KINGSFORD— Do you wonder what you can do with your woodland for improving wildlife habitat? Have you thought about what you can do to improve the value of your woodland? Are you interested in what the land will be like for future generations? __PUBLIC__

To help answer these questions the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will soon begin accepting applications for conservation financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

The EQIP program includes national initiative funding programs for Forest Management Plans. NRCS Forest Management Plans provide non-industrial private landowners with a detailed description of their lands potential to sustainably produce forest products and manage wildlife habitat. The plans provide recommendations for future management practices to meet landowner objectives. No requirements are put on the landowner as a result of getting a plan developed.

The process is as follows: landowner contacts NRCS and applies for a management plan; the landowner application is funded by approximately March of this year; the landowner contracts with an NRCS Certified Technical Service Provider of their choice; the TSP develops the management plan; the landowner signs and submits the management plan to NRCS for approval; the landowner is paid by NRCS. The process must be completed in two years.

Time is short to get applications started so if you are interested get in touch with us very soon. Again, no requirements are put on the landowner as a result of getting a forest management plan-it is simply for the landowner's benefit and the future of our forest resource. The reimbursement rates have increased from last year and appear favorable. There are rates established for all parcel sizes (minimum 10 acres). This program is only for non-industrial, private land owners. There will not be another sign up for one year, contingent on a new Farm Bill passing.

Prior to submitting an application, landowners must establish their eligibility to apply with the local Farm Service Agency and NRCS offices. Applications must be submitted by January 17th to be considered for 2013 EQIP sign-up period.

More information about conservation financial assistance through the EQIP program is available at local NRCS offices and online at www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov. The Kingsford USDA Service Center serves Dickinson, Iron, and Gogebic Counties and can be contacted at (906) 774-1550.