

2009 Policy Platform Priorities

OUR VISION

The protection, management, and utilization of nature's resources have provided the basis for every human civilization known to history. Even a consumer and technology-based society must recognize this interdependence and the necessity for balancing our human accounts with nature's own budget.

Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is dedicated to taking up this challenge; to representing the interests of the people and landscapes of the American West in both the policy and practical arenas; to passing on a deeper connection between our region's bounties and beauty, and our responsibilities for their sustainability; to building a legacy of opportunity and understanding for our children and their children; and to uniting and including all those who join with us in subscribing to these core beliefs:

INTERDEPENDENCE:

The health of our rural communities and landscapes are very much inter-related. Restoration of the environment must occur in social symbiosis with the re-vitalization of rural communities.

RESILIENCE AND DIVERSITY:

Resilience and diversity are the key components that provide for both ecosystem productivity and economic well-being.

POWER-SHARING:

Collaborative decision-making, investigation, assessment, action, and monitoring are vital to all vibrant and democratic systems of resources management and stewardship.

COOPERATIVE PROCESSES:

Real cooperation is inclusive and based on mutual benefits, and on respect for the strengths, differences and interests that the involved parties bring together.

SUSTAINABILITY:

Long-term resource security is more dependent on re-investment in the associated ecosystems and rural economies than on the profits generated by their production.

OUR REGION:

The natural resources, recreation opportunities and cultural attributes of the West make a significant contribution to the Nation as a whole.

Above all, we believe that the future of our region, our country, and our world will depend on how well we are able to manage for the protection and productivity of our landscapes, and on what we leave behind for the generations who will come after us in these places.

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, Montana, Arizona and Colorado.

A RURAL AGENDA FOR STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE AMERICAN WEST

Sustainable Rural Development is the Rubric to Transform Rural America

Sustainable rural development promotes the use of local assets to create diversified economies, green jobs, clean energy, healthy food, sustainable wood products and other value-added products and services. These strategies recognize the interdependence of rural and urban systems. They emphasize the creation of local infrastructure and businesses so dollars spent circulate in the local economy. Communities look to their natural assets to power their economic development by creating rural enterprises and jobs related to the restoration and stewardship of their landscapes, and the creation of value-added products from renewable natural resources. Federal and state programs should be structured to provide the catalyzing funding and technical expertise to stimulate natural resource-based, value-adding businesses, as well as build local infrastructure, entrepreneurial leadership, access to markets, and related capacity to sustain natural resource management and local community benefits. Economic development policies need to be retooled to couple enterprise development with environmental stewardship.

Additional resources:

RVCC's *Transition Proposal for a New Administration and Congress*

(<http://sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/economic-stimulus-1/FINALRVCCTransitionMemo112608.pdf>)

The National Rural Assembly's *Policy Opportunity Snapshots*

(http://www.ruralassembly.org/images/policy_opportunity_snapshots.pdf)

Investment in Natural and Social Assets is Essential to Rural Revitalization

The Federal land management agencies must play a strong role in restoring and caring for our natural systems while building a more resilient rural economy by stimulating job creation and retention. Integrated investment in our public and private lands will contribute positively to ecosystem service values such as water quality and quantity and climate change mitigation and reduce wildfire suppression costs. These investments can also foster green jobs that will strengthen the economies in rural towns and across our nation.

Reinvestment in public lands should be accompanied by investments in the neighboring communities. People living and working on public lands provide many vital assets, including skilled labor, technical and historical knowledge of the land and its management, businesses that add value to forest products, and an ability to leverage private sector funds. Collaborative processes to support restoration, stewardship, and monitoring of land management practices on federally managed lands need to be strengthened and supported.

Additional RVCC resources at: <http://sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/rvcc-issue-papers>

Appropriations Issue Paper

Performance Measures Issue Paper

Wildland Fire Suppression Budget Reform

Collaboration Issue Paper

Green Jobs, Green Infrastructure and Green Markets Will Create Livable Communities and a Healthy Environment

To stimulate a rural green, reduced carbon economy, we must change federal procurement practices and infrastructure investments as well as create incentives for manufacturing, construction, and other sectors to increase the adoption of and conversion to green practices throughout the economy. In addition, programs should be put in place that provide economic and social incentives for young people to either return to rural communities or join in efforts to re-build them and restore their natural assets. Such incentives can include jobs programs, student loan forgiveness and training for a new suite of landscape stewardship and recreational projects.

Additional RVCC resources at: <http://sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/rvcc-issue-papers>

Green Jobs Issue Paper

Economic Stimulus Proposal

Climate Change Policies Should be Socially Equitable and Environmentally Responsible

The potential impacts of climate change on forests and landscapes will have significant socioeconomic consequences, including loss of natural resources, ecosystem services, and livelihoods. Federal policies allocating resources for adaptation and mitigation must include rural communities. Rural communities and landscapes have significant roles to play in adapting to climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Rural communities have the natural capital and expertise to help formulate and implement sustainable solutions to global climate change. Investments in forest, range, and farm management offer immediate opportunities to increase carbon sequestration and decrease carbon emissions. Furthermore, there must be investment in restoring our forests and reducing the incidence of catastrophic wildfire, which is a significant burden to the U.S. economy and major source of greenhouse gas emissions. To address climate change and the need for energy independence, we need to significantly reduce our consumption of fossil fuels through increased efficiency and conservation, while at the same time shifting toward renewable sources of energy for electricity and thermal energy (heat) production.

Additional RVCC resources at: <http://sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/rvcc-issue-papers>
Climate Change Issue Paper

Integrated Woody Biomass Strategies Will Achieve Forest Restoration and Rural Renewal

The integrated utilization of woody biomass generates the highest and best uses of a suite of wood and energy products. In creating these products, rural communities have a tremendous opportunity to support ecologically based forest restoration and improve community economic health. The use of woody biomass as a renewable energy source also helps reduce our nation's dependency on petroleum and reduces carbon emissions by displacing the combustion of fossil fuels. Federal policy should provide incentives for more robust and rapid innovation in renewable energy development and energy efficiency/conservation in rural communities and in their ability to contribute to the energy needs of the entire nation.

Additional RVCC resources at: <http://sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/rvcc-issue-papers>
Thermal Energy Uses of Woody Biomass Issue Paper
Woody Biomass Issue Paper

Fair and Accessible Federal Contracting and Equitable Labor Practices

The restoration of public lands and the revitalization of adjacent rural communities depend on accessible federal contracting mechanisms and a well-trained, fairly compensated local workforce. Enforcing labor laws, making full use of best value contracting opportunities, employing stewardship contracting authorities, and requiring that federal land management agencies design and package projects that maximize opportunities for year round employment in rural communities allows for the implementation of the high-value work necessary to restore and maintain our public lands.

Additional RVCC resources at: <http://sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/rvcc-issue-papers>
Stewardship Contracting Issue Paper
Best Value Contracting Issue Paper
Workforce and Labor Issue Paper

Public Lands Restoration and Community Stewardship Are Inextricably Linked

The health and productivity of public lands is inextricably linked to the health and well-being of the rural communities adjacent to these places. There is increasing recognition that restoring our forests, rangelands, and waterways is critical to maintaining the health and vitality of rural communities, and to ensuring that the full range of ecosystem services and products are available to the American people and global marketplace. The land management agencies, communities, businesses, and workers that perform the work on public lands must have the capacity to manage our nation's forests and grasslands in a manner that ensures ecological health and productivity.

Additional RVCC resources at: <http://sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/rvcc-issue-papers>
Building Community Capacity Issue Paper
Collaboration Issue Paper

Working Landscapes and Stewardship Are Essential to the Health of Rural America

The long-term health of our rural landscapes and communities depends upon integrated land management approaches that address both public and private lands. Privately owned forests, ranches and agricultural lands are vital components of a working landscape, providing wildlife habitat, clean water, recreational opportunities, and other valuable ecosystem services, as well as essential goods and services for society. Private working lands are increasingly under threat as land is fragmented by subdivision and related development – including the rapid divestment of corporate timberlands. Landowners with multi-generational ties to the land and local area are often priced off their lands, disrupting the culture and social fabric of rural communities.

The ecological impacts of fragmented landscapes are significant, and the burdens of delivering the technical and financial services necessary for landscape conservation practices increase with the conversion of property to smaller and more diverse ownership patterns. Conservation easements, land acquisitions and tax incentives are among the tools that can forestall this trend. Federal land management and conservation policies should seek to create alignment between landowner financial stability, protection of large, unfragmented landscapes, and ecological objectives. Those landowners, particularly families, who desire to stay on the land and remain productive, must be provided with assistance that enables them to adapt to the increasing pressures of globalization, development and increasing regulation. Finally, assisting new landowners and managers will require innovative approaches to outreach, planning, implementation and assessment.

Additional RVCC resources at: <http://sustainablenorthwest.org/quick-links/resources/rvcc-issue-papers>

Private Lands Issue Paper

Private Forests and the 2007 Farm Bill Issue Paper

Introduction to Community Forests

Rural Communities Are Essential to Developing Economically Equitable Ecosystem Service Markets

The development of ecosystem service markets must ensure that public land communities are able to participate and/or benefit from these emerging markets, as well as protect the interests of the American tax payer. Several of the proposed mechanisms to generate and capture revenue through ecosystem services do not currently have clear lines of benefit and access for public land communities. New policies must ensure that mechanisms that are developed function in an equitable fashion. It is essential that the most vulnerable and low-income communities, especially those located in counties where federal ownership is dominant, are able to engage in these important emerging markets. It is equally essential that policy regarding ecosystem services on public lands consider international principles and lessons of “rights-based conservation” as a means to protect and enhance the viability of public land communities.

2009 RVCC POLICY PLATFORM OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

Appropriations Priorities

1. Create and adequately fund a new budget line item for comprehensive restoration and maintenance of Federal lands.
2. Provide technical and business assistance in rural communities, such as the Economic Action Program.
3. Fund the Community Wood Energy Program and other relevant programs in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 and the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007.

Legislative Priorities

Restoration

- Pass S.561 - the Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement (FLAME) Act.
- Pass authorizing language that allows the National Forest System to administer grants.

Renewable energy

- Develop a thermal energy component of national renewable energy policy that includes incentives for stand-alone biomass thermal energy generation and provides tax credits for capitalization costs of space heat projects.
- Extend and Improve Production Tax Credits for generating electricity and promote efficient energy conversion of woody biomass by qualifying thermal energy when developing a national Renewable Portfolio Standards.
- Define renewable biomass in national renewable energy policy as including sustainably harvested material, with appropriate ecological safeguards in place, from private and public land, including National Forest System lands.

Climate change

- Congress should hold hearings on the impacts of climate change on rural communities.
- Include provisions for rural green jobs in climate change and renewable energy legislation (i.e., Title IV - Subtitle B—Green Jobs and Worker Transition of the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009).

Private lands

- Pass the Community Forestry Conservation Act to create tax-exempt revenue bonds to acquire working forest or agricultural land.

Federal contracting and jobs

- Conduct oversight hearings to prepare for reauthorization of stewardship contracting authorities.

Administrative Priorities

Restoration

- Eliminate traditional timber targets for the land management agencies and replace them with outcome-oriented measures.
- Reform budget allocation processes to support restoration, collaboration and community benefit.

Climate change

- Implement the Forest Service Strategic Framework for Responding to Climate Change as a way to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation within forest and landscape restoration activities.

Private lands

- Swiftly carry out rulemaking and implementation of the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program. (Fund existing programs for acquisition and long-term stewardship of working forests).

Federal contracting and jobs

- Implement contracting guidance for best value criteria issued for projects funded by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (Forest Service Memo/File code: 6300/1580/7300/5100).
- Obligate a pool of funds at the national level to meet cancellation ceiling requirements on long-term contracts.
- Reissue guidance allowing Forest Service and BLM to use retained receipts to contract NEPA analysis and planning and allow the use of retained receipts for project-level multiparty monitoring.
- Use pricing indices to escalate/de-escalate contract value to account for changing prices and inflation.

Workforce and labor protection

- Regularly publish and report information to Congress and stakeholders about how labor laws on public land projects are being enforced and the impacts of those efforts.
- Design and package projects that will maximize year round employment in rural communities.
- Reinstate the H2B Guest Worker Rules requirement that contractors give hiring priority to local workers.