

Community Benefits from National Forest Management Activities

Improving community-based forest stewardship depends upon strengthening local-level institutional capacity to carry out the many different kinds of activities involved in responsible ecosystem management. In many areas of the National Forest System, the steady decline in timber sales over the past decade has been paralleled by a decline in local capacity to perform important land stewardship functions (i.e., road rehabilitation or stream improvements) that had once been bundled into timber sale contracts. Today, the growing needs in ecosystem restoration, whether for watershed protection or hazardous fuels reduction, is resulting in an increased need for community-based firms with the experience and expertise to carry out this work.

How is the Forest Service facilitating institutional capacity-building in local communities? Are there ways to improve upon this? In the past, the Forest Service had a well-developed system for estimating local employment derived from timber harvesting, yet the agency does not yet have a systematic way of determining the effects of ecosystem restoration and land stewardship projects on local income and employment. As a result, it is nearly impossible to determine who receives the primary and secondary social and economic benefits of its contract programs, limiting the Forest Service's ability to effectively contribute to the well-being of the rural communities in which its customers live and do business.

The Pinchot Institute for Conservation, in cooperation with the Forest Service's Southern Research Station, Mater Engineering, Ltd., and the University of Oregon's Ecosystem Workforce Program, is conducting a

study of the economic benefits communities derived from land management contracts and timber sales on six National Forests: the Coconino (AZ), Deschutes (OR), Willamette (OR), Arapaho-Roosevelt (CO), Bitterroot (MT), and Nantahala (NC) National Forests. This project will address three important questions regarding collaborative community-based stewardship on these forests over the past five years:

- ✿ Who buys the timber; who gets the service contracts; who does the work; where are they located, and how diverse is the contractor base?
- ✿ How big are the contracts; what are their management objectives; what size and type of materials are offered, and how regularly is each type offered?
- ✿ What is the variation in contract and resource offerings within a forest landscape over time? How does this variation affect contractor and production infrastructure in rural communities?

Overall, the end-result will be an increased understanding of how we can best improve the symbiosis between forest management and community prosperity by developing a better understanding of the contributions land stewardship projects make to local income and employment. We can also determine what factors have the greatest influence on how well these activities contribute to long-term capacity building at the local level, and testing how communities in other areas might use these results to periodically evaluate the effects of land stewardship activities on their local economy.

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