

Property Tax Reductions for Maryland Forest Landowners



Maryland forest landowners can qualify for a reduced property tax assessment by managing their woods under an approved forest stewardship plan. Both programs share similar goals—promoting sustainable forest management while lowering tax burdens.

Landowners may participate in either:

- **Forest Conservation and Management Agreement (FCMA)**
- **Woodland Assessment Program (WAP)**

Basic Requirements

To qualify for either program, landowners must:

- **Work with a Licensed Forester** to prepare a 15-year forest management plan based on their goals.
- **Submit the plan** to the local State Department of Assessments & Taxation (SDAT) office by June 30 to be eligible for the reduced rate beginning July 1 of the following year.
- **Stay in compliance:** A Licensed Forester must periodically inspect the property to confirm that plan recommendations are being followed. The forester then notifies SDAT, allowing the landowner to maintain the reduced assessment.

Program Comparison

While both programs provide similar benefits, they differ slightly in rates, flexibility, and penalties:

- **FCMA:** Slightly lower assessment rates and fees, but higher penalties for noncompliance.
- **WAP:** Slightly higher rates and fees, but lower penalties and greater flexibility.

The **FCMA** and **WAP** assessment rates differ by \$62.50 per acre, but the impact on a tax bill is small. At the **FCMA** rate of \$125 per acre, 25 acres are valued at \$3,125—about \$31.25 in annual taxes (\$1.25 per acre). At the **WAP** rate of \$187.50 per acre, the same land is valued at \$4,687.50—about \$45.87 in taxes (\$1.87 per acre). Only the forested portion qualifies; homesites+, buildings, and open areas are taxed separately and usually make up most of the total bill.

Tax regulations are outlined in COMAR 18.02.03.06 and Tax-Property §§ 8-209, 8-211, and 13-303. For detailed guidance, contact your local SDAT office.

Forestry Assistance for Landowners

Since 1995, the Maryland Forest Service has charged modest fees to help cover the cost of preparing and maintaining **Forest Stewardship Plans (FSP)**. These plans guide sustainable management and are required for participation in **FCMA**, **WAP**, and cost-share programs. Contiguous parcels under the same ownership may be combined if each includes at least 5 forested acres.

Other Forestry Services

- **Management Plan Inspections** – Verifies compliance with SDAT requirements.
- **Planting Site Examinations** – Evaluates sites for tree or shrub planting.
- **Timber Stand Improvement Marking** – Marks trees for firewood, pulpwood, thinning, or seed tree designation (sawtimber >12” DBH not appraised).
- **Forestry Services Coordination** – Coordinates forestry work performed by private contractors (e.g., tree planting, site prep, aerial spraying)

More Information



Contact your local Maryland Forest Service office for help with Forest Stewardship Plans, **FCMAs**, and **WAP** enrollment. Find your local forestry office [here](#) and your local assessment office [here](#).

Service	Price
FSP Preparation	
5 – 25 forest acres	\$200.00
26 – 50 forest acres	\$225.00
51 – 100 forest acres	\$250.00
101 – 500 forest acres	\$275.00
501+ forest acres	\$300.00
Tax Inspection	
<11.0 acres	\$50.00
≥11.0 acres	\$100.00
FCMA inspection/amendment	\$100.00
Planting site examination	\$40.00
Timber stand improvement marking	\$ 12.00/acre
Forestry services coordination	\$ 4.00/acre

Program Fee	FCMA	WAP
Entrance Fee	\$50.00	Not applicable
Inspection Fees	\$300.00 \$100/insp, every 5 yrs	> 11 ac: \$500.00 \$100/insp, every 3 yrs ≤ 11 ac: \$250.00 \$50/insp, every 3 yrs
Total	\$350.00 avg. \$23.33/yr	\$250.00 - \$500.00 avg. \$16.66 – \$33.33/yr

Program Feature	Forest Conservation Management Agreement (FCMA)	Woodland Assessment Program (WAP)
Minimum acres of forest (per parcel/lot)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest minimum: 5.0 acres of forested land (homesite not included). • Residential parcels: At least 6.0 acres total if a homesite is present, with 5.0 acres forested. • Multiple parcels: Two or more adjacent parcels under the same ownership can be combined under a single plan. • Tax applicability: Reduced assessment applies only to parcels/lots meeting the 5.0-acre forest minimum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest minimum: 5.0 acres of forested land (homesite not included). • Residential parcels: At least 6.0 acres total if a homesite is present, with 5.0 acres forested. • Multiple parcels: Two or more adjacent parcels under the same ownership can be enrolled under a single plan. • Tax applicability: Reduced assessment applies only to parcels/lots meeting the 5.0-acre forest minimum.
Assessment rate	\$125.00/acre (fixed for length of agreement).	\$187.50/acre (not fixed, subject to change by the State legislature).
Forest stewardship plan (FSP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required; must be current and followed • 15 year timespan. • Fee required (\$200-300 depending on forest acreage). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required; must be current and followed • 15 year timespan. • Fee required (\$200-300 depending on forest acreage).
Entrance fee	\$50.00	Not applicable
Length of agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 years (initial agreement). • Renewable in 15 year increments. 	Continuous
Documentation requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signatures: FCMA is signed by the landowner(s) and the Maryland Forest Service. • Recording: The agreement is recorded in the county land records. • SDAT requirements: An <u>Application for Agricultural Use Assessment</u> and <u>Agricultural Declaration of Intent</u> is required to continue or enroll the property in Agricultural Use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signatures: Application is signed by the landowner(s) and submitted to SDAT. • SDAT requirements: An <u>Application for Agricultural Use Assessment</u> and <u>Agricultural Declaration of Intent</u> is required to continue or enroll the property in Agricultural Use.
Inspection frequency	5 years, based on agreement start date	3 years, based on tax district
Inspection fee	\$100.00, regardless of forest acreage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$50.00 for forest <11.0 acres • \$100.00 for forest ≥11.0 acres

Program Feature	Forest Conservation Management Agreement (FCMA)	Woodland Assessment Program (WAP)
Amendments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amendable for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Renewal/extension in 15-year increments (extension of the original FCMA; back tax liability increases over time) ◦ Acreage changes ◦ Ownership changes ◦ Forest Stewardship Plan updates • Requirements: Each amendment must be notarized and recorded in county land records; \$100 fee applies. • Property transfer: FCMA can be transferred if new owners agree to the obligations and follow a Forest Stewardship Plan. • Acreage changes: Land can be added anytime; removal may trigger rollback taxes. Contact your local SDAT office for details. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No amendments or renewals: WAP has no expiration; a current Forest Stewardship Plan is required to remain in the program. • Acreage changes: Land can be added or removed at any time. Agricultural Transfer Tax may apply to removed acreage if the property is sold (see Penalties section). • Property transfer: New owners can remain in WAP without paying the Agricultural Transfer Tax by submitting an Application for Agricultural Use Assessment and agreeing to follow a Forest Stewardship Plan.
Penalties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noncompliance penalty: Termination of the agreement, loss of the agricultural assessment, and payment of back taxes to the original agreement start date. • Early termination fee: \$100 payable to the Maryland Forest Service. • Rollback taxes: Early termination or acreage removal before the agreement expires may trigger rollback taxes to the original start date. Contact your local SDAT office for details. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noncompliance penalty: Loss of the agricultural assessment. • WAP participation: Landowners can enter or leave at any time. • Withdrawal at property sale: Agricultural Transfer Tax (ATT) applies based on land value: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 4% for <20 acres ◦ 5% for >20 acres ◦ Plus: 25% surcharge on the ATT • Withdrawal while retaining ownership: SDAT tracks the property; ATT for land removed July 1, 2019 or later is reduced progressively: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 25% reduction in the first year of taxes on market value assessment ◦ 50% reduction in the second consecutive year ◦ 65% reduction in the third and subsequent year.