

## **New program promotes forest preservation, CO2 sequestration**

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**RICHMOND, Va. (CBS19 NEWS)** -- A new partnership aims to support sustainable forests and carbon market development in targeted areas in Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Nature Conservancy are working together to create the Healthy Forest Reserve Program, or HFRP.

This program will offer financial assistance in the form of easement payments for specific conservation actions on private forest and tribal lands.

According to a release, an acre of eastern hardwoods can sequester 85 tons of CO2 equivalent on average.

Landowners develop a carbon forest project with TNC and get assistance with carbon credit development and marketing as well as some potential additional income from the sale of credits.

The release says the restored and protected forests also promote biodiversity among plants and animals, help threatened and endangered species.

The program offers a 30-year term and permanent easement options for private landowners or a 30-year contract for tribal lands.

The USDA will pay 75 percent of the value of the land enrolled in 30-year easements plus 75 percent of the average cost of the approved conservation practices.

Landowners who select the permanent easement option can get 100 percent of the easement value of the enrolled property.

“Improving forest management on a regional scale is a win for landowners and the environment,” said Virginia State Conservationist Jack Bricker. “Integrating an emerging voluntary forest carbon market with HFRP supports local economies and fits seamlessly into our new five-year initiative to improve forest health in Appalachia.”

Virginia is currently offering the program through a Regional Conservation Partnership Program project with TNC in several counties in the southwestern part of the Commonwealth. The counties covered include Bland, Buchanan, Dickenson, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise and Wythe.

Eligible landowners need to submit an application by Dec. 30 in order to be considered for fiscal year 2020 funding. All applicants must provide proof of ownership, and operators or tenants need to provide written concurrence from the landowner of tenancy for the HFRP restoration agreement period.

To apply or get more information, call Steve Lineman or Greg Meade with the Nature Conservancy at (276) 676-2209, NRCS Easement Program Manager Diane Dunaway at (804) 287-1634 or the NRCS field offices that serve the eligible counties.

Source: <https://www.cbs19news.com/content/news/New-program-promotes-forest-preservation-CO2-sequestration-564898722.html>