growing demand for affordable housing and other commercial and residential construction

Analysis for New England shows that a holistic approach to forest-based climate mitigation—protecting forests, practicing climate-smart forestry, and strategically utilizing renewable wood products in place of fossil fuel-intensive materials—can deliver carbon savings equal to 30% of the emissions reductions needed to reach net zero by 2050.

Round 1 RFP – Design Phase

Through this RFP, NEFF seeks preliminary proposals from large commercial forest landowners in the project region (New England states) to participate in the Design Phase of pilot implementation of incentives to support application of qualified climate-smart forestry practices under this program. The goal of this Design Phase round of projects will be to design, test, and refine the program and inform subsequent rounds of incentive delivery, related modeling, and Measurement, Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MMRV) with large commercial landowners. Potential Round 1 projects will be selected based on these preliminary proposals and detailed project specifics will be developed collaboratively by NEFF and the landowners involved as part of the project. Preliminary proposals should address at the conceptual level:

1. Practices & Forest Types: Applying one or more of the qualifying climate-smart practices as defined in the attached list as developed for this project.
   - Priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate several of the listed qualifying forest practices (see attachment – Appendix 1) across a range of forest types and stand conditions to maximize the scope and information to be gained from this first round of projects.
   - Note: Activities funded through this project will be subject to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, which requires consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to determine the impacts of proposed activities on Threatened and Endangered Species. NEFF will facilitate this process to the extent possible. Based on current guidance related to the endangered Northern Long-eared Bat, we expect that any harvesting of trees greater than 3" dbh will be prohibited during the months of June and July, but this guidance could change in the future.

2. Modeling: At a minimum, share relevant data to allow for the modeling of silvicultural and carbon related outcomes for climate-smart practices as applied in the project
   - Priority will be given to proposals that include partnership in designing, testing and conducting relevant modeling work.

3. MMRV: Partner with the NEFF CSC team to develop and demonstrate the following MMRV activities, to be conducted by NEFF in collaboration with participating landowners
   - Quantification of GHG benefits using models, direct measurements of biomass, and/or remote sensing.
   - Confirmation that the climate-smart practice has been implemented.

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- Documenting and sharing monitoring and measurement results.
- Independent third-party verification that measurement, monitoring and reporting information are complete, accurate and reliable.

4. Incentive Design: Participate in a collaborative process to test design of incentive program
   - Key issues will include determining the cost per practice, contract design, and interface with loggers and foresters for incentive payments.

5. Logger and Forester incentives and trainings: Support engagement of foresters and loggers trained and/or certified in applying the climate-smart forest practices as noted for this project.

Project selection criteria

1. Commercial forestland owners holding more than 10,000 acres located in the New England region.
2. Projects involving approximately 300 – 2,000 acres of land.
3. Projects that plan to test multiple qualifying climate-smart forest practices.
4. Projects that plan to address multiple forest types and stand conditions.
5. Projects that offer design partnership and input for practice and incentive design, monitoring and modeling work and MMRV approaches and implementation.
6. Projects that are ready to go within a short time frame (ideally within several months) once the RFP process is complete.
7. Projects which are relevant to subsequent rounds of incentives under this program in terms of practices, forest types, contract structures, and MMRV to maximize replicability and scalability.
8. Projects that offer a high degree of transparency, including with respect to direct and opportunity costs and long-term financial benefits, in service of informing program design for subsequent rounds of incentives under this project.
9. Projects that include willingness to share information about the wood harvested via the incentivized practices.
10. Projects that include willingness to devote some staff time to (1) help NEFF vet and refine draft climate-smart wood sourcing criteria and (2) answer some questions about the potential to trace/track that wood up the supply chain.
11. Note: Enrolled landowners will need to apply for a USDA Farm Services Agency number by filling out form CCC-901. Commercial landowners enrolled in this program are exempt from the adjusted gross income limits typically applicable to USDA cost-share programs. Practices implemented through this program are required to address isses as laid out in the NRCS Environmental Evaluation CPA-52 worksheet.

This RFP is issued based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as part of the Climate-Smart Commodities Partnership project under agreement number NR233A750004G017.

Application Template

Please complete the form below to submit your application. Responses can be brief and detailed project specifics are not expected at this time. Project specifics will be developed as part of the Round 1 Design Phase projects once selected. Please simply expand the boxes below as needed to provide requested information. Please use additional pages as needed to complete the template below.

Preliminary proposals need not include all details on specific locations of stands targeted for practice x, but rather an estimate of the acreages involved for each practice – further details and project specifics will be worked out after preliminary selections. The most important element is the landowner's commitment to work with NEFF in sorting through the issues involved in program design – this will require a substantial commitment of time from the landowner staff.

Practices & Forest Types
Describe (1) which qualifying forest practices, (2) which forest types and stand conditions, (3) proposed locations and acreages that are proposed for incentives through this project round, and (4) when the project would be ready to implement.
Modeling
Will the landowner collect and share inventory data to facilitate modeling of silvicultural and carbon-related outcomes for climate-smart practices as applied in the project? Can the landowner contribute modeling expertise, provide feedback on the planned modeling strategy, or otherwise contribute to the modeling effort?

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MMRV

Describe how the landowner will partner with the NEFF CSC team to develop and demonstrate Measurement, Monitoring, Reporting and Verification activities. To what extent is the landowner willing to share inventory data and information about past, current, and planned management activities?

Describe whether the landowner will be able to share information about the wood harvested via the incentivized practices and devote some staff time to (1) help NEFF vet and refine draft climate-smart wood sourcing criteria and (2) answer some questions about the potential to trace/track that wood up the supply chain.

Incentive Design

Describe how the landowner will participate in design of incentive delivery including determining the cost per practice, contract design, and interface with loggers and foresters for incentive payments. *(Round 1 Design Phase projects will require time and commitment from landowner forestry staff, please indicate your capacity to participate in various aspects of the process including determining cost-per-practice, incentive delivery structures, modeling and monitoring design, CPA52 process, etc.)*

Logger & Forester Incentives

Describe how the landowner will support engagement of foresters and loggers trained and/or certified in applying the climate-smart forest practices as noted for this project.

Appendices

I. Draft list of eligible climate-smart forest management practices for this project

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New England Climate-Smart Commodities Partnership Project
DRAFT Forest Practices List, 4/17/24

This list is still under development. NEFF is open to suggestions for additional climate-smart practices, and Design Phase applicants will be invited to help refine and improve this list in a collaborative process with NEFF staff and partners.

Detailed specifications for each practice will be developed in consultation with regional silvicultural experts. The practices expected to be most relevant for large landowners are shown in **bold** but other practices could be considered under appropriate conditions.

NEFF's intention is that all practices, even those primarily aimed at increasing productivity or carbon storage, will be implemented in a way that increases **adaptation** (defined as increasing the forest's capacity for **resistance**, **resilience**, and/or **transition** to future climate) where feasible (e.g., by favoring species adapted to future climate).

NEFF CSF Practice Name	Method(s)	Purpose(s)[1]
1. **Planting for restoration/adaptation**	Potential methods under this practice: Direct seeding hardwood Planting conifer seedling Planting mixed hardwood and softwood Planting hardwood bareroot	Planting to improve species composition to favor adaptation and to increase timber productivity, including but not limited to current non-forested areas and forest areas clear-cut to replace unproductive or understocked stands with species best suited to the site and future climate
2. **Pre-commercial thinning (PCT)**—includes thinning in stands less than poletimber size and thinning in poletimber-sized stands where no wood is removed as product	Potential methods under this practice include chop and drop, girdling, and herbicide treatment (e.g., basal stem treatment)	Pre-commercial thinning (PCT) for a variety of purposes including but not limited to favoring species composition best suited to the site and future climate, improving growth rates, improving future forest health or stand conditions, etc.
3. **Early commercial thinning (ECT)**—includes uneconomic thinning where some wood is removed as product	Potential methods under this practice can include harvesting trees, girdling, or use of herbicides including but not limited to Basal Stem Treatment	Early commercial thinning (ECT) to improve production of CSC, or management, to improve forest adaptation to future climate conditions

[1] Many of these practices can have other benefits (e.g., benefits to wildlife), but here we focus on the climate benefits.

4. Crop Tree Release	Potential methods under this practice can include harvesting trees, girdling, or use of herbicides including but not limited to Basal Stem Treatment	Crop tree release, including, but not limited to, releasing canoe-quality white birch and promoting climate adaptation
5. Insect and Disease Control	Methods can include use of insecticides, fungicides, or other recommended strategies to manage insect and/or disease outbreaks	Maintain carbon storage and sequestration; improve prospects for adaptation to future climate; maintain wood production; maintain seed trees threatened by insect or disease outbreaks (e.g. brown ash used by Native Americans for traditional purposes)
6. (A) TSI emphasizing productivity—in typical managed stands	Potential methods under this practice can include harvesting trees, girdling, or use of herbicides including but not limited to Basal Stem Treatment	While not ignoring opportunities to promote adaptation, the emphasis in this practice is to increase timber production, including uneconomic thinning in sawtimber-sized stands to remove poor quality trees. Keep scattered older trees as part of the residual stand in stands larger than those eligible for early commercial thinning to increase structural complexity.
(B) TSI emphasizing adaptation—in stands that haven't been actively managed in the recent past; this option is intended primarily for small landowners in southern New England where active management is less common	Potential methods under this practice can include harvesting trees, girdling, or use of herbicides including but not limited to Basal Stem Treatment	Management, including but not limited to thinning, to improve forest resilience and adaptation to future climatic conditions

7. Maintain heavily stocked older stands	Methods can include either no management or light thinning, ideally aimed at anticipating mortality.	Maintaining carbon storage and sequestration in heavily stocked stands, including, but not limited to old-growth including management with light harvesting using continuous cover silvicultural techniques
8. Retain legacy trees[2]	Do not harvest scattered patches of older, large-diameter legacy trees. Give preference to ash seed trees if they can be treated to reduce risk of mortality from emerald ash borer	Maintain carbon storage and sequestration in legacy trees; foster adaptation by adding structural diversity to the future stand
9. Implement Exemplary Forestry as laid out in the Exemplary Forestry Standards for the Acadian or Central and Transition Hardwoods forest types	In general, this will involve entries every 20 years to create very small patch cuts to regenerate mature stands or create complexity, with thinning between the patches	Mitigate climate change by maintaining or increasing carbon storage in the forest and wood production and assist stands to adapt to climate change
10. Implement continuous cover forestry	A selection system with removal of approximately 35% of standing volume every 30 years	Mitigate climate change by maintaining or increasing carbon storage in the forest and wood production and to assist stands to adapt to climate change
11. Implement the Triad system	Combine intensive forestry and ecological reserves in appropriate locations with some kind of light touch "ecological" forestry in the matrix landscape	Mitigate climate change by maintaining or increasing carbon storage in the forest and maintaining wood production and to assist stands to adapt to climate change

[2] This practice can have biodiversity benefits, as legacy trees can provide habitat for certain rare species of mosses, lichens, and liverworts.