

Statement of Kristin Troy
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Before the
U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands at the hearing
on:
"Locally Grown: Creating Rural Jobs with America's Public Lands"

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Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you how the management of federal and private lands is retaining and creating jobs in my community.

My name is Kristin Troy and I serve as the executive director of the Lemhi Regional Land Trust, a non-profit organization that was founded by ranchers and is based in Salmon, Idaho. Salmon is one of the most remote communities in the lower 48, and it is also one of the most rugged. We are flanked to the West by the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness and to the East by the Continental Divide.

Context:

Around 92 percent of Lemhi County is in public hands and managed by United States Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. The remaining 8 percent of private lands are, as one would expect, situated in the valley bottoms along the Salmon and Lemhi Rivers. Given the small amount of private land we have in our valley, ranchers depend heavily on access to these public lands for grazing.

Ranching is one of the few natural resource based industries in our community that has survived. But that survival is tenuous at best for a variety of reasons – aging landowners, the rising cost of doing business, and pressure to subdivide.

I grew up in Salmon and in my lifetime, I watched as the mainstay timber and mining industries dried up and blew away. The lost jobs meant lost tax revenue, lost families, a drop in school enrollment, and an increase in despair. As with many other rural communities across the West, we are committed to finding solutions that will maintain working landscapes, blurring the line between public and private lands in light of overall conservation objectives. We know from the loss of our timber industry that once the infrastructure and skilled labor is gone starting over is complicated and expensive. In a way, the decline of a rural economic sector is not so different from the decline of a species. By the time you are threatened and endangered, you are complicated and expensive.

The opportunity:

Rural communities are the front line stewards of our public lands. My organization embraces the idea that meeting our conservation and economic needs can be compatible. This is what I do – I work at the intersection of working ranch lands and endangered species and together with willing landowners and federal partners, we are looking for and finding ways to keep our working lands working while at the same time achieve conservation goals. The community is behind our efforts to conserve our working lands and our rural lifestyle for social and economic reasons, but the outcomes have impressive ecological implications as well.

Although most of our county is public land, adjacent private lands harbor some of the richest wildlife habitat, including some of the most important habitat in the West for Chinook salmon and steelhead trout. These fish have traveled to the ocean and back – a round trip of about 1,600 miles – for thousands of

years. Salmon were the staple for the Lemhi-Shoshoni tribe who inhabited the valley when Lewis and Clark came through the area, and salmon fishing continued to be part of the traditional way of life for ranching families who were early settlers. Today, dozens of landowners in this valley are voluntarily working with federal and state agencies and community-based organizations like Lemhi Regional Land Trust to make sure that when the wild salmon and steelhead return, they recognize home.

Three project examples:

In this context, I'd like to share some of my community's experiences with federal programs intended to motivate private landowners to conserve land for the benefit of threatened and endangered species, and the multitude of other wildlife that rely on intact pieces of land to thrive.

Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Project

Lemhi Regional Land Trust is one of the organizations participating in a collaborative group called the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Project. The group works together to prioritize projects meant to enhance this critical fishery. Members include fish biologists, ranchers, conservationists, agencies, and tourism industry representatives, just to name a few. The group's recommendations put a powerful stamp of approval on proposals and let potential funders know that both ecological and social aspects of the plan have been carefully and thoughtfully considered.

One of these funders is the Bonneville Power Administration. Bonneville Power mitigates the impacts of the massive hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River system, allocating revenue to fund the Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund, established by Congress in 2000 to protect, restore, and conserve Pacific salmon and steelhead populations and their habitats. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) manages the program that provides competitive funding to states and tribes of the Pacific Coast region, including Idaho. We have successfully used some of this funding to help conserve private working lands adjacent to the Lemhi River. I would like to make a few comments about what worked with this federal program:

- When the funding is awarded to the eligible states, there is a state contact and in Idaho's case, this is the Office of Species Conservation. As the Governor's representative on these issues, the Office of Species Conservation is highly motivated to make sure projects have community support. Federal agencies with far away offices and staff might not share this same sensitivity.
- The Office of Species Conservation also manages other sources of federal funding, such as the Snake River Basin Adjudication Habitat Trust Fund, which allow funds to be used for project administration and implementation costs. This is incredibly important, and all too rare. We are currently working on a project to conserve land and water on two separate ranches located on valuable tributaries to the Lemhi River. Between three different funding sources, all public money, over \$2.5 million dollars has been designated for this project and \$25,000 for the hours of staff time necessary to make such a project work on the ground. Additional funds for long-term monitoring were allowed to make sure project benefits continue to be realized over time. In this example, the \$2.5 million would not have gotten to the ground (or to the river) without the allowance of \$25,000 in implementation funding.

Saving Carmen Creek Ranch

Another project involved the Natural Resources Conservation Service Farm and Ranchland Protection Program. In partnership with the Nature Conservancy, we used this program to purchase a conservation easement on a 300-acre parcel that is part of a multi-family, multi-generational ranch along Carmen Creek, an important fish-bearing tributary to the Salmon River just 5 miles from town. As one of the most scenic properties in the valley, the land was getting serious and focused attention from real estate developers. The three brothers who are the principals of Carmen Land and Livestock knew they valued

the land for its productivity, its scenic qualities, and its undeniable importance to fish, birds, and other wildlife. The Farm and Ranchland Protection Program gave the brothers another option to keep their ranch viable other than subdividing.

The Farm and Ranchland Protection Program was vital in the preservation of not only the 300 acres along Carmen Creek, but also for the intact working ranch that will now endure for generations to come. However, Lemhi Regional Land Trust will only approach this funding source again with caution, because the significant costs for implementing the project cannot be recovered through the program itself (and the cash match requirement puts this well-intentioned program beyond the reach of many of the most vulnerable farmers and ranchers). This is one of the many federal programs targeted at communities like ours that lacks funding for implementation. This project, and so many others like it, could not have been accomplished without a community-based organization.¹

Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group

While Lemhi Regional Land Trust's focus is mostly on conserving private lands in the valley, a partner organization is working to achieve this same balance on our public lands. Salmon Valley Stewardship and the Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group are working to get past nearly two decades of gridlock on the Salmon-Challis National Forest, a forest that lately has retained more outside attorney jobs than community forest practitioner jobs.

The Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group is successfully building social agreement around the dual concepts of forest health improvement and local economic benefit. The group is carefully tracking jobs and revenue created by their first 13,000-acre Hughes Creek project. Last I knew, even before the first commercial stick of wood has been cut, the project has put \$200,000 into the local community, with more than 90 percent going to Lemhi County workers. Because the Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group has placed importance on local economic benefit, they carefully monitor the project to ensure this benefit is realized. Surprisingly, few federal agencies -- although endowed with millions of dollars -- can report the same.

The diverse group is working hard to bring additional dollars to forest restoration work. The collaborative's coordination activities and support staff is completely funded by private philanthropies. The group's members have been successful in raising money and using volunteers to help implement their projects, but these funds and volunteer hours are not guaranteed, and therefore keep the successful efforts of these organizations in an ever tenuous financial state. Although leveraging funding and human resources seems to be the best hope for the Forest Service's future, the agency is willing but woefully unequipped to manage grants and agreements with community-based organizations. The Salmon-Challis National Forest shares one grants and agreement employee with two other national forests and her desk is 160 miles away. Because they are understaffed, agreements can easily take four months or longer to put into place, creating frustration and sometimes jeopardizing the funding the partner group brings to the table.

The solutions:

Public and private partnerships, as well as groups of diverse stakeholders working together to solve economic and environmental challenges, is the only way we can move forward with innovative solutions that will create pathways to prosperity and address our nation's conservation challenges.

¹*Community-based Organizations: Strategic Assets for Western Conservation*. April 2010. Sustainable Northwest.
<http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/resources/rvcc-issue-papers/2010-issue-papers/Community-based%20Orgs%20Final.pdf>

Federal programs and the land management agencies need to better organize their business operations to be effective partners to rural community-based organizations, to fully utilize the federal programs that are currently in place, and to be truly effective and sustainable over time. For example, the time and resources it took to see our Farm and Ranchlands Protection proposal for the Carmen Creek easement from start to finish, as well as meet the monitoring requirements, far exceeded the amount of the grant or my organizations ability to raise funds from other sources; the program does not make good business sense. Federal programs need to recognize that getting money to the ground takes time, energy, and a degree of trust. Community-based organizations are often in the best position to offer these resources and in many cases can amplify the effect through public outreach, volunteer support, or leveraged funding. Some programs require a 50 percent match with half of that needing to be cold, hard cash. Flexibility that recognizes the value of in-kind match would remove significant barriers to these funding sources.

Collaborative efforts and community-based organizations have a unique ability to put politics aside and focus on these incredible landscapes. As we work together to find solutions, we get to know and trust one another. Going out on the range with a rancher or walking in the woods with a forester, you get a chance to hear the wisdom that comes from working and living on the land. Involving relevant members of the community in these important discussions as equals adds an element of respect that is too often missing outside the collaborative process.

In Lemhi County and all over the West, we are motivated to create a balance between our environment and our livelihoods. When we figure out how to keep enough water in the streams for fish but still allow the rancher enough to irrigate his hay while providing an option other than subdividing, we know we have succeeded in achieving this balance. We have retained not just a few jobs, but potentially several generations of jobs, and the vibrancy of our small towns.

Community-based organizations are not seeking to become yet another arm of the federal government. We are valuable because we are small, nimble, efficient, and tied to the land. My hope is that federal agencies can be enabled to recognize the importance of partners who are willing and able to get federal dollars on the ground in the most meaningful way possible.

Recommendations:

1. Make grant programs, such as the Farm and Ranchland Protection program, more effective by making them more flexible.
2. Match requirements for federal grants should take into consideration the economic context of the grantee—public land communities are high in poverty and unemployment, raising private match in this context is a serious challenge.
3. Integrate funding to support long-term monitoring to be performed by community-based organizations or other entities to ensure the long-term objectives of projects can be successful.
4. Recognize that increasing partnerships and collaborative efforts enhances the agencies' capacity.
5. Continue to support and fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Forest Landscape Restoration Act, which hold great potential for communities such as mine.

Thank you for the invitation and opportunity to meet with you today. It is my hope that this testimony has been helpful and I am happy to answer any questions.