



**MONTANA FOREST OWNERS
ASSOCIATION**

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July 1, 2019

Tom Watson
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service
10 E Babcock St Room 443
Bozeman MT 59715-4791

Dear Tom:

This is to express the deep concern of the Montana Forest Owners Association (MFOA) over the Natural Resources Conservation Service's announced emphasis of funding EQIP forest projects on a landscape level, in apparent exclusion of funding individual non-landscape level stewardship projects. MFOA is a Montana non-profit corporation founded in 1995. Its purpose is to protect and serve the interests of non-industrial private forest landowners. There are more than 29,000 non-industrial private forest owners that individually own forested parcels of 10 acres or more and cumulatively own in excess of four million forested acres in Montana. MFOA members are fine stewards of the land and need the assistance of EQIP funding to maintain their lands.

MFOA supports NRCS's continued funding of individual stewardship projects as well as landscape level restoration projects crossing multiple ownerships. MFOA continues to support and encourage individual private forest owners to undertake sound silvicultural practices. We believe that random acts of conservation have a ripple effect with the first owner as a focal point for neighboring lands. Little EQIP funding has been assigned to forest owners in the past, and this new emphasis will pretty much eliminate any chance of their participation. We suggest that NRCS consider implementing a hybrid funding vehicle in which landscape projects receive perhaps the major funding but there remains funding for worthwhile individual non-landscape level forest projects.

Lastly, I, as well as other MFOA members, are also members of the Montana Tree Farm System and take similar positions. For example, Allen Chrisman, the Past Chair of the Montana Tree Farm, is also an active and important member of MFOA.

We are scheduled to meet with you and Jerry Shows on July 8 to discuss this.

Thank you for your valuable support of Montana's forest owners.

Sincerely,

Mike Christianson
President