

Conservation Stewardship Law Frequently Asked Questions

1. Q: If my land is in farmland (crops or currently being pastured) or the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP/CREP) should I be looking at getting into the Conservation Stewardship Program?

A: No, farmland and CRP ground is assessed based on the farmland assessment guidelines. These guidelines determine taxes based on the productivity index rate of the 3 predominant soils on the property. In almost every case, your taxes are lower under this assessment than they would be if you enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program.

2. Q: Should I enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program if my unimproved/wooded/idle land was assessed at the farmland assessment rate in 2006?

A: No, the Conservation Stewardship Law protected many landowners from a tax increase by including a “freeze” clause. This clause states that a landowner’s taxes are frozen at the 2006 assessment rate until the property is sold, inherited or more than 50% of the ownership changes.

3. Q: Should I consider enrolling in the Conservation Stewardship Program if my unimproved/wooded/idle land was assessed at 33.333% of Fair Market Value in 2006?

A: Yes, many counties were already assessing unimproved/wooded/idle land at 33.33% of fair market value. For landowners in these counties it makes very good sense to look into enrolling in the program.

4. Q: What will my land be assessed at if I enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program?

A: Your land will be assessed at 5% of Fair Market Value instead of 33.33%.

5. Q: Will I have to allow public hunting or access on my land if I enroll in the program?

A: No, there are no requirements to allow public access

6. Q: If my land is being used for a commercial operation can I still enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program?

A: Yes, as long as your commercial operation does not materially disturb the land (e.g. ATV course). If a portion of your property is developed or has recreational activities that materially disturbs the land you can still get into the program however those areas of the property that are materially disturbed will not be included in the program.

7. Q: Do I have to have a Conservation Stewardship Plan written every year to qualify for the program?

A: No, a plan that is submitted and accepted by the DNR will be good for 10 years and is transferable to the new landowner if the property is sold.

8. Q: Will I have to pay a penalty if I want to get out of the program before the 10 years of the plan are over?

A: No, you can get out of the program any time you want. When you opt out of the plan your land will revert back to the 33.33% of fair market value.

9. Q: What will I have to do to stay in compliance with the plan?

A: In most cases you will have to enhance the property for wildlife. This means you will likely have control any exotic or invasive plant species (e.g. autumn olive, fescue, garlic mustard) that may be present on your land.

10. Q: Do I have to do all of the work required of the plan in the first year?

A: No, you can spread the work required to be completed over the life of the plan.

11. Q: Is a Conservation Stewardship Plan and a Forestry Stewardship Plan the same thing?

A: No, the Conservation Stewardship Plan is a new plan created in the fall of 2007. A Conservation Stewardship Plan does not require the harvest of timber or the planting of trees however the tax break for a Conservation Stewardship Plan is not as good as a Forestry Stewardship Plan.

12. Q: Which plan (Conservation Stewardship or Forestry Stewardship) is right for me?

A: The answer depends upon what you are trying to accomplish. If you have no desire to harvest your trees for lumber and don't want to be required to plant trees then the Conservation Stewardship Plan is probably more what you are looking for.

13. Q: If I am currently in a Forestry Stewardship plan and want to transfer into a Conservation Stewardship plan can I do that and is there any penalty?

A: Yes, you can transfer out of the Forestry Stewardship Plan and into the Conservation Stewardship plan with no penalty.

14. Q: If I enter into the Conservation Stewardship Plan and am required to do numerous things to improve the land for conservation and wildlife is there any cost share assistance to help defray the expense of implementation?

A: Yes, there are a number of programs available through the state (e.g. acres for wildlife, landowner incentive program, C2000) and federal (e.g. Partners for wildlife, Wildlife habitat incentive program) agencies.