

Statement of

Randy Phillips
Deputy Chief
Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture

before the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

March 29, 2001

Concerning

**Effective Community Involvement in National Forest Restoration and
Recreation Efforts**

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Forest Service efforts in working with local communities to accomplish natural resource objectives. I am Randy Phillips, Deputy Chief for Programs and Legislation, USDA - Forest Service. Accompanying me today is Sally Collins, Associate Deputy Chief for the National Forest System.

Many factors over the last several years have led to a decline in the traditional uses of national forest lands. As a result, communities that have relied on these traditional uses as a significant component of their economies have struggled to retain their vitality and resilience. Our local forest managers have turned to new tools and methods to maintain the health of the forests and to involve the local communities in natural resource decisions that affect them. These changing conditions have been the catalyst for many success stories of communities and local forest managers working together to improve the health of the land and their communities. I would like to share with you today some of those success stories.

Ponderosa Pine Forest Partnership

The Ponderosa Pine Forest Partnership effort in southwest Colorado involving forest managers and users, neighbors and interested citizens is one such story. The San Juan National Forest has been working with communities of interest in Montezuma County, Colorado to create a new model for improving the condition of ecosystems while sustaining small, rural timber businesses considered as necessary tools to perform the work of forest restoration.

The "Pine Zone Partnership," as the Ponderosa Pine Forest Partnership is informally called, traces its formation back to 1992 when its original members, representatives from Montezuma County, Colorado, the San Juan National Forest, Fort Lewis College, and the Colorado Timber Industry Association, met in the forest near Dolores, Colorado to discuss ecosystem health and the declining state of the local timber industry. Drawing on the authorities and technical support of the Forest Service economic action programs, the partnership has operated through the years as an informal network of these and additional interests, including individual loggers, and local environmental and community activists.

From the initial gathering grew a multi-disciplinary network committed to testing adaptive-management techniques in a restoration harvest demonstration. They pooled institutional resources to design and conduct a harvesting demonstration on the San Juan National Forest where participants could conduct ecological research and monitoring, test new harvesting utilization techniques, reintroduce fire in its historical ecological role, conduct a detailed cost benefit analysis of harvesting, and begin researching the development of small-diameter pine products and markets.

The Pine Zone Partnership began producing on-the-ground results in 1995 by restoring natural characteristics and functions of ponderosa pine forests on 493 acres of national forest and adjacent private land. Partners thinned even-aged, small-diameter pine stands in order to reintroduce fire to its once natural ecosystem role. The results will reduce insect, disease, and wildfire risks; re-establish an uneven-aged stand structure, improve and increase wildlife habitat, and increase plant diversity, as well as help reestablish steady wood supplies.

While Pine Zone partners sought to integrate ecology and economic research with Forest Service administration, management and timber harvesting, the new relationships that evolved as they cooperated informally and face-to-face are perhaps their greatest accomplishment. They were able, through an acceptance of a mutually shared responsibility for community and forest sustainability, to restructure traditional relationships into new arrangements. As one partner, Dr. Dennis Lynch, Professor Emeritus, Colorado State University emphasizes, in this partnership “ecology drives the economics of forest restoration.”

Deschutes Watershed Assessment

Another success story in working with our local communities is the watershed assessment work being done on the Deschutes National Forest in Oregon under the leadership of District Ranger Phil Cruz. Large-scale assessments have focused discussion with local community representatives on forest health needs at the watershed level rather than on the particular methods used to accomplish individual projects. Those interested in natural resource issues now have a context in which to place a 100-acre treatment area. Analysis of cumulative effects can be more accurately represented and displayed. A spin-off benefit has been a more efficient approach for the Forest Service and other regulatory agencies in ensuring compliance with NEPA and ESA.

There are benefits as well as some challenging concerns associated with this particular method of planning. In the words of Phil Cruz, "Success depends upon people and passion. From the interdisciplinary team members to the leadership, no one can take a holiday from the process or the project."

Challenge Cost Share Program

The Challenge Cost-Share Program is another successful example of partnering with groups interested in management of our national forests. It has provided the Forest Service and our cooperators with a means to jointly identify and accomplish recreation management and fish and wildlife habitat improvement projects. Begun in 1986, the program has grown from 57 partners and 120 projects to 2,500 partners and over 2,800 projects in 1999. In 1999, a variety of State agencies and private organizations worked with the Forest Service to leverage \$16.8 million of appropriated funds into \$43.4 million of habitat improvement projects benefiting wildlife, fish, rare plants, and people. The Forest Service is committed to expanding its capacity to work with partners in accomplishing the Agency's mission via the Challenge Cost-Share program and other venues, and to actively working with partners to identify and remove impediments to achieving this objective. Toward this end, the Forest Service is working to improve the use of existing authorities and reducing the time necessary to formalize partnerships.

Quincy Library Group

In October 1998, Congress passed the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act as Section 401 of the FY 1999 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (Public Law 105-277). This Act implements an agreement by a coalition of representatives of fisheries,

timber, environmental, county government, citizen groups, and local communities that formed in northern California to develop a resource management program that promotes ecologic and economic health for national forest lands and communities in the Sierra Nevada area.

Stewardship Pilot Projects

Congress has provided us another opportunity to work cooperatively with our local communities under Section 347 of the FY 1999 Omnibus Appropriations Act (Public Law 105-277) and expanded by Section 338 of the FY 2001 Interior Appropriations Act (Public Law 106-291).

This stewardship pilot provision authorizes the Forest Service to test several new processes and procedures including the following:

- The exchange of goods for services;
- The retention of receipts;
- The awarding of contracts on a “best value” basis; and
- The designation of timber for cutting by prescription.

Although it is still too soon to tell whether these new authorities should be continued beyond the test period, the early results indicate that the authorities are providing a new context in which to discuss resource management. The pilot projects have enabled the Forest Service to bring people to the table to talk about what they leave on the land rather than focusing on what they take from the land. Groups involved in the pilot projects find that there is common ground. In the words of Regional Forester Dale Bosworth, “It brings people to the conference room rather than the court room.”

National Fire Plan

In addition to the opportunity afforded us through 1999 Omnibus Appropriations Act, the Congress greatly added to the ability of the agency to work through partnerships for natural resource and community benefits through the National Fire Plan.

The severe fire season of 2000 captured the attention of the American people on the need to find ways to protect life and property and minimize losses of natural resources. In response, a report entitled, "*Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment*", was prepared and released by the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture in September of 2000 and is referred to as the National Fire Plan.

Based on the recommendations in the report, the Congress and the Administration increased funding for agency firefighting, fuels reduction, resource restoration, and community assistance. The Conference Report for P.L. 106-291 directs the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to work closely with State and local communities to maximize benefits to the environment and to local communities. It directs the agencies to seek the advice of the State Governors and local and tribal government representatives in setting priorities for fuels treatments, burned area rehabilitation and public outreach and education. The Appropriations conferees also directed the agencies to work together to develop a list of all communities within the vicinity of Federal lands at high risk from fire and to work with the State Governors to develop a 10-year comprehensive strategy.

Funding for the implementation of the National Fire Plan affords the Forest Service many venues for building new partnerships for community assistance and resource protection. For example, in communities, we are assisting State and local partners by providing funding assistance to rural and volunteer fire departments to increase local firefighting capacity. We are also helping to

educate community planners and homeowners through partnerships with the States, the National Fire Protection Association, and local firefighting organizations to take actions to reduce fire risk to homes and private property through a program called FIREWISE. We also expect implementation of the National Fire Plan may create as many as 8,000 new jobs in rural areas and provide economic opportunities for rural forest dependent communities through partnerships for natural resource work.

County Payments

The 106th Congress also passed the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self Determination Act of 2000. This landmark legislation allows counties containing national forest land to work with local forest officials to re-connect their communities to the land that sustains them.

Counties can reserve 15 to 20 percent of the historical payments they received under the 25 Percent Fund Act to make investments on national forest lands, adjacent private lands, or other county services. Counties and local forests are working together to solicit nominations for people to serve on the Resource Advisory Committees that will make project recommendations to local forest officials. These projects will create additional opportunities for employment while making investments that restore forest health and water quality. The counties should receive funds for these projects beginning in October, 2001.

Conclusion

There are many more examples of success stories across the country. Agency teams and others are evaluating the lessons we have learned from cooperative approaches to natural resource management. These teams will be identifying what changes, if any, might be needed in policy,

regulation, and statute in order to better work together with our many partners and others interested in the health of the land and our rural communities. We look forward to working with you and the other members of the subcommittee on ways to improve our partnership programs.

This concludes my testimony. I would be glad to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.