

## Rural Voices for Conservation

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

American Forests  
Applegate Partnership  
Collaborative Learning Circle  
Ecosystem Workforce Program  
Forest Energy  
Forest Guild  
Framing Our Community  
Gifford Pinchot Taskforce  
Gila Woodnet  
Hells Canyon Preservation Council  
Jefferson State Forest Products  
Jefferson Sustainable Development Initiative  
Lake County Resource Initiative  
Mattole Restoration Council  
National Network of Forest Practitioners  
Northwest Connections  
Okanogan Communities Development Council  
Redwood Community Action Agency  
Resource Innovations  
Restoration Technologies  
Santa Clara Woodworks  
SBS Woodshavings  
Sierra Forest Communities Institute  
Sustainable Northwest  
Swan Ecosystem Center  
Wallowa Resources  
Watershed Research & Training Center  
Wildlands CPR

# FY 2006 Community-based Restoration Funding Package

*Bringing fiscal responsibility and rural values to the care of our forests and health of rural communities*

The Community-based Restoration Funding Package represents a fiscally responsible approach to restoring and maintaining public and private lands, and is based on the experiences of community leaders actively engaged in restoration projects throughout the American West. These investment priorities highlighted herein value the environment, rural communities and healthy local economies. The budget line items represent the zones of agreement of many collaborative planning efforts. The Funding Package recommendations focus on programs that foster public-private cooperation through the US Departments of Agriculture and Interior, and suggest how scarce public dollars can be leveraged to achieve the interdependent goals of forest restoration and rural economic development.

## Why do we need a Community-based Restoration Funding

The health and productivity of forests and watersheds across the West suffer from decades of insufficient investment in restoration and maintenance. Fire cannot play its natural role in these landscapes due to dense stands of small trees, and critical habitat is at risk due to a host of other ecological imbalances. For many reasons, rural communities are well-positioned to engage, on multiple levels, in the comprehensive restoration work that must occur on these lands. However, the business, workforce and infrastructure necessary to carry out forest health activities has been drastically reduced over the past decade. As we restore our forests we must also restore the ability of our communities to steward these lands.

## Funding Package Line Item Highlights

- ❖ Economic Action Programs (\$40M – base) (\$12.5M – NFP)
- ❖ Collaboration and Multiparty Monitoring (a new line item) (\$20M)
- ❖ Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat (\$150.3M)
- ❖ Vegetation and Watershed Management (\$215.3M)
- ❖ Landowner and community assistance programs such as Forest Health Management, Cooperative Fire, and BLM, Rural Fire Assistance. (\$124.5M)
- ❖ Capital Improvement and Maintenance (road maintenance and restoration) (\$259.6M)

Effective restoration of our public and private lands requires that we create a diverse investment portfolio, providing sufficient funds for the multiple activities involved in restoration, including collaborative decision-making, business development, and monitoring. As history has taught us, the lack of an integrated approach to forest management will result in the federal government constantly “putting out fires” in the form of abnormally severe wildfires, insect and disease outbreaks, declining resource conditions and an undermining of rural economies – all of which will cost taxpayers more in the long run. We need a pro-active, solution-oriented approach to federal spending; this Community-based Restoration Funding Package offers such an approach.

## Funding Package Line Item Highlights

- 1. Restore the Economic Action Programs (EAP)—base program and NFP program.**  
Elimination of the EAP base program will hurt rural communities and businesses by removing an effective grant and technical assistance program that positions these communities to leverage private dollars and re-create their community vitality. Elimination of the National Fire Plan EAP undercuts the goals of the 10-year comprehensive plan by taking away the focus on marketing and utilization of small diameter wood and one of the only sources of Forest Service funds for developing community wildfire protection plans.
- 2. Create a Collaboration and Multi-party Monitoring Line item.** It is time for serious commitment to collaboration and multi-party monitoring. This line item will support the land management agencies and communities in working together to restore and maintain our landscapes. It will provide an important authorization, currently absent from the Forest Service budget structure, to fund early and continued collaboration at the local level, e.g. Project level monitoring called for under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. It anticipates the new planning rule requirements for monitoring for adaptive management.
- 3. Invest in Wildlife and Fisheries Management, Vegetation and Watershed Management and Rehabilitation and Restoration Line Items.** Reductions in line items for Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management, Vegetation and Watershed Management and Rehabilitation and Restoration will handcuff the agencies, preventing them from effectively developing a program of work around restoration. These line items fund planning and project implementation for forest restoration and maintenance.
- 4. Increase support for federal agencies to work with states, local governments, homeowners, landowners, and communities.** Funding reductions to the Forest Service and BLM programs that support collaborative efforts with communities in addressing wildfire protection, forest health, and landowner assistance will inhibit important restoration activities on public and private lands. Investment, rather than the dramatic reductions called for under the President's FY2006 budget, in programs such as the Forest Service's Cooperative Fire and Forest Health programs, Forest Stewardship, and the Forest Land Enhancement Program and the BLM's Rural Fire Assistance and Jobs-in-the-Woods programs will provide important resources for coordination in local fuels reduction and fire-fighting efforts, workforce training, and restoration projects.
- 5. Restore, maintain, and decommission roads.** Chronic under-investment in road improvement, maintenance, and decommissioning is exacerbating an already expensive problem. Increasing our investment for these activities is necessary to close the gap on this backlog of work.

### Where should we invest public dollars?

The Community-based Restoration Funding Package highlights budget line items particularly effective at delivering:

- ❖ **Holistic Restoration and Maintenance of Forest Lands**  
Comprehensive forest management activities, including restoration and maintenance programs, are needed to ensure the long-term health of our forest resources nationwide. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act provided appropriate emphasis on hazardous fuels reduction around communities. Yet we must go beyond hazardous fuels reduction and address broader landscape-scale needs for restoration and maintenance.
- ❖ **Meaningful Public Participation and Collaboration**  
Collaboration will improve the technical aspects of projects and increase social support for agency actions. Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) and Stewardship Contracting are two important mechanisms to foster collaboration.
- ❖ **Long-term Commitment for a Consistent Program of Work**  
The unreliability of federal programs makes small business investment in training, hiring and equipment difficult. The remedy for this problem is to prioritize federal spending with a long-term view—not short-term political or economic goals.
- ❖ **Rural Infrastructure and Business Development**  
A skilled, rural-based restoration/maintenance workforce, and wood products sector, is the most cost-effective way to get the work done.
- ❖ **Multi-Party Monitoring**  
Monitoring ensures accountability on the effectiveness of our management choices and is critical to restoring trust in our land management agencies, as required in Stewardship Contracting and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

## Specific Concerns with the President's Proposed FY2006 Budget

- Significant funding reductions to all programs supporting community assistance and economic development goals contained in the National Fire Plan, Healthy Forest Restoration Act and the 10-year implementation strategy. This includes:
  - ▲ 55% reduction in assistance programs to state and local fire departments to fight wildfires (within the Forest Service and the BLM), coupled with reductions to fire fighting assistance programs in the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
  - ▲ 35% reduction in funding to address insect and disease outbreaks including prevention and eradication on both public and private lands.
- Eliminates funding to several key programs for building community capacity and workforce training including the Forest Service, Economic Action Programs and BLM's Rural Fire Assistance and Jobs-in-the-Woods programs. The President's justification for eliminating EAP is misguided, citing duplication with 3 existing USDA Rural Development programs, which do not provide the same type of assistance that the EAP provides.
- Reduces funding by over 80% for the Forest Service Restoration and Rehabilitation program, which provides critical post-fire restoration of forestlands. The President's budget proposal equals approximately 1% of the funds appropriated by Congress in FY2001 for these activities that prevent further damage to soil and water resources and accelerate forest recovery in burned areas. Seven and a half million acres of national forest burned between FY 1999-FY 2003. More, not less, attention and resources should be directed to restoring functioning forest ecosystems where they have been heavily impacted by wildfire or other natural disturbances.
- Lack of an emergency fire suppression budget, which in recent years has resulted in additional stress on federal land management agency budgets due to borrowing from existing accounts to pay emergency fire suppression costs.
- Reduces landowner assistance programs such as Forest Stewardship and Forest Land Enhancement Program, as well as other USDA conservation programs for landowners such as NRCS's Resource Conservation and Development program.

## Expanded explanation of funding package priorities

### USDA – FOREST SERVICE

#### State and Private Forestry

The Forest Service *State and Private Forestry* programs are central to the Community-Based Forestry Restoration strategy. These programs provide a coordinated effort for management, protection, conservation education and resource use that helps facilitate stewardship across lands of all ownerships. State and Private Forestry programs build community capacity to care for our public resources, while building the economic strength of rural areas.

The *Forest Health Management* program maintains healthy, productive forest ecosystems by preventing, detecting, and suppressing damaging insects, diseases, and plants. The program develops and applies new and improved technologies for use in forest insect, disease, and plant survey, monitoring, technical assistance, prevention, and suppression activities. Federal Lands and Cooperative Lands activities ensure a coordinated program of forest and insect disease detection, monitoring, evaluation, prevention, and suppression take place across land ownerships.

*Cooperative Fire Protection* contributes important funds to build local wildland firefighting capacity through the State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance activities. Building local capacity to fight wildfire increases safeguards for life, as well as private and federal property, and reduces federal wildfire fighting costs.

*Cooperative Forestry* administers a critical set of programs and works in partnership with States, tribal governments, communities and private landowners to improve the management, protection, and use of forest based goods and services. The Forest Stewardship Program provides technical assistance to private forest landowners to develop forest management plans and reforestation and hazardous fuels reduction resources. Forest Legacy provides an investment in maintaining the value and functions of lands threatened with conversion to non-forest uses through the acquisition of land or interests in the land. Urban and Community Forestry programs engage communities and volunteer organizations in assessing, retaining and protecting their natural environment. Economic Action Programs build capacity within natural resource-dependent rural communities to strengthen their economies and to work in collaboration with federal agencies on federal lands restoration/maintenance. The Forest Resources Information and Analysis program provides cost-share financial assistance to States to perform important nationwide forest inventory and analysis for public and private forested resources.

We also recommend the creation of a *Collaboration and Multi-party Monitoring* line item to provide the funding necessary to build agency capacity to work in partnership with communities. Included in these funds is financial support for collaborative monitoring efforts on hazardous fuels reduction projects, called for under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA). Currently, there is no discrete line item in the Forest Service budget to fund this type of project level monitoring (see explanation of Inventory and Monitoring Line Item below). Ideally, with the collaborative monitoring emphasis contained in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, Congress will address this budget level problem with a clear and simple solution by creating a line item with dedicated funds to implement the legislative mandates contained in HFRA.

### **National Forest System**

*Inventory and Monitoring* funds inventory, monitoring, assessment and resource mapping activities in the Forest Service. These functions are an important component to measuring success toward agency goals and objectives and establish the baseline data from which management decisions are made. Activities under this line item are restricted to large-scale assessments, such as landscape level ecosystem inventories. None of the funds allocated to this line item are currently authorized for project level work, making them ineligible for the collaborative monitoring called for under HFRA.

*Wildlife and Fisheries Habitat Management* provides funding for essential work performed on national forest and grasslands to manage habitats necessary to maintain the diversity, viability, and productivity of plant and animal communities.

*The Vegetation and Watershed Management* program focuses on restoration, enhancement, and watershed conditions including soil, air, water, and forest and rangeland vegetation. This program includes reforestation and timber stand improvements, which are important activities for restoring lands affected by wildfires and restoring forest structure and function. It is the key planning resource for road decommissioning or closure of low quality roads and most other watershed restoration projects.

*The Hazardous Fuels Reduction* budget line item funds hazardous fuel reduction treatments in the wildland urban interface (WUI) and on other NFS lands in order to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Funds are provided to plan, implement and support fuel management activities including inventorying and mapping hazardous fuels, prioritizing areas for treatment, analyzing treatment alternatives, determining and applying fuel treatment, and monitoring and evaluating fuel treatment accomplishments.

## **Wildland Fire Management**

The Wildland Fire Management budget funds activities to protect life, property, and natural resources on National Forest Lands, as well as adjacent State and private lands. Along with the necessary fire operation budget line items, there are a number of line items in this budget area that fund a holistic approach to restoring our national forest lands.

*The Rehabilitation and Restoration* program restores landscapes and protects communities from post-fire damage. This covers both short and long-term efforts to improve lands unlikely to recover naturally from wildland fire damage, or to repair or replace minor facilities damaged by fire. The goal is to closely match historical or pre-fire ecosystem structure, function, diversity, and dynamics.

Several important programs are funded through the State and Private Forestry account specifically for activities under the National Fire Plan. The *Forest Health Management – Federal Lands* line item provides funding for technical assistance to help manage and control invasive insects and diseases, and to evaluate forest and tree health in areas of high risk of wildland fires and in previous burn areas. The program targets federal lands close to cooperative lands to control damaging pest populations that have the potential to affect neighboring lands, including those of rural communities. The *Forest Health Management – Cooperative Lands* program provides technical and financial assistance to States to control damaging pest populations on forestland owned by states, local governments, private organizations and individuals that is in high-risk fire areas or previously burned areas. *Economic Action Programs* provides funding to local communities to identify, develop and expand economic activities related to materials and wood removed through hazardous fuel reduction treatments. This program also funds projects that allow communities to conduct wildfire risk assessment, defensible space planning and Community Wildfire Protection Plans. *State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance* provide funds in preparedness and hazardous mitigation to States and local fire fighters. These funds include resources for local communities to implement fire protection activities such as hazardous fuels treatment, fire prevention and education campaigns, personnel training, and equipment and personnel availability. This program is the primary contributor to the national FIREWISE program that supports work to ensure that states and local communities can reduce hazardous fuels in and around communities. It also supports strengthening voluntary fire departments in small, rural communities.

## **Capital Improvement and Maintenance**

The *Roads* budget line item funds maintenance, improvements and decommissioning on the 386,000 miles of NFS system roads. Current funding provides only 20 percent of funds necessary to fully maintain Forest Service roads to intended safety, service, and environmental standards. Funding for road maintenance and decommissioning on NFS lands is essential to ensure that the road system is a public asset and not an ecological and economic liability to the American public. While roads in disrepair cause damage to streams, fisheries and water supplies, road maintenance and decommissioning provide high wage jobs to rural communities while protecting our natural heritage.

## **Mandatory Appropriations**

*Payments to States – County Projects* are authorized under the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000, under Title II and Title III, which allow counties to utilize 15-20 percent of their payment amounts for forest restoration, maintenance, stewardship, or county projects under the auspices of a Resource Advisory Committee. The program is collaborative in nature, and the funds, if a county elects to utilize them, are for project-oriented work. Communities across the country are now successfully utilizing these funds to develop community wildfire protection plans and implement priority restoration projects on federal and non-federal land.

## **USDA – NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION SERVICE**

The Natural Resource Conservation Service administers two key programs that assist private landowners with management activities that improve their overall land stewardship.

*The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)* provides cost-share payments and other incentive payments to address soil, water and other natural resource management issues on non-industrial private lands.

*The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)* provides cost-share payments and technical assistance to private landowners to develop wildlife habitat.

## **US DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR - BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has led the way in cooperative stewardship and collaboration with rural communities. However, funding for basic land management activities has been reduced in recent years, forcing local BLM offices to become more creative in meeting land management goals. Because the BLM interfaces with communities to accomplish forest restoration, fisheries enhancement, hazardous fuels reduction, timber stand improvement, and road decommissioning, we recommend maintaining base funding for BLM land management programs while increasing funding for collaboration-focused programs.

Funding for BLM land management activities are divided by focus area, and local BLM offices submit project proposals to the state and national offices on a project-by-project basis. Projects that demonstrate local collaboration are an integral component to the following programs. Riparian Management funds are used to enhance creek side areas through livestock fencing improvements, tree planting, and erosion control. The Wildlife and Fisheries programs work to restore habitat in forest and rangelands habitats. The Fisheries Program has played a significant role in watershed restoration efforts to improve salmon and trout habitat. The Resource Management and Planning inventories and monitors BLM-managed resources, including timber, rangeland, fisheries, recreational impacts and water quality.

To further encourage collaboration between the BLM and local communities, we recommend funding for two related programs, the Challenge Cost Share Program and the Cooperative Conservation Initiative, which are specifically designed for projects undertaken by local communities on public lands. These programs are used to complete projects as diverse as road maintenance, land management planning, fisheries restoration and timber stand improvement.

### **BLM – Wildland Fire Management**

The *Hazardous Fuels Reduction* line item funds fuels reduction projects on both the BLM Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI) and non-WUI lands. The *Rural Fire Assistance* program funds capacity building for local fire fighting efforts. *Burned Area Rehabilitation* funds restoration activities on lands damaged by wildfire, including monies to monitor and evaluate treatments.

The *Jobs in the Woods* program provides funds to undertake necessary restoration work on BLM lands in Oregon and California while retraining displaced rural workers.

*Resource Management and Planning* supports the Bureau's efforts to expand and improve its monitoring systems to support management decisions and to assess the impacts of restoration activities.

## US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The US Fish and Wildlife Service oversees the National Wildlife Refuge System. As a participant in the National Fire Plan, the USFWS engages communities in hazardous fuels reduction on and around Refuges through the Hazardous Fuels Reduction line item. In addition, the USFWS works extensively with private landowners to promote voluntary conservation work. Programs such as the Landowner Incentive Program and the Private Stewardship Program have been used by community groups to achieve forest restoration goals on private lands and within mixed ownerships. These programs place an emphasis on habitat restoration for threatened and endangered species. The voluntary approach can reduce conflict by promoting consensus-driven projects that emphasize recovery.

The *Landowner Incentive Program* funds grants to states and tribes to provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners to help them protect and manage imperiled species and their habitat. The *Private Stewardship Program* provides grants to individuals and groups engaged in local, private and voluntary conservation efforts that benefit listed, proposed, candidate, or other at-risk species.

### Who We Are

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is comprised of western rural and local, 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 California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, New Mexico, and Montana.

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