



A Community-based Approach to Federal Forest Management: RVCC's Vision and Essential Goals

Across the West a new, community-based model of management on National Forest System lands has been developing that is improving forest health while providing sustainable timber volume and increased economic opportunities. We are seeing increasing political interest and debate around formalizing this approach. In addition, numerous bills have been introduced in recent years that have attempted to establish local or state participation in or control over federal forest management in an effort to end conflict over forest management practices.

The growth of forest-specific legislation is in part a response to the increasing management needs of our national forests and reduced on-the-ground staffing of land management agencies. Needs vary from forest to forest, but generally include: management action to address the impacts of climate change; increased federal funding and more efficient federal spending; continuity of federal employees and agency knowledge; increased fish and wildlife habitat protection; certainty of supply – of by-products of both sustainable forestry and restoration; development of markets for restoration by-products; assurance of good working conditions for forest workers; and creation of effective structures for conflict resolution. We recognize the urgency of these needs, and seek to develop a comprehensive approach to national forest management based on nine goals outlined at the right.

We believe that all legislation focused on community-based engagement on national forest management should contain central provisions that ensure our ecological, social, and economic resources will be sustained and enhanced. We also support management practices and processes that are equitable and do not favor one forest's or region's resources over another. Further, we believe that healthy forests can support rural communities adjacent to them by providing ecosystem services and opportunities for job creation and economic development. In turn, rural

Essential Goals for Community-Based Solutions:

1. Restore forest health and promote ecological resiliency.
2. Utilize collaborative processes.
3. Increase local business and workforce capacity, including creation of a cross-trained and multi-skilled forest restoration and stewardship workforce.
4. Create high quality business and employment opportunities by utilizing forest products derived from restoration and ecologically beneficial forestry activities to supply existing and new infrastructure that is appropriately scaled to meet ecological needs of the land and economic needs rural communities.
5. Generate revenue for counties not by recoupling timber harvest and payments, but by incentivizing ecological resiliency and development of ecosystem services.
6. Engage communities directly and build local community capacity, utilizing local knowledge, and working in coordination with community-based organizations.
7. Ensure clear and robust monitoring and adaptive management.
8. Maintain federal environmental and labor protections, increase NEPA efficiencies, and reduce NEPA backlogs.
9. Improve planning, contracting, and implementation efficiencies.

communities can provide the workforce and knowledge necessary for forest restoration and long-term stewardship. Community stakeholders must be given the opportunity to meaningfully participate in collaboratively-shaped land management decisions.

Working together to find policy solutions to the ecological and economic challenges of the rural West

RVCC is comprised of rural western, regional, and national organizations that have joined together to promote balanced conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the West. We are committed to finding and promoting solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and well-being of rural communities. We come from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington.





Essential Goals for Community-Based Solutions:

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition believes that effective and durable policy solutions for national forest management must be based on nine essential goals:

1. Restore forest health and promote ecological resiliency.

For any piece of forest management legislation to be effective, it should primarily promote long-term ecological resiliency of our national forests and forest resources. Increasing the pace and scale of restoration is critically needed to address the range of threats that climate change, drought, and past forestry practices pose to our nation's forests. The future health of our forest ecosystems, watersheds and forest-dependent communities depends on the ecological resiliency of our forests. By focusing management on ecological resiliency, new legislation may also be able to reduce forest susceptibility to uncharacteristic insect outbreaks, wildfires, disease, and other natural disturbances that are present in forests on a case specific basis.

The United States Forest Service estimates that between 65 and 82 million acres of land under its management are in need of restoration. For example, 12.5 million acres require mechanical treatment to address hazardous fuels reduction.¹ During difficult budget times, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) can partner closely with community-based, local, and regional organizations to address restoration and other management needs. The use of stewardship contracting and other authorities can facilitate these arrangements and should be supported in all new legislative proposals.

The existing landscape-scale restoration programs presently underway by the federal land management agencies are the result of years of hard work in building trust to collaboratively manage our national forests. Any new legislation should complement these current programs by encouraging the spread of collaborative approaches to national forest management, and not replace or supplant them in funding or goals.

Additionally, any new legislation should focus only on restoration and ecologically beneficial forestry. By combining long-rotation, sustainable forestry and forest restoration practices, the agencies can produce higher value forest products while disturbing fewer acres of land, and generate larger margins than those produced by restoration by-products. We believe that this approach would result in ecological management that is compatible with economic benefits to the federal government and to rural communities. By focusing on resiliency as the ultimate indicator, we can ensure a sustainable forestry approach that does not detract from forest health.

2. Utilize collaborative processes.

Legislation seeking collaborative influence on national forest management should ensure that local community, timber industry, conservation, government, and other relevant interests are given the opportunity to participate in developing management plans that will meet the essential goals described here. Reaching a broad-based, multi-stakeholder supported agreement on forest management through this process increases efficiencies, promotes a stable level of management and helps move toward long-term sustainability and forest resilience. The need for a wide diversity of expertise and experience is necessary for achieving ecosystem health should be recognized and incorporated in the collaborative process.

Community-based collaborative groups supported by new legislation should be based on models with a proven track record of having diverse representation of interests and an inclusive decision making policy. They should build off the successes and lessons learned from groups involved in CLFR, RACs, stewardship pilots, and other collaborative forest management approaches and programs.

¹ United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, "Increasing the Pace of Restoration and Job Creation on Our National Forest," February 2012 <http://www.fs.fed.us/publications/restoration/restoration.pdf>

3. Increase local business and workforce capacity, including creation of a cross-trained and multi-skilled forest restoration and stewardship workforce.

Many rural communities have responded to the impacts of reduced timber harvest on public lands by establishing new business – such as companies that specialize in on-the-ground restoration – and by creating job training programs to diversify and increase the skills of the local workforce. We support the continued creation of a forestry workforce trained and incentivized for conservation activities, forest and watershed restoration, fuels reduction, prescribed fire, and pile burning.

All new bills aimed at improving the management of our national forests must directly support local businesses and local workforces. They must provide high quality, living-wage employment; a safe and healthy workplace; stable, durable employment; and training and opportunity for advancement both in the woods and in forest products manufacturing. One way to address this issue could be to establish workforce training centers for a labor force to operate in the production of value-added products and to provide ecosystem services. Training programs must include comprehensive instruction in labor law compliance and occupational safety and health in the forestry and forestry services industries.

4. Create high quality business and employment opportunities by utilizing forest products derived from restoration and ecologically beneficial forestry activities to supply existing and new infrastructure that is appropriately scaled to meet ecological need of the land and economic needs rural communities.

New legislation must recognize and support the growth and development of rural economies based on the utilization of restoration by-products and predictable supplies of sustainably harvested timber. This includes two types of overlapping infrastructure and workforce – one focused on forest and watershed restoration and stewardship, and the other focused on harvest and processing by-products of restoration and sustainable forestry.



Forest restoration and stewardship activities are creating an increasing number of jobs in our rural communities, spurring rural entrepreneurship, and supporting new and existing business and processing infrastructure. The emerging restoration economy can be further supported by integrating ecologically beneficial forestry activities.

Wood processing infrastructure is essential to affordable, effective and ongoing restoration. Biomass facilities and appropriately-scaled sawmills provide market access for small diameter trees, pre-commercial thinning materials, brush and other by-products of restoration. Legislation must recognize the critical role of existing infrastructure, and encourage the development of new and innovative infrastructure that is appropriately scaled to utilize restoration outputs as well as outputs from sustainable forestry activities.

By managing our national forests for both ecological restoration activities and sustainably harvested timber, we can move steadily towards ecological resilience and economic growth. Restoration by-products and high value wood products can generate additional local wealth, create and maintain jobs, and provide raw materials to local mills, while supporting the ecological resiliency of our forests.

5. Generate revenue for counties not by recoupling timber harvest and payments, but by incentivizing ecological resiliency and development of ecosystem services.

We believe the recoupling of timber receipts and payments to counties will not be sufficient to generate long-term economic growth in rural areas or to ensure sustainable management of our National Forest System and BLM lands. We seek to reframe this discussion to incorporate the growing understanding of economic and ecologic resiliency. Potential tools to generate county funding under this model could include ecosystem service markets or a reformed Payments-In-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILT) “single county payment program” that values protected lands and other land stewardship indicators, among others.



6. Engage communities directly and build local community capacity, utilizing local knowledge, and working in coordination with community-based organizations.

Restoration, management, and long-term stewardship of our national forests depend on the ability of agency representatives, concerned stakeholders, and natural resource-based businesses to implement management activities and to enhance related services. Regardless of the goals – hazardous fuels reduction, habitat improvement, wildlife enhancement, stream restoration, road maintenance or sustainable forestry – investment in the people, programs and institutions carrying out this work is a fundamental part of accomplishing the goals of the on-the-ground projects. Rural communities adjacent to public lands are uniquely positioned to perform restoration, management and long-term stewardship. The investment in building their capacity to address current national forest health problems is critically needed. Federal actions that impact rural communities, businesses, and ecological conditions must be accompanied by appropriate and proportional levels of investment to support needed shifts and improvements in local capacity. Rural towns that have the right combination of human, social, cultural, physical, and financial capital are uniquely situated to help achieve federal land management objectives.

To be effective, new forest management legislation must recognize that the best way to meet federal conservation goals and the economic needs of public lands communities is through investment in capacity building, delivered through effectively designed programs within federal land management and rural development agencies.

7. Ensure clear and robust monitoring and adaptive management.

Any new legislation aimed at improving the management of our national forests must include a well-funded and clear monitoring and adaptive management requirement. Although public land management agencies currently gather information on biophysical conditions and management outputs of our national forests, these monitoring

practices can be greatly improved to build trust, capture achievements, and inform management decisions. In addition to the evaluation of current impacts and status of forest health and resources, a primary goal of monitoring should be assessing the impact of forest management on social and economic sustainability of adjacent and other affected communities.

Monitoring of ecological, economic and social conditions on national forests and surrounding communities should involve a diverse group of individuals and stakeholders to ensure maximum sharing of knowledge and trust building. All new legislation must ensure that monitoring and learning takes place through a process of informed collective review and discussion.

To be effective, legislation must mandate that monitoring results are disseminated widely and used to inform subsequent management decisions. Land management planning and decision making should explicitly reflect learning from monitoring and evaluation of past management actions. Monitoring needs to be integrated into every step in adaptive management processes.

8. Maintain federal environmental and labor protections, increase NEPA efficiencies, and reduce NEPA backlogs.

Some proposed legislation includes language exempting National Forest System or BLM lands from federal environmental and labor laws in favor of state or other local management laws. However, federal laws provide essential safeguards for threatened and endangered species, clean water, clean air, public involvement, forest workers, and other public values. It is important that these safeguards be maintained on all public lands.

To encourage the restoration of forest health and ecological resiliency, an increase in NEPA efficiencies should be considered. Several factors play into the perceived inefficiency in following the requirements of this law. RVCC participants have identified some of these and recommended some changes in the context of the Blue Mountains Forest Partners collaborative group that could be applied elsewhere. Common barriers to an efficient NEPA process



include: high agency turnover; lack of coordinated agency response to new information; lack of boilerplate information; inefficiencies in the ESA consultation process; lack of funding and staff; and poor communication and coordination between Forest Service interdisciplinary teams. We recommend that any new federal forest management legislation include solutions to these barriers. Such solutions include: entrance and exit memos for agency staff; timely replacement of agency staff that are transferred, retired, etc.; prompt legal and policy evaluations for circulation to agency staff; creation of a boilerplate library; programmatic NEPA analysis; and the utilization of a trained local workforce to assist the agencies in gathering the information and data necessary for these analyses.

9. Improve planning, contracting and implementation efficiencies.

New forest management legislation must also aim to increase non-NEPA planning, contracting and implementation efficiencies. To have an impact, these changes must be made at a national – rather than region or district – level. Simple, straightforward National Forest Management Act Directives and employee training on contracting tools – including the use of stewardship contracts and partner agreement – will go a long way to reducing costs and time of project planning, contracting and implementation. As public land management agencies seek increased efficiencies in contracting, they must not do so at the expense of contractors and workers. Using best value contracting and ensuring enforcement of workforce and labor protections are essential elements for all future legislation impacting the management of our National Forest System and BLM lands.

Coalition Partners

Alaska

Sitka Conservation Society

Arizona

Forest Energy Corporation

California

Mid Klamath Watershed Council
Northwest Forest Worker Center
Watershed Research & Training Center

Colorado

Forest Energy Corporation

Georgia

Gunner Hall

Idaho

Framing Our Community
Salmon Valley Stewardship

Michigan

Northern Initiatives

Montana

Blackfoot Challenge
Criley Consulting
Flathead Economic Policy Center
Future West
Northwest Connections
Swan Ecosystem Center
Vander Meers Wildland Conservation Services

New Mexico

Forest Guild
Gila Wood Products
Gila WoodNet
Restoration Technologies

Oregon

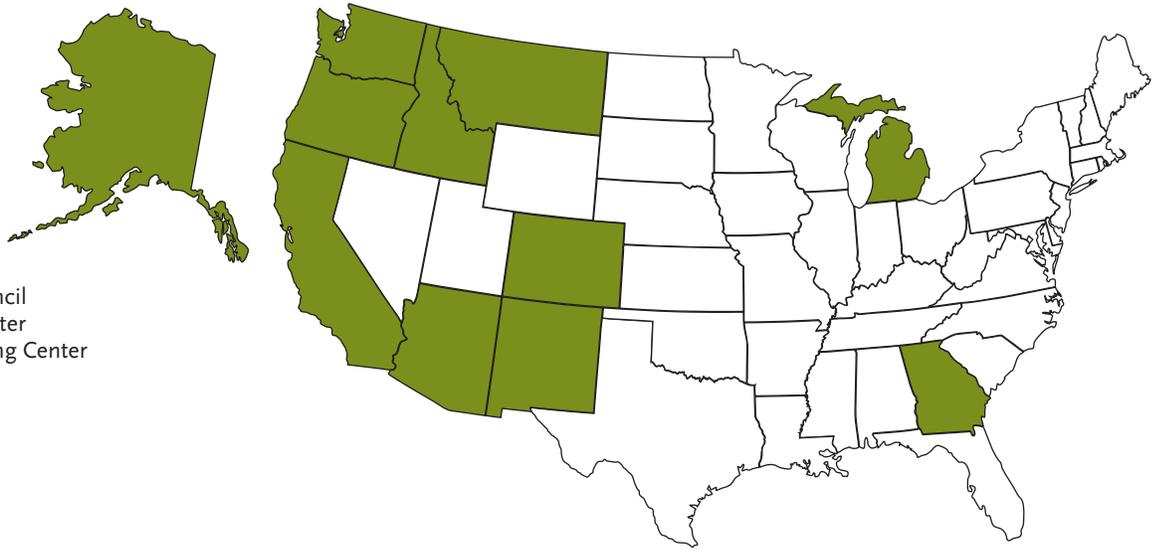
Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council
Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council
Ecosystem Workforce Program
Ecotrust
Hells Canyon Preservation Council
Institute for Culture and Ecology

Oregon (continued)

Jebel Ronde Ranch
Lake County Resources Initiative
Oregon Wild
Siuslaw Institute
Southern Oregon Forest Restoration Collaborative
Sustainable Northwest
Wallowa Resources

Washington

Conservation Northwest
Gifford Pinchot Task Force
Mt. Adams Resource Stewards
Skamania County



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