

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**  
**Request for Proposals**  
**Western North Carolina Forest Products Cooperative Marketing**

**1. Introduction**

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act assigns the Forest Service a key role in creating thousands of private sector jobs for Americans in areas of our nation that are most impacted economically. The Forest Service is uniquely qualified to meet this challenge. We have a rich history of helping during tough economic times. We provide training, education and good, environmentally sensitive jobs.

The Forest Service works closely with our partners and with the communities we serve. Forest Service personnel are very much a part of the fabric of the local communities hit hard by the economic downturn. Our staffs know the needs, the people, and have the skills to mobilize large numbers of workers to get important conservation work done.

The USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station received \$1,974,000 in Recovery Act funding to develop a Western North Carolina Forest Products Cooperative Marketing project in the 18 Western North Carolina counties.

**2. Request for Proposals**

Proposals are requested to manage a project that will employ unemployed and underemployed forest products workers and will assist them in preparing their businesses for more efficient production when demand for forest products returns. The persons to be employed by this project are those working with both timber and non-timber forest products as well as marketing specialists, community organizers, and other forest products advisors.

Many timber and non-timber forest operators in Western North Carolina are working a few days a week or less. This solicitation seek proposals on how to employ these forest workers in building networks to help connect producers and consumers, as local food organizations have done with great success in our region. Cooperative marketing and cooperative use of equipment will be explored. A central principle behind this solicitation is that constructing marketing and organizational networks during the economic downturn will position forest operators to be more prosperous as their markets recover.

The budget for this project is \$1.9 million. It will be funded by the USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station. The required format and content for a ten-page proposal is provided below. The approved project will be funded for one to two years, and will be expected to produce specific results within the first four months. Proposals are due on or before 5:00 pm on October 23, 2009. No matching funds are required.

**3. Background**

A workshop held in February 2009 was titled Local Forest Products: New Enterprises and New Markets. Speakers explored emerging opportunities for landowners to generate income from Southern Appalachian forest lands. They also examined ways for local forest product producers to reach local

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buyers of forest products. The final panel of the day included a variety of forest landowners who described diverse ways to use forest lands to generate income.

The workshop attendees offered many suggestions in response to the day's presentations. The most frequent suggestions were:

1. Support forest products co-ops, producer cooperation, and the "community supported forestry" concept presented at the workshop.
2. Provide consumer education on local availability of forest products, matching buyers and sellers, and ASAP-style market development. ASAP is the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project.
3. Capitalize on local sawmills (including on-site milling) to meet local demand for forest products
4. Provide more forest product operator networking opportunities

The project report went on to recommend a specific approach to follow up on these participant suggestions. The full report is available at the at the Southern Research Station's website <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/> in the section on the Recovery Act. Proposals may follow the specific approach recommended in that report or may offer other approaches to employ forest workers and to build infrastructure to support forest products production and marketing in the future.

#### **4. Proposal Content and Priorities**

##### **Content**

- A cover page including contact information for the project leader and the lead entity submitting the proposal. The cover page must include the signature of a person authorized to commit the lead organization to the work proposed.
- A not to exceed ten-page proposal addressing project management and the proposed approach to forest products business development. Proposals will describe the objectives, approach, projected workforce, cooperators, qualifications of the team, and a general budget.
- Attachments of up to twenty pages may include biographic information for key personnel, description of the organization(s) or business(es) or other entity(ies) that will participate in the completion of this project, descriptions of any project partners including their roles and their approximate level of effort in the proposed project. Attachments may include descriptions of recent relevant work of a similar nature. Examples of the organization's ability to manage large amounts of funds consistent with federal requirements will be particularly important to a successful proposal.

##### **Examples of Possible Approaches**

- Connecting local producers of forest products with local consumers of forest products.
- Training producers to be more effective in sustainable production and local marketing.
- Assisting producers in exploring niche markets and in diversifying their forest products operations.

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- Supporting existing forest products marketing cooperatives and organizing new ones where demand exists among forest producers or forest product consumers.
- Supporting cooperation among forest product practitioners, such as in using shared equipment or facilities, even where a formal marketing cooperative may not be needed.
- Arranging opportunities for improving communications among forest product practitioners.
- Other approaches that address the goals of this solicitation.

**Approaches Less Likely to be Selected**

- Capital-intensive approaches such as buying a few pieces of costly equipment or facilities.
- Approaches that employ few underemployed forest workers.
- Broad public education in contrast to more specific forest product market development.
- Large scale restoration activities that do not build a capacity for the industry to be more effective in the future.

**5. Characteristics of a Successful Proposal**

Minimum Qualifications – Any individual, business, or organization may submit a proposal but a successful applicant must have a demonstrated ability to successfully manage large amounts of federal funds equal to or larger than the \$1.9 million budgeted for this project.

Economic Stimulus – The successful proposal will describe an approach that moves quickly to employ large numbers of underemployed forest products workers. Goals for these funds include creating an immediate employment impact as well as creating lasting benefits as a result of the work undertaken with these funds. The proposal should address how these dual goals will be achieved by the proposed approach.

Geographic Scope – A specific geographic scope should be identified. This solicitation is for a regional project in Western North Carolina.

Partnerships and Collaboration – Groups of organizations and individuals may submit joint proposals. Team approaches are welcome but a lead entity and a project leader must be identified.

Organizational Attributes – Submitters of strong proposals are likely to possess some or all of the following attributes. Team approaches may strengthen proposals if one organization does not possess all these characteristics:

- demonstrated financial management capacity
- familiarity with federal accounting and procurement requirements
- demonstrated ability to manage a regional project over several counties or more
- familiarity with forest sustainability issues in the Southern Appalachians
- familiarity with economic development and job creation
- demonstrated ability to work with individuals and groups at a regional scale
- familiarity with both timber and non-timber forest products
- familiarity with cooperative approaches to business development and

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- familiarity with natural resources products marketing.

If your proposed approach involves more than one entity, please describe in an appendix to the proposal, which skills each partner brings to the project and their projected level of involvement in the project.

## **6. Proposal Requirements**

Proposals will be limited to ten single-spaced narrative pages (less than 5000 words), excluding appendices. Proposals will include statements about the objectives, approach, projected workforce, cooperators, qualifications of the team, and a general budget. The full proposal, including all attachments shall not exceed thirty pages.

Proposals must identify a principal contact person and provide contact information. Joint proposals are welcome but a lead organization must be identified.

Proposals will be considered for projects that are to be completed within 1-2 years of the award. Specific results must be demonstrated within four months.

Selection criteria will be applied to the proposals during the selection process. Criteria include the following in priority order:

1. Clarity of the proposal approach and projected outcomes.
2. Relevance of experience related to the goals of this solicitation and how recent the relevant experience was.
3. Quality of past work as listed in the proposal or appendices.
4. Likelihood of the project being successful and producing high-quality, immediate, and lasting results.
5. Quality of external collaboration (the partners and nature of collaboration described).
6. Clarity and justification of proposed budget.

## **7. Selection Process and Projected Timeline:**

1. This Request for Proposals is issued on September 24, 2009.
2. Proposals of no more than ten pages plus up to twenty pages of appendices are due no later than 5:00 pm Friday, October 23, 2009 by email as described below
3. Proposals will be screened by an expert panel using rigorous criteria. The submitters will be notified by November 6, 2009.
4. The grant is expected to be awarded by December 15, 2009 or sooner if possible.
5. The Southern Research Station expects that a project manager will be identified or hired by December 15 and the project fully under way by January 15, 2010.

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6. All funds are expected to be expended and the project completed by October 2011. Quarterly and annual reports are due and progress will be audited regularly. Thorough documentation must be maintained about how funding is used. A final report will be due within 90 days of project completion.

**8. Method for Submitting Proposals and Submission Deadline.**

Proposals should be submitted by mail to:

Susan Fox  
US Forest Service  
200 WT Weaver Blvd.  
Asheville, NC 28804

Any questions can be directed to:

[sfox@fs.fed.us](mailto:sfox@fs.fed.us)  
Susan Fox 828 257 4309