

TEXAS CONSERVATION & SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OPPORTUNITIES IN FORESTRY



TCSI.TAMU.EDU

HARDWOOD STAND ESTABLISHMENT

FUNDING RATE = \$400/ACRE

OVERVIEW

The Texas Conservation & Sustainability Initiative (TCSI) is a groundbreaking initiative designed to foster conservation and sustainability practices while creating market opportunities for Texas agricultural and forestry producers. This five-year financial incentive program is made possible by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). TCSI provides financial assistance to small-acreage, non-industrial private landowners to implement science-based, adaptive silvicultural practices that establish new forest stands, improve the health and vigor of existing stands, and support long-term, holistic management.

ADAPTIVE SILVICULTURE

Silviculture is the intentional practice of establishing, growing, and tending forest stands to meet landowner and societal objectives in a sustainable manner. Adaptive silviculture builds upon familiar tools—mechanical and chemical site preparation, planting, thinning, fertilization, prescribed fire, and harvesting—but applies them more deliberately in response to changing biological, environmental, and market conditions. Adaptive silviculture is long-term management. It defines desired future stand conditions, anticipates disturbance and variability, monitors stand development and market trends, and adjusts management actions as conditions evolve to maintain productivity, resilience, and forest health.

STAND ESTABLISHMENT STRATEGIES

Successful adaptive silviculture begins with proper stand establishment. A stand is a group of trees sufficiently uniform in age class, structure, composition, and site quality to function as a single management unit. Properties may contain one or multiple stands, each managed according to site conditions and landowner objectives.

Stand establishment involves more than planting seedlings. It includes timely seedling ordering, careful handling and storage, proper planting, site preparation, early post-planting treatments, and cultural practices necessary to establish a fully stocked, free-to-grow, and vigorous stand. Even when conducted properly, successful establishment may require up to five years.

Stand establishment under adaptive silvicultural strategies emphasizes long-term stand vigor, resilience, and value production over the life of the stand while also providing important ecosystem services.

These practices follow NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Code 612 – Tree/Shrub Establishment. Additional practices such as CPS Code 490 – Tree/Shrub Site Preparation and CPS Code 315 – Herbaceous Weed Control may be required to ensure successful establishment.



STAND ESTABLISHMENT CRITERIA

The following specifications are designed to promote long-term forest productivity, resilience, and sustainability while minimizing unnecessary disturbance and management inputs.

Site Evaluation: Ensure the site is well suited for the desired hardwood species. Site conditions are often more critical for hardwood establishment than for pine. Priority should be given to deep, fertile silt-loam to sandy-loam soils with good moisture availability, adequate aeration, and no restrictive layers such as hardpans. Soil pH should generally be neutral to slightly acidic (approximately 6.0–6.5). Select sites with a low to moderate risk of prolonged drought or frequent flooding, recognizing that soil moisture—either too much or too little—is often the primary limiting factor for hardwood establishment.

Tree Species Selection: Carefully match hardwood species to site conditions. Most desirable hardwood species perform well only within a relatively narrow range of soils and moisture regimes. Bottomland forest sites are generally differentiated by microtopographic position. For example, cherrybark oak and Shumard oak are best suited to bottomland fronts, ridges, and higher flats where drainage and aeration are favorable.

Planting Layout and Density: A dual-cropping system is preferred for hardwood establishment. Under this approach, primary crop trees are planted in combination with secondary hardwood species that serve as trainer trees. Trainer trees help improve stem form, encourage natural pruning, and provide early competition. Target total stocking rates range from 620 to 1,000 seedlings per acre, planted in alternating rows. For example, a 7-foot by 7-foot spacing yields approximately 890 seedlings per acre, with roughly half designated as primary crop trees.

Seedling Ordering and Quality: Order seedlings from a reputable forest tree nursery well in advance of planting. Orders should include both the desired primary hardwood species and appropriate trainer species. Order approximately five percent more seedlings than required to allow for culling. High-quality hardwood seedlings should have a straight main stem approximately 18 to 24 inches tall above the root collar and a well-developed root system with at least 10 to 12 first-order lateral roots. Root pruning is not permitted.

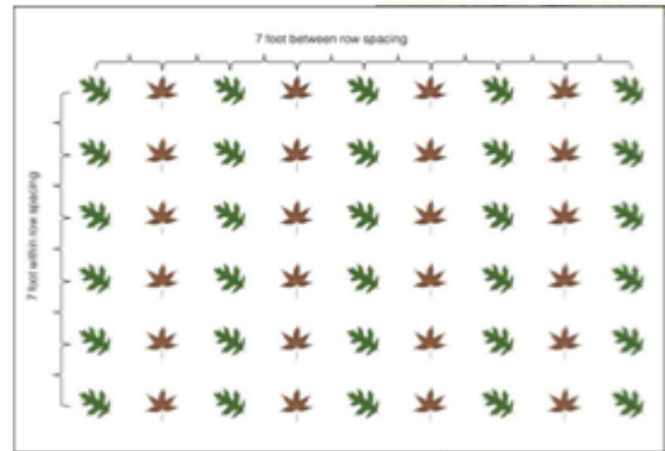
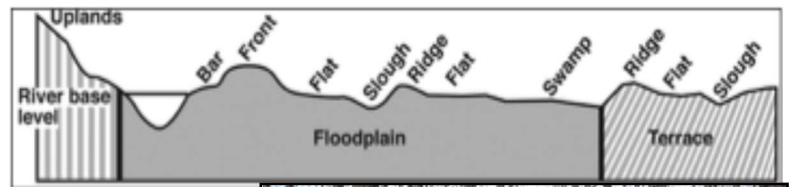
Site Preparation: Conduct site preparation activities in accordance with NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) 490 – Tree/Shrub Site Preparation, and, where appropriate, CPS 338 – Prescribed Burning. Mechanical, chemical, prescribed fire, or combined treatments may be used to control competing vegetation, address soil limitations, and reduce regeneration pest pressure. Site preparation intensity should be minimized and matched to site conditions. Subsoiling (ripping), when performed correctly, is a preferred treatment and has been shown to improve planting quality and early hardwood growth. Practices that remove woody debris from the site, such as raking and piling or windrowing, should be avoided except in approved situations.

Seedling Handling and Care: Proper handling of hardwood seedlings is critical to survival. Transport, store, and plant seedlings in a manner that prevents drying, freezing, or physical damage. Inspect seedlings upon delivery.

Planting: Closely supervise planting operations to ensure compliance with NRCS CPS 612 – Tree/Shrub Establishment. The preferred planting window is late fall once adequate soil moisture is available. Containerized seedlings (plugs) are preferred but bare-root hardwood seedlings may be planted during the winter planting season, but no later than February 15.

Herbaceous Weed Control: Conduct banded herbaceous weed control during the first growing season when necessary. Use appropriate equipment and herbicide prescriptions: <https://texasforestinfo.tamu.edu/HerbicideDSS>

Protection and Evaluation: Protect seedlings from insects, wildlife, livestock, fire, and equipment damage. Periodically inspect the stand for competing vegetation, pest pressure, and other stressors. If issues arise, consult with a Texas A&M Forest Service forester or a qualified consulting forester. All practices must follow applicable Best Management Practices (BMPs)



GENERAL ELIGIBILITY and PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

To be eligible for participation, applicants must comply with all the following requirements:

1. Eligible Landownership

The applicant must be a private, non-industrial, small-parcel landowner with a total proposed treatment area of not less than ten (10) acres and not more than one hundred fifty (150) acres. The subject property must be located within a county designated as eligible on the official program eligibility map.

2. Funding Limitations

- a. Financial assistance for forestry practices shall be limited to a maximum of forty-five thousand dollars (\$45,000) per individual or a maximum treated area of one hundred fifty (150) acres per individual per open contract, whichever occurs first.
- b. However, where forestry practices are combined with additional eligible agricultural practices under the program, total financial assistance shall not exceed one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) per contract.

3. Farm Service Agency Requirements

The applicant must obtain and maintain a valid Farm Service Agency (FSA) Farm Number and shall comply with all applicable federal environmental compliance requirements, including but not limited to conservation and land use provisions required by the FSA.

4. Soil Sampling and Monitoring

The applicant shall permit scheduled soil sampling and associated monitoring activities prior to implementation, during implementation, and following completion of the approved practice(s), as required by the program or its authorized representatives.

5. Practice Maintenance Obligation

The applicant shall maintain the approved treatment area and all implemented practices in accordance with program requirements for a minimum period of five (5) years from the date of completion, unless otherwise specified in writing by the program administrator.

6. Practice Enrollment Limitation

Each application shall be limited to enrollment in a single eligible practice. Submission of multiple applications for the purpose of enrolling in multiple practices may be subject to review or disqualification.

7. Authorization to Proceed

The applicant shall not commence any on-site work or incur reimbursable expenses prior to receipt of a written Approval to Perform letter issued by the program administrator. Costs incurred prior to such authorization shall be deemed ineligible for reimbursement.

8. Prohibition on Duplicate Funding

The applicant shall not receive duplicate financial assistance for the same practice on the same acreage from any other federal, state, or private cost-share or incentive program. Any violation of this provision may result in disqualification, repayment obligations, and/or other remedies permitted by law or program policy.



ENROLLMENT STEPS

- Apply at <https://tcsi.tamu.edu>
- Work with a practicing, degreed forester to complete the included Forest Practice Plan of Work and a treatment area map.
- Establish a Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm number and obtain required maps and documentation.
- Submit all required documents as a single PDF which include.
 1. Forest Practice Plan of Work
 2. FSA Tract Map
 3. Treatment area map
 4. FSA Subsidiary Print
- Schedule a site visit with Texas A&M Forest Service

ESTABLISHING FARM RECORDS WITH FARM SERVICE AGENCY

The following information is a guideline to obtaining your farm number with FSA.

- Find Your Local Service Center. Visit <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/USDA-service-centers>
- Call or email your Service Center to make an appointment.
- Ask what documents to bring to your appointment.
- During your appointment make sure to register for a farm number and file form AD- 1026 (Wetland Conservation and Highly Erodible Land Conservation).
- Obtain a copy of a Farm Tract Map and a copy of a Subsidiary Print. These copies are required for program participation

IF APPLICANT IS SELECTED

If an application is approved, the applicant shall comply with the following process and requirements:

Environmental Evaluation – An Environmental Evaluation will be conducted to assess compliance with applicable environmental requirements. This evaluation typically does not require an on-site visit but may include one at the discretion of the program administrator.

Contract Execution – The applicant will receive a formal contract outlining program terms and conditions. The contract must be reviewed, signed, and returned within the timeframe specified in the award notification.

Approval to Perform – Upon contract execution, the applicant will receive a written Approval to Perform letter. All approved practices must be fully implemented within twelve (12) months from the date of issuance unless an extension is granted in writing by the program administrator.

Inspection and Payment Authorization – Upon completion of the approved work, the project will be subject to inspection and verification by the program or its authorized representatives. Incentive payments will not be processed until all work has been verified as compliant with program requirements.

Questions: tcsiforestry@tfs.tamu.edu

Texas A&M AgriLife provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.



FOREST PRACTICE PLAN OF WORK

HARDWOOD STAND ESTABLISHMENT

For TAMFS use only	
Project name:	
Received Date:	
TAMFS Forester:	
Pretreat Date Inspected:	
Post-Treat Inspection Date:	

CONTACT INFORMATION

LANDOWNER'S LEGAL NAME	MANAGER'S NAME	CONTRACTOR'S NAME
COMPANY NAME	COMPANY NAME	COMPANY NAME
MAILING ADDRESS	MAILING ADDRESS	MAILING ADDRESS
CITY/STATE/ZIP	CITY/STATE/ZIP	CITY/STATE/ZIP
PHONE	PHONE	PHONE
EMAIL	EMAIL	EMAIL

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

TRACT NAME	ADDRESS	COUNTY	TOTAL ACREAGE
ACTIVITY <input type="checkbox"/> REFORESTATION <input type="checkbox"/> AFFORESTATION	TREE TYPE <input type="checkbox"/> HARDWOOD	HARDPAN <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	TREATMENT AREA HARVESTED <input type="checkbox"/> YES ON MONTH/YEAR _____ <input type="checkbox"/> NO, EXPECTED DATE _____
PRIMARY SOIL TYPE	SITE INDEX	TREATMENT ACRES	TOTAL REQUESTED
PROPERTY LOCATION: (Include the nearest cross roads, how to access, and lat/long coordinates to tract center)			
SITE DESCRIPTION AND CURRENT CONDITION: (What does the site look like? Is this a replant? Why did previous planting fail?)			

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Silviculture is the intentional practice of establishing, growing, and tending forest stands to meet landowner and societal objectives in a sustainable manner. Adaptive silviculture builds upon familiar tools—mechanical and chemical site preparation, planting, thinning, fertilization, prescribed fire, and harvesting—but applies them more deliberately in response to changing biological, environmental, and market conditions. Adaptive silviculture is long-term management. It defines desired future stand conditions, anticipates disturbance and variability, monitors stand development and market trends, and adjusts management actions as conditions evolve to maintain productivity, resilience, and forest health.

FUNDING RATE = Up To \$600/ACRE

STAND ESTABLISHMENT STRATEGIES

Success begins with proper stand establishment. A stand is a group of trees sufficiently uniform in age, structure, composition, and site quality to function as a single management unit. Properties may contain one or multiple stands, each managed according to site conditions and landowner objectives.

Stand establishment involves more than planting seedlings. It includes timely seedling ordering, careful handling, proper planting, preparation, and early post-planting treatments to establish a fully stocked, free-to-grow stand. Even when conducted properly, successful establishment may require up to five years.

Stand establishment under adaptive silvicultural strategies emphasizes long-term stand vigor, resilience, and value production over the life of the stand while also providing important ecosystem services. These practices follow NRCS CPS Code 612 – Tree/Shrub Establishment. Additional practices may be required.

Funding Rates:

- Tier 1: \$350/acre on open land Planting,
- Tier 2: \$475/acre on cutover site with minimal debris as determined by a TAMFS forester, or
- Tier 3: \$600/acre on cutover site with heavy debris & numerous standing trees and shrubs as determined by a TAMFS forester.

STAND ESTABLISHMENT CRITERIA

The following specifications are designed to promote long-term forest productivity, resilience, and sustainability while minimizing unnecessary disturbance and management inputs.

Evaluate the site: Confirm that the site is suitable for pine production and identify any site preparation or soil amelioration needed to ensure seedling survival and vigorous early growth. Soil moisture availability—whether excessive or limiting—is often the primary constraint. Adaptive silviculture emphasizes observed weather extremes rather than long-term averages when assessing site suitability.

Determine the number of seedlings to order: Wider row spacing of 12 to 16 feet is preferred. Stocking range should be 360 - 520 tree seedlings per acre (tpa). Example layouts include: 7' x 12' = 520 tpa, 7' x 15' = 415 tpa, and 8' x 15' = 363 tpa.

Order seedlings: Contact a reputable forest tree nursery early and order high-quality, controlled mass-pollinated pine seedlings for fall planting. Containerized loblolly pine seedlings are preferred. Controlled mass-pollinated (full-sib) families offer predictable growth, form, and self-pruning traits, which are especially important at lower planting densities. Order approximately 5% more seedlings to allow for culling. Seedlings should be treated at the nursery for protection against regeneration pests when planting on cutover sites with heavy pine debris.

Site preparation: Use mechanical, chemical, prescribed fire, or combined treatments as needed to control competing vegetation, address soil limitations, and reduce regeneration pest risks. Site preparation intensity should be minimized and tailored to site conditions. Practices that remove woody debris from the site, such as raking and piling, should be avoided except under approved circumstances.

Plant: Plant containerized seedlings in the fall once adequate soil moisture is available, typically beginning in mid-October. Delay planting until moisture conditions are favorable. If winter planting is necessary, bare-root seedlings of the same improved family may be used. Do not plant later than February 15.

Cutover sites – On sites with heavy logging debris, use a dozer equipped with a V-blade and wildland planter to clear debris from planting rows while planting in a single pass. A hand planter should follow to fill missed spots. Retained debris between rows provides soil protection, moderates temperature, and conserves moisture.

Afforestation sites – Use a rubber-tired tractor with an open-land planter for machine planting. A hand planter should follow to ensure full stock.

Herbaceous Weed Control: Conduct banded herbaceous weed control during the first growing season when necessary, using appropriate equipment and herbicide prescriptions. Decision-support tools are available at <https://texasforestinfo.tamu.edu/HerbicideDSS>.

Protect and Evaluate: Protect seedlings from insects, wildlife, livestock, fire, and equipment damage. Periodically inspect stands for competing vegetation, pests, and other stressors. Consult with a Texas A&M Forest Service forester or consulting forester as needed.



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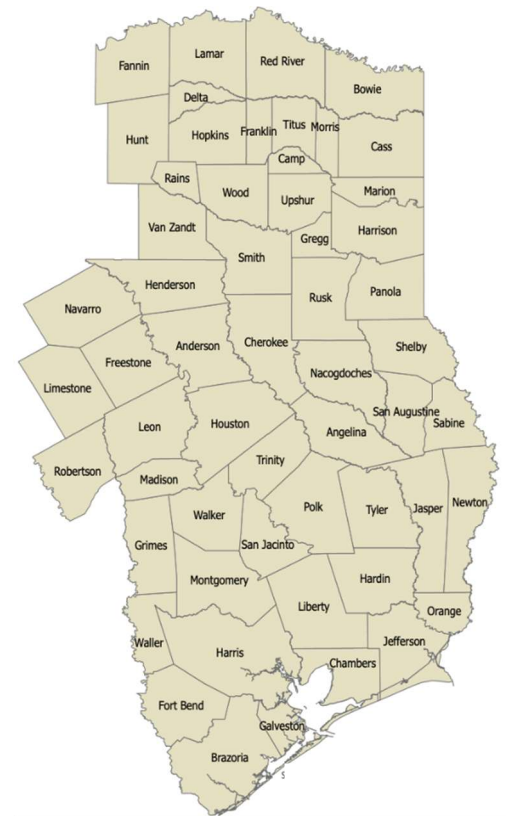
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