

**BRIEFING PAPER**

**LOCATION:** Southwestern Region  
**DATE:** July 13, 2004  
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**ISSUE:** Collaborative efforts leading to Stewardship contracting on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.

**DISCUSSION:** The various projects included in the Forests' stewardship contracts have all gone through the appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. As collaboration with diverse members of the public has evolved over time, so has the NEPA process evolved to better include public input into decisions made by the Forest Service. In addition, the Forests have participated fully in community based groups such as the Natural Resources Working Group, the Sustainable Forest Partnership, and the Upper Little Colorado River Watershed Planning Group to identify local concerns and local solutions.

The Forests have met with a variety of community leaders and representatives of special interest groups to discuss the needs or recommendations of each group and to identify possible courses of action resulting in better forest management and improved monitoring of project work. Examples include:

- The Forest has established demonstration plots to visually display different levels of tree stocking density based on Forests Land Management Plan direction, different scientific models, and environmental group recommendations;
- The Forest Service is working with the County Partnership for Restoration (CPR) group to sponsor a two day workshop entitled "Building Trust for Forest Restoration Through Collaborative Partnerships" December 5-6, 2003. CPR is a partnership between county government and the Forest Service covering three national forests in New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona (ASNF) and it is facilitated by Dr. David Garrett. The workshop is geared towards citizens and will present different viewpoints on restoration needs, methods and technology to better prepare the citizens for involvement in fuels management decisions.
- Navajo and Apache Counties, which include the ASNF, are convening panels to determine countywide priorities for fuels treatments to protect communities and property values. The results of the panels will help guide the sequencing of all fuels projects, including the White Mt. Stewardship Projects, to work across property boundaries to meet community needs.
- The Multiparty Monitoring Board for the White Mt.



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Stewardship Contract is being formed. It will include community interests from across the forest. The Nature Conservancy and Northland Pioneer College have expressed interest in being very involved and in conducting some of the monitoring for the contract. Monitoring will include ecological, social and economic indicators of the effects of the contract and projects completed.

- The Forests working closely with homeowners to identify thinning prescriptions adjacent to private lands that will act as fuelbreaks in the wildland/urban interface; (Specific example: residents of Alpine living adjacent to the Forests' boundary were encouraged to help "mark" trees within 200 feet of their property that would best meet their needs and still provide defensible space)
- The Forest has worked with the county governments and communities to identify important contracting and industry infrastructure needed to accomplish thousands of acres of small tree thinning annually. The Four Corners Sustainable Forestry Partnership has been an important discussion group with industry representatives. Numerous Cooperative Forestry and National Fire Plan grants have been awarded to stimulate local small wood industries and markets;
- The Forest has been working with the San Carlos and White Mountain Apache Tribes to identify landscape level forest treatment priorities to better protect private property and high value areas, and get out in front of the emerging pine bark beetle epidemic. The effect of different treatments on the progress of the Rodeo Chediski Fire and the movement of the pine beetles is currently being studied to assist in future project planning across all land ownerships. The Forest has committed to working with the counties, tribes, State Forester and communities to prepare a landscape level wildland-urban interface plan to eastern Arizona;
- The Forest has conducted countless tours and community discussion with Congressional staffers, the Governor's Office, county government and community members to look at and discuss priorities for hazardous fuels reduction project. The Natural Resources Working Group has been one important sounding board for community-based collaboration on projects.

The individual projects comprising the stewardship projects have also evolved in their public participation and collaborative efforts. The early projects (ie. Little MP, Horton TS, Blue Ridge /Morgan) used traditional scoping of identified publics that might be interested or



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affected by a proposal. Later projects (ie. Alpine WUI, Iris Springs Meadow Restoration, Ranch 3, and Mineral) used more collaborative techniques and involved direct support and involvement by such groups as the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the Springerville and Alpine Habitat Partnership Committee, the Rock Mountain Elk Foundation, the Antelope Foundation, the Mule Deer Foundation, and representatives of local timber products industry, local governments, and local/regional environmental groups. This collaboration identifies community interests and needs for action and will help the Forest prioritize the areas treated and coordinate better with treatments off national forest lands. The monitoring for the contract will help us evaluate whether we are meeting the community needs and expectations and contributing to the economic values of the communities and allow us to make course adjustments.

Two examples of community collaboration that led towards the identification and preparation of wildland urban interface projects for stewardship contracting are detailed below:

### **SUMMARY OF ALPINE RD PUBLIC COLLABORATION ON ALPINE WUI WORK**

In addition to steps during the NEPA process in which citizens were able to provide input and comments on the Alpine Wildland/Urban Interface Fuels Reduction project analysis, the following extra measures have been taken after the signed decision, to involve local citizens who are directly interested in the implementation of this project and its end results:

- Several information presentations were, and continue to be, made to the Alpine Action Alliance, and at annual meetings of various Alpine homeowners associations.
- Letters mailings to all adjacent landowners and homeowners assoc. representatives to advise them of our planned timeframe for implementation. Explanation of various colors of boundary flagging and paint markings used for field contract layout was given, with requests for their assistance in helping us keep those flaglines intact. Included an invitation for their direct field involvement during selective tree marking within 200 feet of their property line, and appointments were made to do so with them. Several adjacent landowners took us up on this offer for Alpine WUI-1 (see next item). We will soon be doing this for Alpine WUI-2.



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- Personal visits with private landowners on the project area adjacent to them, to demonstrate the fuels reduction objectives with real examples of adequate spacing guides for live tree thinning needs, healthy trees to leave -vs- unhealthy trees to remove, answer all their questions about slash treatment, bark beetle implications, different species silvics, roads and resource protections, and to give the landowners some informed choices about which trees they are willing to sacrifice in order to save their favorites. ALL landowners who participated in this exercise stated they truly appreciated having a Government employee spend several hours teaching them so much information and answering all their questions. They also stated they now can see the amount of change that will be visible from their back porch, but can adjust to that change better by understanding why it is necessary, and by having had some direct say about which trees they'd like to keep. Moreover, this provides them good hands-on guidelines and confidence to get started making similar thinning decisions for their own land.
- Phone calls to numerous interested out-of-town landowners who cannot be present, but want further explanation of the work underway.
- Direct coordination with permit holders regarding field location and contract protection of utilities under USFS permit or easement running across project treatment acres, such as water towers, surface and buried pipelines, overhead power and phone lines, or other improvements needing protection.
- Issuing regular update letters to the adjacent landowners and association reps. advising them about field layout progress, contract preparation and award schedule, and when to expect heavy equipment and noise near them, fire safety precautions required in the contract, follow-up treatments the USFS is planning to do next, etc.
- Application and award of R.A.C. dollars to help fund our first Alpine WUI contract. Provided project information to committee members representing various backgrounds and interests, including municipal/governmental, industrial, and environmental groups.

**White Mountain Stewardship Project**  
Blue Ridge Demo Collaboration



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During 1997, a cross section of community members met to find ways to move the natural resource dialogue from contention and conflict in the courtroom to collaboration and restoration on the ground. The group was comprised of local, state, and federal government representatives, as well as environmentalists, ranchers, business people, academics, and other interests.

They became known as the Natural Resources Working Group. The goals are to restore our forests to diverse and sustainable conditions, to involve interested people, to develop economic opportunities, and to share the social and environmental benefits. Their agreement was signed in an MOU dated December 1997.

Once organized, the group looked for areas in which to demonstrate these collaborative restoration efforts. The Blue Ridge/Morgan Ecosystem Management Area was selected. It involves 17,000 acres of NF directly adjacent to the Town of Pinetop-Lakeside. The environmental analysis was completed in April 1997 without appeal or litigation. A variety of activities were a part of the decision, including: commercial tree thinning (less than 16" dbh); fuelbreak construction near private lands; broadcast burning; fuel wood cutting; pre-commercial tree thinning (less than 6" dbh); and other smaller projects.

With the support of the NRWG, the FS prepared three timber sales to demonstrate three distinct vegetative treatments of commercial thinning. These included: forest plan (use NOGO guidelines & MSO recovery plan); pre-settlement restoration (first step of NAU Ecological Restoration Institute guidelines); and natural process restoration (proposal from environmental community). Unfortunately, none of the sales sold due to large amount of small diameter tree volume. Many of these acres are proposed for inclusion in the stewardship contract.

The Natural Resource Working Group has met an average of every two months. The Forest Service is an active participant. The group has become more inclusive with wider participation in recent years. Reports of accomplishments and review of future plans occur at these routine meetings. Issues of a forest wide nature are also discussed and agreed collaboratively. The Blue Ridge Demo project has enjoyed very wide support because of this collaboration.

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