

Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition
Seventh Western Annual Policy Meeting
Meeting Summary Report
February 22, 2008

Who We Are:

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) 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. The RVCC is 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 the well-being of rural communities.

Purpose of this Report:

Every year the RVCC convenes at an Annual Policy Meeting (APM). The purpose of this report is to convey the outcomes of the Seventh Western Annual Policy Meeting held November 13-17, 2007 in Stevenson, Washington.

Meeting Goals and Objectives:

Too often the people who are most affected by legislation and federal funding decisions surrounding public lands are disconnected from the policy process. The RVCC works to ensure that rural voices and perspectives are represented in natural resource policies. The RVCC is unique because no one organization speaks for the coalition. The APM is a critical part of the RVCC's flexible structure because it brings diverse groups together to identify issues that are ripe for collective action. The APM is a working meeting where participants collaborate to identify and define priority policy issues, messages and solutions. Organizations' attendance at the APM enables participating organizations to shape a strong, united platform for the coming year. The meeting also provides participants with opportunities to network and share information to bring back to their organizations and communities.

Pre-Meeting Homework

A requirement for attending the APM is the completion of a pre-meeting homework. The purpose of the pre-meeting homework is: 1) to help design the meeting; 2) to frame the baseline of the issues for the coming year, 3) to enable participants to have meaningful discussions about the issues and opportunities they face, and 4) to begin the process of joint problem solving. Prior to the meeting, 61 participating groups completed the homework. The homework responses were synthesized by the Core Group to identify priority issue areas before the whole group met.

Results of the Pre-Meeting Homework

The 2007 Homework Synthesis revealed that RVCC participants continue to be interested in increasing appropriations and institutional support for:

- comprehensive restoration,
- capacity building,
- collaboration,
- performance measures and their link to the budget processes of land management agencies,
- and integrated biomass utilization.

Emerging issues highlighted in the homework include:

- climate change,
- fire suppression budgets,
- land conversion,
- ranching,
- and rural economic development.

The homework responses showed that RVCC participants continue to be focused on creating “strategies that promote local solutions and sustainability (forests, energy, food systems, etc.), and recognize the importance of rural areas and communities.”¹ Many respondents expressed frustration over a lack of political power and funding to help rural communities engage in policy.²

At the APM, participants used the Homework Synthesis as a jumping off point for small group discussions. The Homework Synthesis did not bind or limit the issues discussed, but it helped to highlight participant interest and the potential for collective action among the Coalition. It allowed participants to move past issue identification, and onto the development of solutions and strategies necessary to accomplish the goals of the group.

Participants

The Seventh Western Annual Policy Meeting was the largest RVCC meeting thus far with more than 90 confirmed participants. The meeting convened at the Skamania Lodge in Stevenson, Washington.

¹ “Seventh Western Annual Policy Meeting RVCC Homework Synthesis,” 2007, 2.

² “RVCC Homework Synthesis,” 2007, 2.

Types of Groups

The pre-meeting homework revealed that there was a large diversity of groups at the meeting. Types of groups represented at the meeting include the following:

Type	Percentage of Participants
Community-based natural resource organizations	30
Environmental organizations	11
For-profit businesses	11
Regional and national conservation-based development organizations	10
Federal or state land management agencies	10
Research organizations	8
Other including: Foundations, Individuals, Labor/environmentalist alliances, Non-profit trade associations, Professional forestry organizations, and Research outreach and education non-profits	8
Other federal state or local government agencies	7
Economic development organizations	3
Representatives of elected bodies	2

The participants represented both urban and rural areas from 12 different states. Community-based natural resource organizations comprised the largest group at the meeting and made up 30% of the homework respondents.³ None of the homework respondents identified themselves solely as representatives of tribal entities or worker organizations.

Level of Prior Involvement with RVCC

The size of the meeting and the large number of new participants provided both challenges and opportunities. The pre-meeting homework revealed that 30% of the participants had never attended an APM before, and 40% did not play a role in an RVCC working group last year.⁴ A balancing act was necessary to get a lot done at the meeting, while making sure that new participants were up to speed by communicating meeting processes and sharing the institutional memory of RVCC. New participants are crucial to the Coalitions' growth and provided the opportunity to create new contacts and hear new perspectives.

³ "RVCC Homework Synthesis," 2007, 13.

⁴ "RVCC Homework Synthesis," 2007, 13.

Meeting Structure

The APM began with a keynote speech by Lynn Jungwirth.⁵ Lynn set the tone of the meeting by reflecting on the work that RVCC has accomplished since its inception and by reminding the audience of the value of place-based experience and problem-solving:

“As we work here over the next two days we will bring our simple yet intricate knowledge and experience to the table. We will analyze various strategies and opportunities to make the world a better place. We will agree on what we know and decide how to package that knowledge so we can share it with the world. And we will trust in that world to recognize good information and good work.”

The first two days of the meeting consisted of morning panels attended by the full group and small group break-out discussions in the afternoon. Participants appreciated the structure of the meeting which broke the day up into presentations and discussion groups.⁶ The morning panels covered a range of topics that gave important background information on RVCC, and connected natural resource issues to rural communities in the West.⁷ Panel topics included: the political realities of the role of rural in national politics, climate change policy and the rural west, lessons from recent research on rural communities and landscapes, and threats and opportunities that rural communities face when confronted by land conversion.

One of the highlights of the presentations was the “Rural Matters” PowerPoint created by Sustainable Northwest that provided provoking information about rural America. This presentation was followed by a Political Realities Round Table “The Role of Rural in National Politics” where participants heard political staffers, elected officials and advocacy experts reflect on the best way to advocate for rural and natural resource issues. Panelists encouraged the Coalition to continue to write letters, build relationships, and advocate in a bipartisan manner.

In the afternoon, the full group broke up into smaller discussion groups where participants worked together to identify priority issues and create working group work plans for the coming year. More established working groups got straight to business to get as much done as possible in the short amount of time that the groups were convened. Newly formed groups, like Ranching and Climate Change, took more time for introductions and issue identification, with the goal of creating a vision for these new issues within RVCC.

⁵ See Appendix A, (pg 9) for the full text of Lynn Jungwirth’s keynote speech.

⁶ “Seventh Western Annual Policy Meeting Participant Evaluation Summary Report.” 2007, 6.

⁷ See Appendix B, (pg11) for a copy of the meeting agenda.

Meeting Content

What Came out of the Meeting?

On the last day of the meeting the full group met to integrate the work of the small-break out groups, and to have a final discussion about prioritization of issues and 'asks' for an RVCC platform in 2008. Core Group members generated the following table using the discussion notes from each small break out group:

Priorities	Working Groups							
	Appropriations & Accountability	Legislative Strategies	Biomass Utilization	Climate Change	Workforce and Labor	Stewardship Contracting	Ranching	Private Lands
Establishing the role of RVCC in addressing climate change policy			x					
Comprehensive Restoration Bill		x	x					
Appropriations/funding (including Community-based forestry funding Package)	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Agency budget allocation	x							
Challenges with budget and target structures	x		x	x	x	x		
Community Capacity Building	x	x	x	x	x			
Agency capacity and incentives			x	x	x			
Collaboration across public and private land ownerships	x		x	x	x			x
Incentives and mandates for collaboration	x							
County Payments	x	x			x			
Fire suppression costs								
Education about links between working conditions, immigration, contracting and quality work on the ground				x				
Improving DOL enforcement; extend to BLM				x				
Prevention of industrial and non-industrial land conversion								x
Taxes			x	x			x	x
Developing the vision for ranching in RVCC							x	

The table shows each working groups' focus in the coming year and it highlights the issues being tackled by multiple groups. The table reveals that the majority of the working groups are very interested in promoting legislative and administrative policies and procedures to: 1) increase funding and appropriations for collaborative restoration (including a community-based forestry funding package; 2) address the challenges posed by current budget and target structures; 3) build community capacity, and 4) increase collaboration across public and private land ownerships.

Other priorities and goals that came out of the full-group discussion included:

- Increasing transparency and accountability in land management agencies, including performance measures and a focus on outcomes, rather than solely looking at outputs (targets);
- Addressing climate change in a manner that is socially and economically equitable. Promoting the idea that rural communities and healthy forests and rangelands are needed to help solve the problem of climate change, but also recognizing that rural communities, forests and rangelands would be disproportionately affected by climate change; and
- Raising the visibility of RAC reauthorization as part of the county payments issue.

In 2007 two new working groups addressing climate change and ranching joined the five existing working groups: Appropriations Legislation and Accountability, Biomass, Private Lands, Stewardship Contracting, and Workforce and Labor.

At the meeting, participants identified their role within the working groups, and stated whether they wanted to be active or FYI members of their groups. Each of the working groups left the meeting with a rough work plan, and an idea of the working group's goals and strategies for the year ahead. Working group members will continue to communicate throughout the year through emails, conference calls, and additional meetings. They will refine their objectives through the development and implementation of their work plans.

Working groups develop new and/or updated Issue Papers and Talking Points throughout the year. RVCC Issue Papers create an opportunity for the coalition to display a unified voice, because every organization has the opportunity to sign-on to the papers prior to their dissemination. Issue Papers are a valuable tool and help RVCC participants to bring their issues and solutions to the attention of policy makers in meetings with congressional staffers and other policy makers at the Western-Week-in-Washington.

Participant Comments and Feedback⁸

Participants left the meeting feeling energized about RVCC work in the year ahead:

“I made some great contacts and came away with some new ideas to bring back into our community.”

“This meeting really re-energized me and is helping me focus my research work.”

⁸ All of the following comments were taken verbatim from Participant Evaluations of the Seventh Western Annual Policy Meeting.

Overall, participants were positive about the meeting:

“[The meeting gave] opportunities to listen, network [and] follow-up - brought about by great moderators bringing context to the group, good presentations with firm timekeeping, and a varied format with workgroups in the afternoon.”

“Thank you so much for bringing together so much knowledge and compassionate people that care for our earth.”

“[The meeting had] excellent group dynamics and feedback of knowledge.”

“[The meeting] gave me the opportunity to participate in the dialogue of democracy.”

“We reached a higher level of clarity about goals and processes to achieve them.”

“[The meeting was] very well organized, inclusive, and professional; good balance of strong leadership and allowing everyone a voice.”

Some participants offered constructive criticism about the meeting:

“I know that it is difficult in a short time to get more refined products but it would have been nice to get a little closer.”

“Due to RVCC size and group dynamic evaluation, its getting difficult to dive into the nuance/strategy detail at these meetings.”

“I'm concerned about lack of rural community groups present as well as the fact that these groups might not represent the people from where they live. More "conservative" voices need to be at the table.”

“RVCC is too focused on restoration economy for rural areas instead of taking a Holistic approach for rural economies and promoting diversified economic development.”

“I have a persisting concern: that the "conservation" part of our voice is not as steeped in the realities or rural communities and life as it should be due to the influence of predominantly urban based national and regional environmental organizations. In my rural community the perspective of the overwhelming majority is that less government and less policy is one of their greatest desires. So much of what we are dealing with at RVCC relates to a level that they have no interest in engaging in, because they do not believe in it or understand it. Yet some of these very people are completely agreeable to the idea of a land ethic, healthy restored forests, etc. How do we engage this? How do we make the voice of RVCC more genuine in a truly rural sense? I'm not sure if I have the answers (in fact, I know I don't) but, would love to see our leaders entertain this question.”

Conclusions

At the Seventh Western Annual Policy Meeting participants worked together to create a policy platform for 2008. The RVCC working groups made headway on their work plans for the coming year and began to prioritize their policy asks.

The APM showed that the RVCC continues to represent a diverse group of organizations that are committed to, not merely defining the problems that exist, but identifying policy solutions and creating positive changes in land and resource management and rural communities in the West.

As new issues such as climate change come into prominence, the RVCC evolves to ensure that rural communities will be able to sit at the table with other political actors to effectively advance solutions that will improve the health of the land and rural communities.

RVCC Plans for Evaluation and Improvement

A full spectrum of comments about the APM was included in this summary report because we believe that evaluation is important to the success and progress of the Coalition. As the Coalition grows, RVCC leadership will work to make sure that the APM continues to be an effective working meeting with a diversity of groups in attendance.

In 2008, the Core Group will undertake an evaluation of the RVCC using a survey of RVCC participants and interviews of RVCC founders to assess the progress of the Coalition thus far. The evaluation will be completed by June of 2008, and the results will help to guide the RVCC into the next Annual Policy Meeting and our continuing work together.

APPENDIX A.

SEVENTH WESTERN ANNUAL POLICY MEETING

Skamania Lodge, Stevenson, WA

KEYNOTE BY LYNN JUNGWIRTH

Director of the Watershed Resource and Training Center

November 14th, 2007

I'd like to thank Sustainable Northwest for the opportunity to help us explore Rural Voices for Conservation...who we are, how we work and what we do.

I know that many of us here have been working in the developing world of community forestry in the US for over a decade. Some of us are just joining in today. Each of us changes what the collective "we" is and how we move forward. And with that in mind I wanted to share some of my observations, looking back at work we've been doing in policy and how we've been doing it since 1994. It is important, I think, to have a "sense of we" as we move forward today.

We are, first and foremost, rednecks. We are marked forever, as Jeff Foxworthy says, by "a glorious absence of sophistication." But, we are cursed with intellectualism: hear Edward Abbey, who led us through Abbey's Road and Desert Solitude, "I am a redneck myself, born and bred on a submarginal farm in Appalachia, descended from an endless line of dark-complected, beetle-browed, insolent barbarian peasants, a line reaching back to the dark forests of Central Europe and the Alpine Caves of my Neanderthal primogenitor."

So, whether you hail from Manhattan, San Jose, Wallowa, Chicago, or "The Swan," if you are here because you have oversimplified life to: work hard, be honest, help your neighbor, and take care of the land, you, too, unwittingly (which is the easiest way to do it) are a redneck. You share in the policy legacy of the redneck.

And it is a proud history indeed. The very term "redneck" came from the days when miners were first organizing to fight for better working conditions. Those workers didn't hide their activism. They declared their position, and thereby were targets of violence both by mine owners, security forces and the police. They declared themselves by wearing a red bandana around their necks as they went to work in the mines. By 1898 they got an 8 hr work day, by 1933 they had collective bargaining rights, and finally, in 1969 they got meaningful legislation on safety. Rednecks are serious about commitment.

These same rednecks and their descendents participated in the whisky rebellion. When the federal government decided to tax distilleries, the policy of the day was to (surprise surprise) tax the big distilleries at 6% and the little distilleries at 9%. The subsequent rebellion of the little distillers and the "running of moonshine" in souped up cars (to escape the "revenueurs") directly led to the NASCAR racing we have today. Because rednecks also know have to have fun...while addressing policy.

Today, according to Wikipedia, rednecks are rural people who are considered “more libertine, especially in their personal lives, than other country brethren who tend toward social conservatism. They are distinguished by their loyalty to kin and their mistrust of government authority.”

We bring to the policy arena the simple realities of our work. Organizing for political action is not what we naturally do. We stay at home and work. We have blue-collar values. We expect to be self-reliant. To have to work together is anathema to us. To have to petition the government so we can do right by our families and the land is humiliating and frustrating. To learn how the policy world works and to enter into that strange world is challenging and scary. And yet, at this moment in history, we few, we band of brothers...and sisters...and cousins...we rednecks, are here. We are here because we believe in each other and our values. We believe in engaging in the hard work of democracy because we believe in democracy itself.

We are serious about commitment. For over 12 years we have stayed steady, refusing to give up on the relationship between the people and the land, and among the people for the land. And we have found a way to participate in this thing they call democracy every single year since 1994. Rednecks don't give up.

As we work here over the next two days we will bring our simple yet intricate knowledge and experience to the table. We will analyze various strategies and opportunities to make the world a better place. We will agree on what we know and decide how to package that knowledge so we can share it with the world. And we will trust in that world to recognize good information and good work.

Because we have been working together for 12 years and have brought good solutions forward (like stewardship contracting, best value, meaningful performance measures, multiparty monitoring, and workforce analysis) we are recognized by congressional, administrative, and agency staff as the problem solvers we are; that place-based problem solving is the one thing we can bring to the table that others can't. It is our strength and our credibility.

So as we go about this work, recognize the redneck in you. Celebrate that insolent barbarian peasant whose hands are deep in the muck of life. Share your truth. I know you'll work hard.

APPENDIX B.

**Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition
Seventh Western Annual Policy Meeting
Wednesday, November 14th - Friday, November 16th, 2007
Skamania Lodge, Stevenson, Washington**

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13TH

Arrival and check-in to Skamania Lodge.

Enjoy an evening of informal networking at this beautiful facility.

4:00pm to 6:00pm Registration table open in conference center lobby

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14TH

- 7:00am Registration table opens**
- 7:00am Catered buffet breakfast.** Location: Stevenson B
- 8:00am Full group session begins.** Location: Cascade Locks
Welcome and introductions
- Maia Enzer, Sustainable Northwest
- 8:15am Keynote address**
- Lynn Jungwirth, Watershed Research and Training Center
- 8:30am Overview, history and RVCC year in review**
- RVCC Core Group
- 9:00am Highlights of homework synthesis**
- Wendy Gerlitz, RVCC Core Group
- 9:30am Break** (*coffee and tea provided*)
- 9:45am Panel 1: Political Realities Roundtable—“The Role of Rural in National Politics”**
Moderator: Maia Enzer, Policy Director, Sustainable Northwest
- Niel Ritchie, Executive Director, League of Rural Voters
 - Marcie McLaughlin, Director of National Policy Programs, Rural Policy Research Institute
 - Jane O’Keeffe, Lake County Resources Initiative
 - Mark Webb, Grant County, Oregon Judge
 - Sarah Bittleman, Office of Governor Kulongoski
- 11:00am Panel 2: Climate Change Policy and the Rural West: Economic Implications and Social Equity**
Moderator: Gerry Gray, Vice President, Policy, American Forests
- Jessica Coven, Policy Associate, Climate Solutions
 - Todd Graham, Aeroscene Land Logic
- Noon Catered Lunch.** Location: Stevenson B
- 1:00pm Small Group Session 1: Issue development for collective action**
Participants will break into small groups that are organized by issues that working groups will develop for RVCC’s 2008 platform.

Session outcomes:

- 1) A list of strategic priorities for that working group
- 2) Statements that describe policy problems and/or barriers, and
- 3) An initial list of recommendations to remedy those problems.

Topic	Room	Facilitators
Appropriations and accountability	Stevenson C	Wendy Gerlitz and Kathy Lynn
Private lands conversion	Rainier	Mo Hartmann and Laura Schweitzer
Workforce, labor, and service contracting	Summit 6	Cass Moseley and Howard Gross
Biomass	Stevenson D	Nick Goulette and Mike DeBonis

2:30pm **BREAK. Change of sessions**

2:45pm **Small Group Session 2: Issue development for collective action**

Participants will break into small groups that are organized by issues that working groups will develop for RVCC's 2008 platform.

Session outcomes:

- 1) A list of strategic priorities for that working group
- 2) Statements that describe policy problems and/or barriers, and
- 3) An initial list of recommendations to remedy those problems.

Topic	Room	Facilitators
Legislative strategies	Stevenson C	Maia Enzer and Lynn Jungwirth
Ranching and grasslands	Summit 6	James Honey and Nils Christoffersen
Stewardship Contracting	Rainier	Nick Goulette and Alden Boetsch
Climate Change and energy	Stevenson D	Gerry Gray and Kathy Lynn

4:15pm **BREAK.** Snacks will be provided. A no-host bar will stay open until 6:00pm. Location: Cascade Locks

4:30pm **Full group activity and report on outcomes and summary of the day**

5:30pm **ADJOURN.**
Enjoy the facility, lounge, and restaurant.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15th

7:30am **Catered buffet breakfast.** Location: Stevenson B

8:15am **Full Group Sessions begins.** Location: Cascade Locks

- **Review agenda and objectives for the day,** Maia Enzer, Sustainable Northwest

8:30am **Panel 1: Rural Communities and Landscapes: Lessons from Recent Research**
Moderator: Nils Christoffersen, Wallowa Resources

- *People, Fire, and Forests: A Synthesis of Wildfire Social Science.* Dr. Matt Carroll, Natural Resource Sociologist, Washington State University
- *Consequences of Public Disinvestment on Public Land and Public Lands Communities.* Dr. Cassandra Moseley, Director, Ecosystem Workforce Program, University of Oregon

- *When Ranching is for the Birds (and Fish and Wolves): Social and Ecological Implications of Ranch Ownership Change in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.* Dr. Hannah Gosnell, Assistant Professor, Department of Geosciences, Oregon State University

9:45am **BREAK** (*coffee and tea provided*)

10:00am **Panel 2: Land Conversion: Threats and Opportunities for Rural Western Communities**

Moderator: Maureen Hartmann, Northwest Connections

- James Honey, Sustainable Northwest
- Jim Stone, Chair, Blackfoot Challenge
- Kevin Raymond, Pacific Forest Trust

11:30am **Report out from Day 1 Small Group Sessions**

Groups will have 5 minutes each to present outcomes of their work the previous day

- Appropriations and accountability
- Legislative strategies
- Workforce, labor, and service contracting
- Stewardship Contracting
- Biomass
- Climate change and energy
- Private lands conversion
- Ranching and grasslands

12:30pm **Catered Lunch.** Location: Stevenson B

1:30pm **Small group session 1: Strategy Development**

Participants will break into small groups to develop strategies for advancing priority issue areas during 2008.

Session outcomes:

- 1) *Elaboration and refinement of solutions to be advanced*
- 2) *Identification of specific decision-makers with power to adopt solutions*
- 3) *A prioritized list of strategic actions and approaches to advance solutions*
- 4) *A list of recommendations and items for full group consideration on Friday*

Topic	Room	Facilitators
Appropriations and accountability	Stevenson C	Wendy Gerlitz and Kathy Lynn
Private lands conversion	Rainier	Mo Hartmann and Laura Schweitzer
Workforce, labor, & service contracting	Summit 6	Cass Moseley and Howard Gross
Biomass	Stevenson D	Nick Goulette and Mike DeBonis

3:00pm **BREAK.** Change of sessions

3:15pm **Small group session 2: Strategy Development**

Participants will break into small groups to develop strategies for advancing priority issue areas during 2008.

Session outcomes:

- 1) *Elaboration and refinement of solutions to be advanced*
- 2) *Identification of specific decision-makers with power to adopt solutions*
- 3) *A prioritized list of strategic actions and approaches to advance solutions*
- 4) *A list of recommendations and items for full group consideration on Friday*

Topic	Room	Facilitators
Legislative strategies	Stevenson C	Maia Enzer and Lynn Jungwirth
Ranching and grasslands	Summit 6	James Honey and Nils Christoffersen
Stewardship Contracting	Rainier	Nick Goulette and Alden Boetsch
Climate Change and Energy	Stevenson D	Gerry Gray and Kathy Lynn

4:30pm

Full Group Session: Report out from small group sessions 1 and 2

Location: Cascade Locks

Groups will have 5 minutes each to present outcomes of their work during previous two sessions

- Appropriations and accountability
- Legislative strategies
- Workforce, labor, and service contracting
- Stewardship Contracting
- Biomass
- Climate change and energy
- Private lands conversion
- Ranching and grasslands

5:30pm

Wrap-up

5:45pm

Adjourn

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16th

7:30am

Catered buffet breakfast. Location: Stevenson B

8:30am

Full Group Sessions begins. Location: Cascade Locks

- **Review agenda and objectives for the day.** Maia Enzer, Sustainable Northwest

8:45am

Prioritization And Integration of Platform

Facilitators: Cassandra Moseley, Ecosystem Workforce Program & Kathy Lynn, Resource Innovations

Session outcomes

1. Discuss and integrate priority issues into a cohesive platform
2. Provide working groups with feedback from the full group on outstanding issues
3. Create opportunity for holistic vision to emerge across the coalition

10:45am

RVCC and APM Evaluation

Facilitators: Alden Boetsch, Sustainable Northwest
Cassandra Moseley, Ecosystem Workforce Program

11:30am

Closing remarks and next steps

- Maia Enzer, Sustainable Northwest
- Lynn Jungwirth, Watershed Research and Training Center

12:00pm

THANK YOU AND GOOD-BYE FOR NOW