

Building Community Capacity Issue Paper

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 timber production – investment in the people, programs and institutions carrying out this work is a fundamental part of accomplishing the on-the-ground work. 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 in local capacity. Rural towns that have the right combination of human, social and cultural, physical, and financial capital are uniquely situated to help achieve federal land management objectives. Current levels of funding and program support within federal agencies for community capacity building are entirely inadequate to develop the capacity of rural communities to be effective partners in meeting federal conservation goals and the communities' own economic needs.

Federal investment in capacity building for rural federal land communities, delivered through effectively designed programs within the federal land management agencies, in coordination with rural development agencies, will be the best way to meet federal conservation goals and the economic needs of rural federal lands communities.

Community capacity is the collective ability of residents to respond to social, economic, and environmental stresses, create and take advantage of opportunities, and meet the needs of the community by drawing on as much local capital as possible.

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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest in Capacity Building Programs and increase coordination with the Rural Development Agencies:

1. Establish and fund a distinct program within each of the land management agencies for technical assistance, grants and loans for natural resource based-businesses, and collaborative planning processes, including programs to support the implementation of the National Fire Plan.
2. Provide permanent authorization to the Forest Service to use appropriated funds to provide technical assistance and grants to rural communities to support agency goals.
3. Direct the USDA Rural Development Agency to develop programs to deliver technical assistance and grants related to the development of natural resource related businesses.

Demonstrate Accountability for Commitments:

1. Create, measure, and report on performance measures that evaluate long-term outcomes for capacity building investments.
2. Provide clear direction to land management agency staff at all levels authorizing and encouraging programmatic structures and delivery mechanisms for all capacity building programs and activities.

Maintain Agency Capacity for Capacity Building:

1. Retain appropriate field level staff to provide capacity building services to rural communities.

DEFINING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Community capacity is the collective ability of residents to respond to social, economic, and environmental stresses, create and take advantage of opportunities, and meet the needs of the community by drawing on as much local capital as possible. There are four interdependent categories of capital that define community capacity:

1. **Human Capital:** education, skills, experiences and abilities of local residents to meet workforce needs.
2. **Social and Cultural Capital:** ability and willingness of residents to work together to solve problems or create opportunities.
3. **Physical Capital:** sewer systems, transportation systems,

business property, developable land, and other community infrastructure to facilitate investments in future industries.

4. **Financial Capital:** municipal budgets, income of residents, access to loans and grants, operating funds, and other such resources to entice investment in the community and its physical capital.

Capacity building refers to the actions taken to develop community capacity. Key steps to building community capacity include, but are not limited to:

1. Technical assistance to increase the skills of local businesses and community leaders;
2. Activities designed to allow for collaborative planning and problem-solving;
3. Support to improve community infrastructure and technology; and
4. Grants and loans available for business development, educational pursuits, skill-building and the costs incurred through participation in collaborative activities.

BENEFITS OF FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Rural communities are essential to the effective implementation of forest management on public lands. The Bureau of Land Management and the USDA Forest Service manage their working lands for multiple purposes – with no single primary objective. Each agency must balance watershed values, recreation, sustainable resource use and extraction in a complex web of multifaceted, sometimes competing demands. Local communities can help the agencies accomplish their management goals. People living and working in communities adjacent to public lands provide many vital services: a skilled labor pool; technical and historical knowledge of the land and its management history; and businesses that purchase timber and other forest products and manufacture wood products. Additionally, these communities provide restoration services, treat noxious weeds, and perform other related activities. The success of the land management agencies depends on adjacent rural towns having the physical capital to partner and conduct business with federal land management agencies.

The economies, social fabric, and heritage of western rural communities are uniquely interconnected with—and affected by—federal policies, procedures, and programs. As a major landowner and manager of western landscapes, the federal government has a significant impact on the economic, social, and political life of Western rural communities. In the western United States, the federal government owns and manages more than 50 percent of the land base in many rural counties. The federal lands managed by these agencies are of vital and unique

importance to adjacent rural communities. These lands have served as a source of livelihood and recreation for individuals, families and entire local economies. Many public lands border private land owned and managed by people who live in these rural communities. Federal land management affects watershed values such as clean water, air and other environmental assets essential to the vitality of adjacent communities. When the conditions of these lands are degraded in communities that lack the human, social and cultural, physical, and financial capital to respond, the communities are disproportionately impacted by the environmental consequences such as degraded air quality from wildfire smoke; declining economic, recreational and cultural opportunities resulting from declining fish populations, and other related impacts.

Building community capacity builds social support for agency actions. By investing in and supporting programs focused on community capacity building, the land management agencies build connections, relationships, knowledge and understanding with their neighbors. They foster trust, responsibility, and stewardship. They gain partners, workers, volunteers and allies who contribute positively to accomplishing their work. A land management approach that includes capacity building for adjacent rural communities accomplishes many federal goals that cannot be accomplished through independent actions or assistance through other entities.

OUTCOMES FROM INVESTING IN CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMS

Federal investment and support for building human, social and cultural, physical and financial capital will result in:

1. Shared responsibility for the management and health of the nation's federal lands; often leading to communities that can leverage private dollars to help achieve management goals.
2. A capable and well trained workforce to do restoration work, timber management, and value added processing on or near federal lands and with federal resources.
3. Trust, respect and stewardship among the neighbors of federal lands and the agencies that manage them.
4. The creation of systems that maximize the economic value of the federal land management activities.
5. Targeted rural economic development in, all too often, poor or financially depressed communities.

BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The responsibilities of the federal land management agencies and the livelihoods of rural community residents are intertwined. There is a shared responsibility among the federal government, states and neighboring rural communities to ensure the health

and vitality of the nation's public lands, and indeed, the critical ecosystem values provided by entire watersheds, including public and private lands. Each group (federal agencies, states, community-based organizations and intermediaries) have unique roles, responsibilities and opportunities to contribute to strong and vibrant partnerships that steward the land and people.

ROLES OF THE FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES IN BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

A clear and unambiguous commitment is required in building and maintaining rural community capacity to implement forest management goals on public lands, particularly the restoration and maintenance of forest health. Land management agencies must provide community capacity assistance specific to land management goals. The Collaborative Forest Restoration Program in New Mexico and the former Forest Service Economic Action Programs provide examples of successful capacity building programs linked with agency restoration goals and activities. Specifically, federal land management agencies should administer programs that provide:

1. Technical assistance to natural resource based-businesses integrally linked to the accomplishment of forest management activities and tied to the utilization of restoration and fuels reduction byproducts, value-added product development and marketing, and other such activities related to the enhancement of ecosystem services;
2. Federal grants, low interest loans, and other financing options and incentives for community focused collaborative projects that restore and maintain the health of public and adjacent private lands;
3. Financial assistance for gap funding, training costs for capacity building, start-up costs for development of physical capital, and seed funding for innovative project development; and
4. A commitment to utilize Participating Agreements and Assistance Agreements to train local workers to perform management tasks.

ROLES OF THE STATES

There is also a role for state government in working with rural communities. They should work with the federal land management agencies to coordinate the delivery of:

1. Technical assistance and information through extension services;
2. Technical and financial assistance to private land owners;
3. Linkages between community and state colleges and universities to assist rural communities in natural resource related activities and businesses; and
4. Training and certification programs for natural resource related businesses.

ROLES OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND INTERMEDIARIES

Increasingly, the role of the federal and state governments is narrowing. To fill this void, non-profit and private entities are moving into the gaps. These community-based organizations and "intermediary organizations" are able to provide continuity in offering support to build and maintain community capacity as government programs and policies change. These groups can be local, regional or national in their scope. Intermediary and community-based groups are uniquely qualified to:

1. Manage and facilitate collaborative entities focused on the restoration and maintenance of public lands;
2. Build bridges between diverse stakeholders and establish common ground;
3. Provide training, skill building, and related services to businesses, community organizations, federal agencies, and other key stakeholders involved in public lands management;
4. Link communities and agency technical assistance providers to one another;
5. Facilitate peer-to-peer networking;
6. Provide direct technical assistance for a diversity of topics related to forestry and forest-based economic development; and
7. Access funding from philanthropic entities to support the protection, restoration, maintenance and monitoring of public lands management.

The federal government, states and communities must work together to build a strong land management system that sustains ecosystem values and services for future generations. Where community capacity exists (many of those with some community capacity often attribute the now defunct Forest Service Economic Action Program (EAP) with helping them build it), nonprofit community organizations are leveraging foundation dollars to get work done on federal lands. Volunteers are working, monitoring and helping to plan future work on our federal lands. The federal land management agencies must continue to expand their commitment to local communities and to building a system that works for both our public lands and rural economies.

Public and private investments in a restoration and stewardship work program could stabilize part of the rural work force and contribute to the ecological integrity of our public lands.

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