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# THE PINCHOT LETTER

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News from the Pinchot Institute for Conservation

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## Fire and Water: Catalyzing Community Stewardship of Natural Resources

The need for prompt action to halt the deterioration of degraded watersheds, and to minimize the likelihood of another wildfire episode like the one experienced in 2000, has sharply accelerated efforts by the USDA Forest Service and Department of Interior agencies like the Bureau of Land Management to enlist the aid of local communities in the restoration and improved stewardship of adjacent forest lands. Top agency officials met recently with community leaders, tribal, state and local government representatives, and participants from conservation groups and other non-governmental organizations in Lakewood, Colorado to outline commitments aimed at facilitating community-based approaches to watershed restoration projects, hazardous fuels reduction projects, and ongoing land stewardship activities. These commitments include:

- ✿ Removing procedural and other administrative barriers to cooperation and collaboration
- ✿ Providing additional resources to facilitate cooperation and collaboration
- ✿ Using the ongoing work of federal land management agencies as a learning laboratory for community-based stewardship

The Pinchot Institute, in cooperation with the Ford Foundation, National Forest Foundation and the USDA Forest Service, convened and facilitated the Lakewood meeting to lay the foundation for the process by which these commitments will address the needs, concerns and priorities identified by the communities themselves and turned into actions on the ground.

### COMMUNITY COOPERATION IN WATERSHED RESTORATION

Some early successes with community collaboration in the Forest Service's large-scale watershed restoration projects has helped open the agency's eyes to the critical role local communities can play in improved stewardship of both the public and private lands typically found in a large watershed. In 1999, the Forest Service identified 15 such watersheds nationwide—from the Rio Peñasco River in New Mexico to the watershed for the New York City metropolitan region—as prototypes for more visionary management of ailing watersheds and ecosystems. Since then, cooperative projects have been used to establish 70 miles of riparian forest, and accomplish tree planting, thinning, and prescribed burning on more than 72,000 acres. More than 7,200 acres of wetlands, and 1,500 acres of native grasslands have been restored. Over 100 miles

of roads have been decommissioned and revegetated, with another 1,300 miles rehabilitated to halt degradation of water quality and aquatic habitat.

It is becoming clear that these 15 watersheds are serving as prototypes not only for the technical aspects of restoring and protecting degraded watersheds, but for developing the relationships and mechanisms (e.g., land stewardship contracts) that will serve as a long-term basis for shared leadership between the community and federal land management agencies toward the common goal of improved forest stewardship.

### INSIDE

- ✿ **David Lowenthal Named Pinchot Distinguished Lecturer.....page 4**
- ✿ **Deadline for Grey Towers Challenge Grant Nearing .....page 5**
- ✿ **Mike Dombeck: Old-Growth Policy Clarification....page 8**
- ✿ **National Policy Framework for Forests.....page 12**
- ✿ **Certification and State Trust Lands .....page 15**

*Leadership in Forest Conservation Thought, Policy and Action*

IMPLEMENTING THE  
COMPREHENSIVE FIRE PLAN

How the Forest Service and DOI agencies respond to the aftermath of this year's wildfires will be an important test of the agencies' understanding and commitment to collaborative stewardship. Collaborative stewardship entails a flexible approach to addressing local community needs and objectives, within the broader context of national-level policy and the agencies' mission of conservation and sustainable natural resource management. Land stewardship that is ecologically sound, economically

viable, and socially responsible is a goal that is shared between the federal land management agencies and local communities. This shared goal is the basis for cooperation, and a continuing, long-term commitment to mutual consideration and support. This cooperation begins with understanding and manifests itself in action.

The Departments of Agriculture and Interior have laid out their plans for the federal response to this year's catastrophic fire season in the West in a report entitled *Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment*. Collaboration

with communities in both recently burned areas and in unburned, high fire risk areas, is a major theme in the report. Local communities have a high stake in the stewardship of surrounding forests, which play a central role in determining the long-term social, economic, and environmental well being of their citizens. Many of these communities have overcome polarization among interests. They have come together to form a shared vision for their desired future, and a set of common objectives for achieving that vision.

## ABOUT THE PINCHOT INSTITUTE

The Pinchot Institute for Conservation is an independent non-profit research and education organization dedicated to leadership in natural resource conservation thought, policy, and action. The Pinchot Institute was dedicated in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy at Grey Towers National Historic Landmark in Milford, Pennsylvania, historic home of conservation leader Gifford Pinchot, to facilitate communication and closer cooperation among resource managers, scientists, policy makers, and the American public. The Institute continues Pinchot's legacy of conservation leadership as a center for policy development in support of sustainable forest management. Further information about the Pinchot Institute's programs and activities can be found at [www.pinchot.org](http://www.pinchot.org).

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The federal land management agencies are a part of these communities, and the land and resource management decisions made by agency officials should reflect communities' self-determined vision and objectives to the extent possible within the context of law and policy. Local communities also play an essential role in the stewardship of these resources through use, management and protection. To the extent feasible, the federal land management agencies should use and strengthen local capacity for carrying out resource stewardship activities, both to ensure that this local capacity can be called upon when needed, and to contribute to sustainable economic development in the communities themselves.

#### THE CHALLENGE FOR THE USDA FOREST SERVICE AND DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR AGENCIES

Pressures on the agencies to show tangible and significant accomplishments on the ground before the end of fiscal year 2001 may lead to short cuts that will minimize opportunities for collaboration in both the consideration of new projects and their implementation. Such short cuts could prove to be short sighted.

Implementation of the fire strategy in the context of collaborative stewardship is an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of community collaboration, and help rebuild the trust and support of local communities for these agencies. The task for these agencies is so large that working collaboratively is the only way for the agencies to accomplish the work expected of them. The challenge is to capitalize on this tremendous opportunity to learn to work collaboratively and to help develop agency and community capacity to do so, while still meeting the timeframes for accomplishment established by Congress.

#### COMMUNITY FORUMS

The Pinchot Institute is assisting the coordination of the process by which the fire strategy is implemented in cooperation with local communities. Working with local organizations and through "task groups" established at the Lakewood meeting, communities may have the opportunity to consider these fire strategy projects in the context of their own desired future, through one or more facilitated meetings in which agencies officials are invited to participate. A possible outcome of these forums is the establishment or revision of local action plans, which can make available federal funds for restoration efforts on private and tribal lands (through Forest Service State and Private Forestry) as well as incorporate community objectives into projects to be undertaken on adjacent national forest lands.

In the near term, many of the hazardous fuels reduction projects that will be implemented in fiscal year 2001 have already been through planning, including all necessary environmental reviews. The Institute can assist the Forest Service in selecting among these fuels projects by helping communities with the capacity to work collaboratively with the agency both in prioritizing among the projects and in getting them accomplished.

For the longer term, the community forums can serve as an ongoing mechanism for identifying and designing ecosystem restoration projects in high fire-risk communities. Additionally, they can serve as a sounding board in the monitoring and evaluation of ongoing projects.



#### LAND STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTS

Even with the need for expedited accomplishment of high priority projects, there are opportunities to use and strengthen the capacity of local community-based firms through multi-year projects.

The urgency associated with the fiscal year 2001 projects could lead the Forest Service and Department of Interior officials to conclude that the work can only be done through a few large contracts with large regional or national firms. Where this happens, there is generally little benefit to local communities or forest workers in terms of economic reinvestment or capacity building. With a more creative approach, a program of work can be designed to expedite the accomplishment of near-term priorities, but also serve as the basis for a broader array of land stewardship activities to take place once the high-priority tasks have been completed.

One such approach is through land stewardship contracts, which are multi-year, multi-task, landscape-scale, and results oriented. Such contracts can be designed so they are well suited to the capacity of small firms, and actually help reinforce that capacity over time by encouraging capital investment and the development of an experienced, skilled workforce earning family wages.

The Pinchot Institute will facilitate the development of land stewardship contracts to accomplish fire strategy projects, providing technical assistance and additional research and analysis as needed. The Institute has developed significant expertise in this area, based upon several years' experience refining the concept of land stewardship contracts, researching legal authorities, and overseeing demonstration projects. This experience can be applied to the timely accomplishment of fire strategy projects.

## CATALYZING PARTNERSHIPS

Through its active working relationships with the Ford Foundation, the National Forest Foundation, and a diverse array of community forestry organizations, the Pinchot Institute is catalyzing a broader partnership with the Forest Service and helping to bring additional funding to these efforts.

Through its longstanding partnership with the Ford Foundation, the Pinchot Institute has been able to provide direct support for citizens and community forestry organizations for involvement in collaborative stewardship activities. Foundation funding has also opened new opportunities for partnering with the National Forest Foundation (NFF), which can help provide matching funds. Areas of high priority for action under the Forest Service fire strategy match closely with the NFF's geographic area of special emphasis, as well as with its new program focus on community forestry.

For more information, please contact Mary Mitsos at [mmitsos@pinchot.org](mailto:mmitsos@pinchot.org), or at (406) 363-7175.



## Marsh Biographer David Lowenthal Named 2001 Pinchot Distinguished Lecturer

Dr. David Lowenthal, Professor Emeritus of Geography and Honored Research Fellow at the University College of London, has been named Pinchot Distinguished Lecturer for 2001 by the Pinchot Institute Board of Directors. Dr. Lowenthal is the author of *George Perkins Marsh: Prophet of Conservation*, the definitive biography of Marsh published last year by the University of Washington Press.

George Perkins Marsh's seminal *Man and Nature*, first published in 1864, shocked many Americans into realization that forest exploitation could lead to permanent alteration of the environment at a continental scale—just as it had done throughout the entire Mediterranean region centuries before. Marsh's scholarship, and his first-hand observations while serving as the American ambassador to Italy, persuaded concerned Americans to take action. Thus began the Conservation Movement, which became Gifford Pinchot's life calling, and continues to influence the ideas, institutions, and policies that

guide forest conservation to this day.

In his lecture entitled *Forest Stewardship: George Perkins Marsh, Gifford Pinchot, and America Today*, Dr. Lowenthal will briefly trace the precepts of conservation policy to Marsh's writings, and describe the principles and philosophies that united early conservationists like Gifford Pinchot and John Muir behind common goals, despite differing tactical approaches. Dr. Lowenthal will discuss what Marsh's insights have to tell us today, as we craft our own evolving vision of forest stewardship and conservation.

The Pinchot Distinguished Lecture for 2001 will be held at 3 p.m. on Friday, April 6, at the Cosmos Club, located at 2121 Massachusetts Avenue NW in Washington, DC. The lecture is free of charge, but reservations are required due to space limitations. To RSVP, or for more information about the Pinchot Distinguished Lecture, please contact the Pinchot Institute at (202) 797-6580 or at [pinchot@pinchot.org](mailto:pinchot@pinchot.org).

## Pinchot Institute Featured in PBS Television Discussion of Federal Lands Policy

On February 17, Pinchot Institute President Al Sample appeared on the PBS television program *Think Tank*, hosted by Ben Wattenberg, to discuss recent developments in federal lands policy. The other discussants on the program were Roger A. Sedjo, Director of the Forest Economics and Policy Program at Resources for the Future, and Robert Nelson,

Professor of Public Policy at the University of Maryland and a Senior Fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute. The half-hour program, which is broadcast by PBS stations nationally, focused on recent decisions to designate new national monuments on federal lands, and place 58 million acres of National Forest lands off-limits to new road construction. These decisions, and

recent proposals to open the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling, were examined in light of the current energy shortages in California and potential energy issues elsewhere in the US. For more information or a transcript of the program, see the PBS website at [www.pbs.org/think-tank/](http://www.pbs.org/think-tank/) or contact Greg Erken via email at [thinktank@pbs.org](mailto:thinktank@pbs.org).