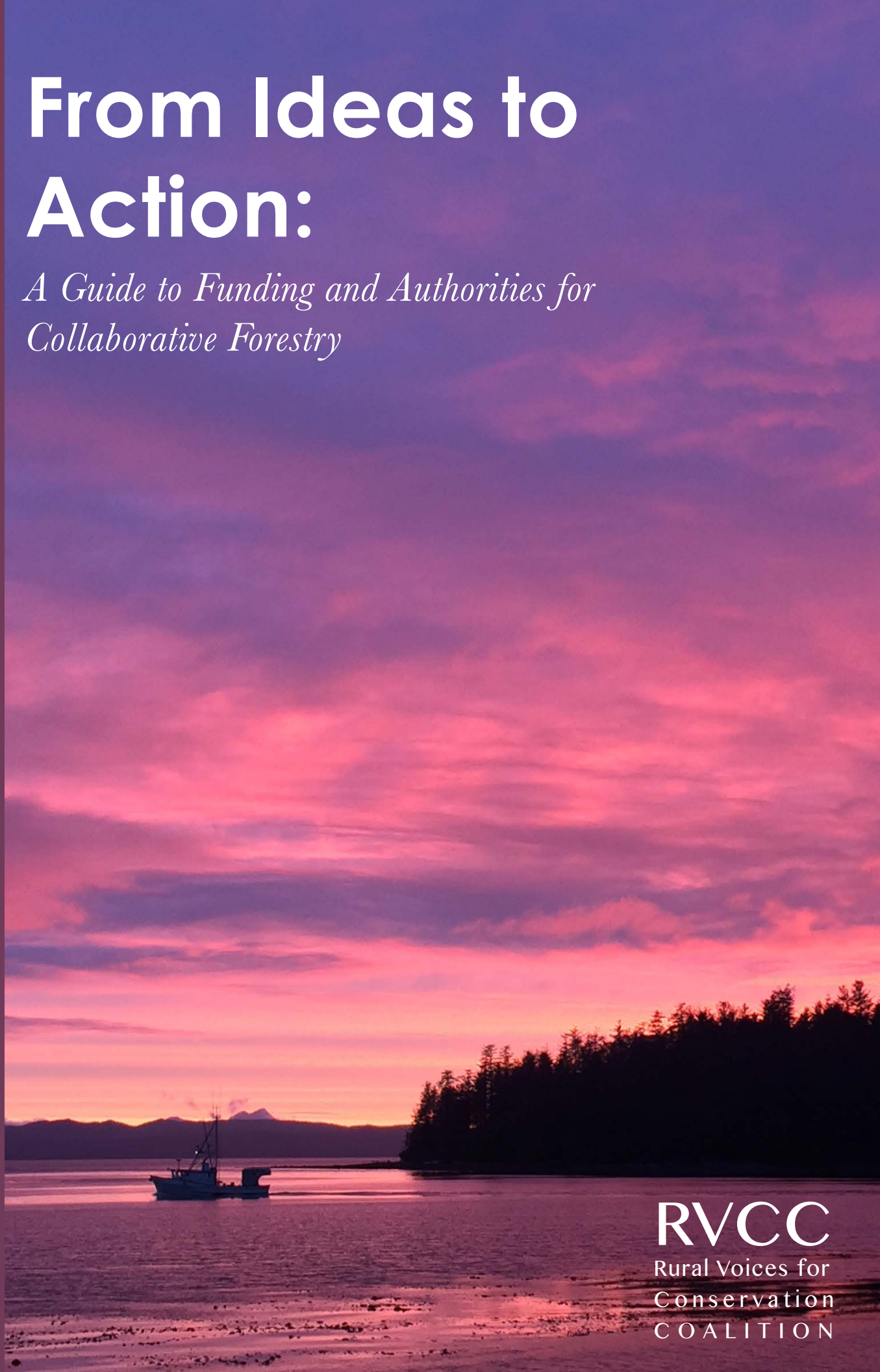
RVCC PRIMER

From Ideas to Action:

A Guide to Funding and Authorities for Collaborative Forestry



RVCC
Rural Voices for Conservation
COALITION

AUTHORS

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ABOUT RVCC

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) promotes new approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the rural West. We are committed to developing practical solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and the well-being of communities. We work together to improve issues that affect rural communities, public and private land management, and the continuation of a natural resource-based economy in the West, advocating for the inclusion of comprehensive community interests.

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Cover photo by Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership.

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"I think individuals and organizations tend to think about the various authorities and tools as isolated one-off decisions, or just in relation to their own constituency. Before we think about changes or new authorities, we need to take a more holistic approach that achieves diverse outcomes using existing tools or asks why they haven't been used yet."

- Dylan Kruse, Sustainable Northwest

Overview

Executive Summary

For 15 years, the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) has successfully advocated for the expansion and improvement of federal policies that support stewardship and restoration on public and private lands. An All Lands approach to collaborative stewardship recognizes the social, ecological, and economic interdependence that exists regardless of property and management boundaries, and strategically targets the larger benefits that can be achieved when working together at broader scales.

There are currently dozens of programs and authorities that can enable this holistic approach to land stewardship. And yet through interviews and conversations with community practitioners, it's clear that few people feel comfortable or knowledgeable about the federal resources at their disposal, or in navigating the agencies that administer them. Likewise, within federal agencies, existing tools and programs are often applied or interpreted inconsistently, leading to confusion about what is possible and what isn't.

Our conversations revealed that factors limiting the full utilization of existing tools included: simply not knowing what's available, incomplete knowledge of how federal or state agencies work, and work overload. Reasons cited for success often had to do with individual skills, such as leadership, persistence, and the willingness to ask "how might this work?"

This unfamiliarity and inconsistency, in combination with the increasing importance of implementing collaborative agreements, led RVCC to create this practitioner's guidebook. We believe there is significant room for creativity, flexibility, and innovation within existing policies, programs, and authorities, and that leveraging programs and unlocking efficiencies will lead to improved outcomes.

This guidebook presents a menu of Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service tools and programs available to implement land stewardship on public and private lands, while providing insider tips and lessons learned. It is intended to increase the understanding of what can be used by community-based practitioners, federal land managers, and individuals to address ecological problems on our public and private lands.

Methodology

We scanned the existing pool of federal programs, tools, and authorities related to collaborative natural resource management through a variety of lenses and distilled existing knowledge and expertise into short "how-to" fact sheets. To gather information, we first surveyed our RVCC network participants to gauge understanding in the field around the various programs. We then conducted dozens of interviews with program experts and community leaders, reviewed case studies, and summarized existing legislation, agency guidance and other materials. Finally, we developed the following fact sheets in consultation with program experts.

We intentionally limited our focus to two federal agencies and focused primarily on forests. While not exhaustive, this primer represents many of the key programs available.

How to Use This Guide

This guidebook is intended to orient community-based practitioners, agency staff, and individuals to Forest Service and NRCS tools and programs available to implement land stewardship on public and private lands, while providing useful tips and ideas. Lessons were drawn from conversations with experienced collaborators and agency leaders. In order to orient readers to the two federal agencies, we include information and maps outlining their organizational structure and summary of their primary purpose.

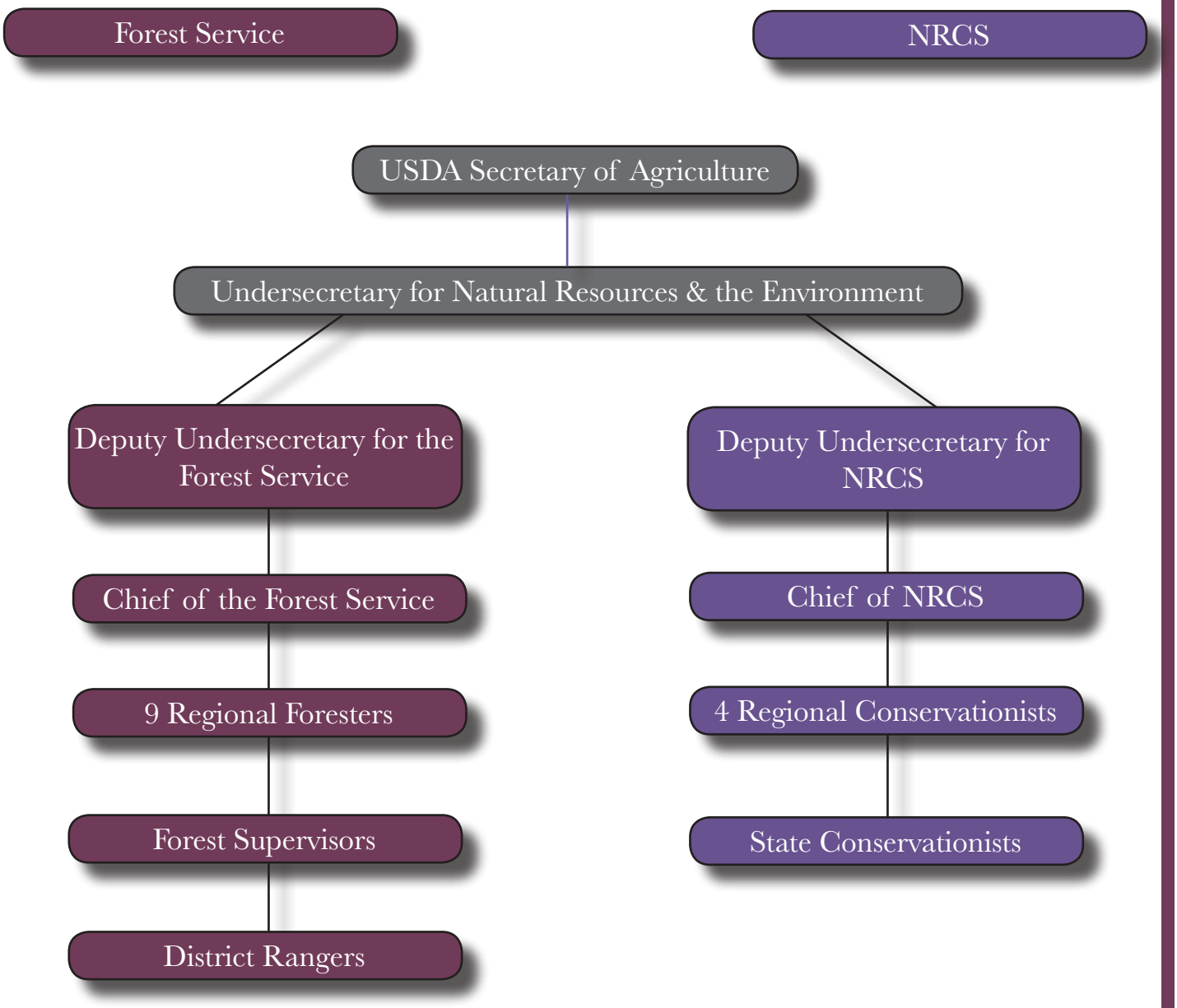
After the agency overview, we discuss existing tools using the following breakdown:

- **Programs** that provide financial resources for project design and implementation (e.g. Conservation Innovation Grants and Regional Conservation Partnership Program)
- **Authorities** that facilitate working across ownership boundaries (e.g. the Tribal Forest Protection Act)
- **Agreements** that support leveraging partners and resources for mutual benefit

Each section generally includes a summary of the program or authority, information on how it works, how to apply, the role for partners, and tips. In several areas we've added an "ask an expert" section, complete with contact information for people who have used the program or authority successfully and are willing to share their lessons learned. We also created an easy-to-read spreadsheet with key deadlines, match requirements, and eligible applicants for the funding programs.

Photo Credit: Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

Agencies at a Glance



Forest Service

Background & Mission
The Forest Service manages 193 million acres of federal lands within 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands. The agency also works with state and local entities to manage non-federal lands, conducts natural resource research, and promotes international land stewardship. Its mission is "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations."

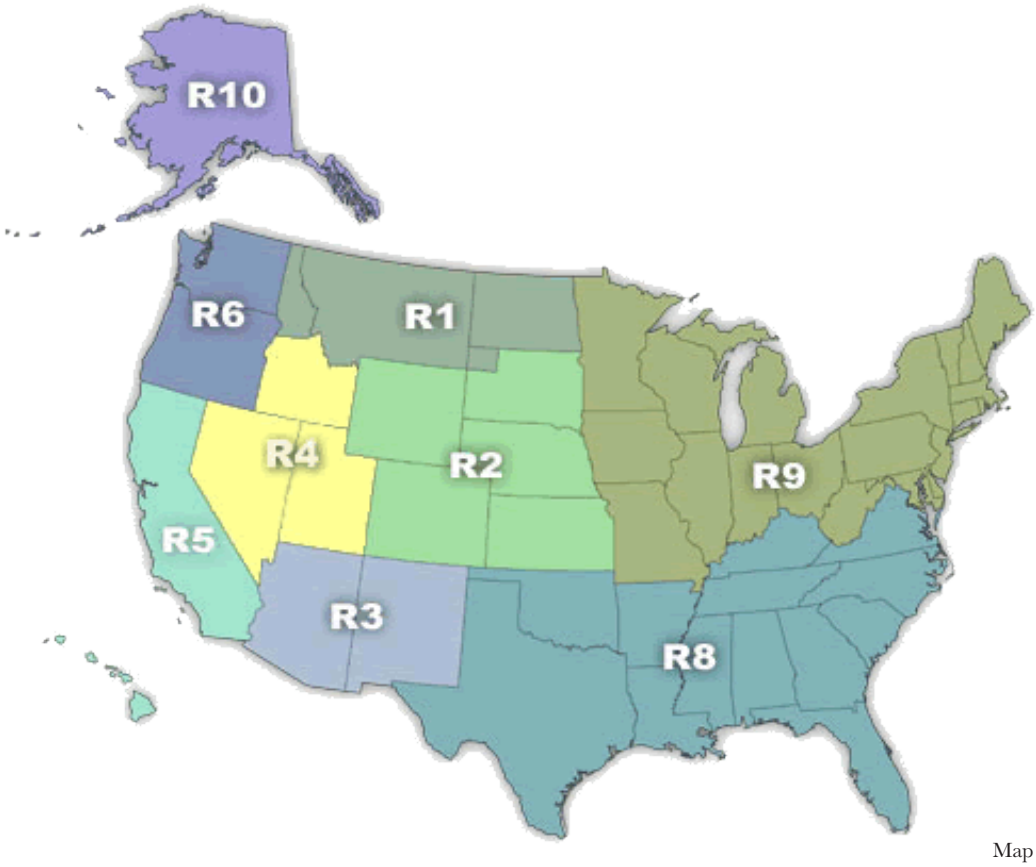
Employees: 30,000

Regions: 9 (there is no Region 7)

Primary Program Units
National Forest System, State & Private Forestry, Administration, International Programs, and Research

Key Programs
Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program; Forest Legacy Program; Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program; Joint Chiefs Restoration Partnership

Key Tools
Stewardship Contracting Authority; Good Neighbor Authority; Wyden Authority; Tribal Forest Protection Act; Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy



Map Credit: US Forest Service

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Background & Mission

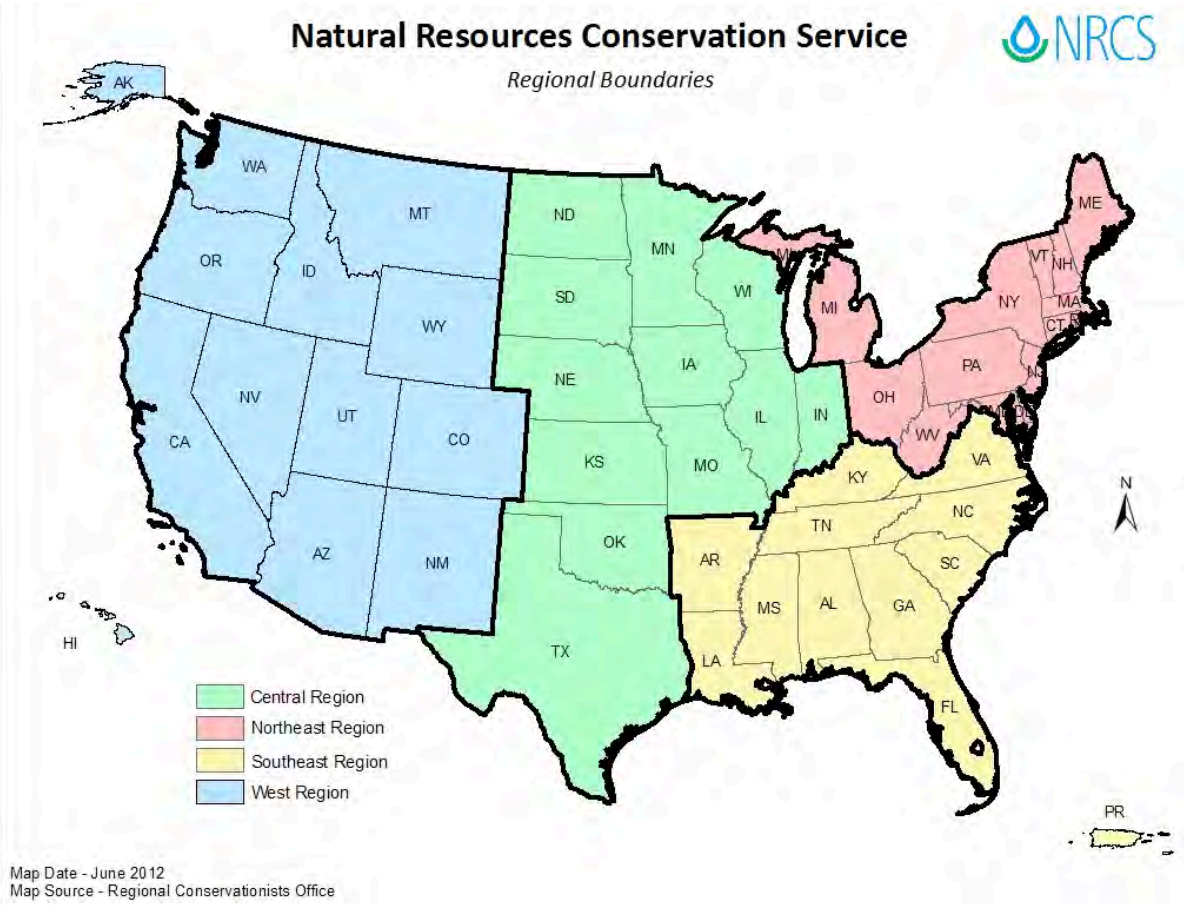
The Natural Resources Conservation Service works through county-based offices with agricultural producers, forest stewards, and private landowners to promote the voluntary conservation of soil and water resources through technical and financial assistance. The mission of NRCS is to "improve the health of our Nation's natural resources while sustaining and enhancing the productivity of American agriculture." Activities supported by NRCS must produce a conservation benefit, and generally must implement proven conservation practices that are detailed within NRCS handbooks.

Employees: 11,500

Regions: 4

Key Programs

Conservation Innovation Grants; Environmental Quality Incentives Program; Regional Conservation Partnership Program; Conservation Stewardship Program



"If you look at the collaborative models that are working well, there was a high performer in there somewhere who did it because they wanted to. How can Forest Service leadership set expectations that we operate with partners in a certain way, and fully utilize the various tools that are available at our disposal? That's the question I would ask and the challenge I'd set for my peers."

- Jason Anderson, US Forest Service

PROGRAMS

Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

FUNDING PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Agency	Program	Eligible Applicant	Land Ownership	Conservation Priority	Match Requirement
US Forest Service	*Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program*	Collaboratives or local USFS offices	Public and private	All-lands large-scale restoration	CFLR Fund can cover up to 50% of non-NFS, non-planning activities. Forest units or partners must supply the rest
	Forest Legacy Program	Landowner	Private	States use USDA-approved priority areas and project criteria	25% from state, local or landowner sources
	Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program	Nonprofits, universities, and tribes	Public, or public and private	Watershed and landscape scale restoration in OR, WA, CA, and Southeast AK	No requirement, but non-federal leverage is expected
Both	*Joint Chiefs Restoration Partnership*	Local NRCS and USFS offices	Public and private	Wildfire, habitat for at-risk species, water quality	No requirement, but non-federal leverage is expected
NRCS	*Environmental Quality Incentives Program*	Landowners or operators	Private	Depends on the state and year	Partial "cost payments" depend on the region and the practice
	Conservation Innovation Grants	State or local units of government, federally-recognized American Indian tribes, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals	Project must relate to an innovation that can be applied to private working lands	Changes yearly and may be different for state pools and national pool	50% match
	Conservation Stewardship Program	Individuals, legal entities, joint operations, or Indian tribes that meet the stewardship threshold for at least two priority resource concerns when they apply	Private	Depends on the state and year	None
	Regional Conservation Partnership Program	Non-profits, local government agencies, Tribes, educational institutions, etc.	Private, or private and public	National, CCAs, and State pools will have different priorities named in their RFPs	Non-federal leverage required but not quantified

FUNDING PROGRAMS OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

Agency	Program	Maximum Award	Assistance Type	Application Period	Duration
US Forest Service	*Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program*	No more than $4 million per year per project, for up to 50% of cost of implementation and monitoring on NFS land (doesn't include planning, work on non-NFS lands)	Technical & Financial	N/A	Annual funding, which expires in 2019
	Forest Legacy Program	<75% of project costs	Financial	Depends on the state	N/A, these are predominently perpetual easements
	Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program	$24,000	Financial	Depends on the state	12 months, renewal allowed, may only have one grant open at a time
Both	*Joint Chiefs Restoration Partnership*	>$4 million	Technical & Financial	Late Summer/ Early Fall	Annually for up to 3 years
NRCS	*Environmental Quality Incentives Program*	$450,000	Technical & Financial	Rolling	Contracts last up to 10 years
	Conservation Innovation Grants	$75K for State pool, $2M for National pool	Financial	Between Fall and late Winter	Projects can last 1-3 years, no renewals
	Conservation Stewardship Program	Different payment limits depending on the years enrolled and type of operation	Financial	Rolling	Contracts last 5 years with an option to renew
	Regional Conservation Partnership Program	$10 million per project over 5 years	Technical & Financial	Spring and Summer	Contracts up to 5 years

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program

Forest Service

What is it?

Congress created the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) in 2009 to promote forest health and resiliency, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and support economic well-being in local communities through collaborative, science-based restoration efforts. There are a total of 23 CFLRP projects, which will be funded annually through 2019 (subject to Congressional appropriations). Projects range from 50,000 to 2.1 million acres, and many have significant tribal, state or private lands within their boundaries.

What kinds of projects are funded?

CFLRP has several unique features, including a requirement that projects sustain community and collaborative engagement. Project proposals are required to have the pledged support of local collaborative groups for the 10-year duration of the program, and the subsequent 5-year period of multi-party monitoring.

In addition, each project is expected to achieve multiple objectives:

- Encourage ecological, economic, and social sustainability
- Leverage local resources with national and private resources
- Re-establish natural fire regimes and reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire
- Experiment with and demonstrate the effectiveness of ecological restoration techniques
- Encourage utilization of forest restoration by-products

How is it funded?

Congress appropriates up to $40 million in annual funding for CFLRP. Each project can receive no more than $4 million a year, which can cover no more than 50% of the cost of implementing and monitoring restoration treatments on National Forest System lands. These funds can be matched by various sources, including:

- In-kind or financial contributions from partners
- Forest Service appropriated, permanent, or trust funds
- Retained receipts from stewardship contracts

CFLRP funds cannot support planning or work on non-NFS lands, so projects use a variety of other resources to accomplish their work on private, state, or tribal lands. Strategic investments on federal lands can leverage new and significant funding from a range of partners who see the benefit of building on these efforts. Individual forest units may also be able to provide additional funding from their budgets.

Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

What is the role for partners?

There are ongoing opportunities for partners and contractors to engage with the projects already underway.

- **Participate in the collaborative process!** The collaborative groups that work together to support CFLRP projects are open entities. Meetings are public, and new partners are encouraged to join at any time.

- **Lend your capacity and expertise.** New partner groups who can contribute time, money, facilitation, or knowledge to a CFLRP project may be welcomed. However, newcomers looking to get involved should take great care in building relationships and respecting the longstanding partnerships already at work in these areas. Opportunities include stewardship contracting and agreements, elements of ecological, social, and economic multi-party monitoring, and job-training, youth, and volunteer programs.

Things to Know:

- The annual $40 million in funding for CFLRP is fully committed between the 23 existing projects and cannot currently fund new projects.

- Congressional authorization for CFLRP ends in 2019. However, the program enjoys strong bipartisan support. Should the program be extended, there may be future opportunities to accept additional projects and/or extend support to existing ones.

- CFLRP projects often serve as a catalyst for additional forest restoration and investment within the National Forest. Therefore, there may be opportunities to get involved or access other funding sources within the project area.

"Capacity begets more capacity. Once you get the ball rolling, it becomes an attractor."
- Tony Cheng,
Colorado Forest Restoration Institute

Learn More:

- Explore the US Forest Service CFLRP website and map to see if there's a project in your area.

- CFLRP Project Factsheets are available on The Nature Conservancy website, which include information and points of contact for each project.

Ask an Expert!

Dylan Kruse / Policy Director / Sustainable Northwest
Dylan coordinates the CFLR Coalition, a national alliance formed to ensure successful implementation of the CFLR program through funding and policy recommendations.

Call Dylan at (503) 221-6911 x 115 or email dkruse@sustainablenorthwest.org.

Lindsay Buchanan / CFLRP Coordinator / Forest Service
Lindsay is the National Coordinator for the CFLR program in Washington DC. She provides support and guidance to the 23 CFLRP projects across the country.

Call Lindsay at (503) 808-2810 or email lindsaysbuchanan@fs.fed.us.

Forest Legacy Program

Forest Service

What is it?

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is intended to protect important forest areas from development and fragmentation, either through fee-simple land purchases or permanent conservation easements. The easements restrict development and use multi-resource management plans to protect values such as soil and water, biological diversity, recreation, timber, and more.[1]

What kinds of projects are funded?

Project proposals:

- Must be at least 75 percent forested and located in landscapes that have been designated by the state as Forest Legacy Areas
- May involve a single landowner and property or an assortment of parcels and landowners
- May be submitted by a sponsoring organization (like a land trust) and/or an eligible landowner (including tribes)

How are projects selected?

Project proposals are submitted by states and forwarded to the Forest Service (generally in November) for additional review and final prioritization by a national panel (usually in January). Projects are scored based on three criteria:

1. Public benefits gained from the protection and management of the property
2. The likelihood of conversion resulting in a loss of forest resources and public benefits
3. Whether the project fits within a larger conservation plan or initiative, and enhances previous conservation investments

How is FLP funded?

FLP usually receives between $50-60 million a year through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Projects are funded through USFS State and Private Forestry, and can be used for up to 75% of project costs (for both easements and land purchases). At least 25% of the remaining project costs must come from non-federal sources, which can include a landowner match or state or local sources.

What is the role for partners?

Partner organizations can help identify critical landscapes for protection, initiate conversations with landowners, and work with state agencies to develop projects for consideration. Partners can also play an important role in providing matching funds.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Work with your state agency and partners early** in the project development stage to best capture the diversity of social, ecological and economic values of the proposed project. Be sure to survey complementary efforts that may align with your proposal.
- **Evaluate title and third party interests early** on to catch any issues that may make the property ineligible for FLP (e.g. right-of-ways, outstanding mineral interests).
- **Look to additional resources,** such as EQIP, to fund the implementation of a multi-resource management plan for an easement.

Things to know:

- FLP is a **highly competitive** program. Typically, up to 60 projects are proposed by the states each year, and more recently less than 20 projects have received funding in a given year.

1 *Forest Legacy Program.* (2013, December 16). Retrieved from http://www.fs.fed.us/cooperativeforestry/programs/loa/aboutflp.shtml

Photo Credit: Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

- The process of applying, being selected, receiving funding, and conducting due diligence on a project can take several years. It requires a high degree of commitment from landowners and partners.
- Conservation easements (usually held by the state agency) account for 65% of all FLP projects, in which properties remain in private ownership.
- FLP can only be used for acquisition related expenses, and not implementation of the multi-resource management plan. Other resources, such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) dollars, can be used for that purpose.
- Many property owners benefit both through the sale or donation of their property rights, and through reduced taxes that accompany the land use limitations of their easement.

Ask an Expert!

Margaret Haines / Natural Resources Specialist / US Forest Service, State & Private Forestry

Call Margee at (505) 366-3816 or email mhaines@fs.fed.us.

Contact information for each state's FLP coordinator is available on this Forest Service website.

Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program

National Forest Foundation & Forest Service

What is it?

Administered by the National Forest Foundation through a partnership with the Forest Service, the Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program (CCLS) invests in building the capacity of collaborative groups and community based organizations to implement landscape scale restoration projects. The program is one of the few programs designed specifically to support partners, collaborative groups and community based organizations in carrying out projects that restore landscapes and strengthen local economies. It is currently available in Southeast Alaska, Oregon, Washington, and California. Additional states may be added as funding is available.

What kinds of projects are funded?

The two primary goals of the program are to help community-based and collaborative organizations remove barriers to watershed and/or landscape scale restoration projects, and help facilitate job creation and retention and business development in their region. Each region also has goals unique to that region's context and needs. Funds can be used for organization and staff support, travel, community outreach, and meeting facilitation or group coordination. Funds cannot be used for outreach and/or education as a primary project component; any form of advocacy or litigation; or for providing funds directly to the Forest Service or other federal entities.

How is it funded?

The program was launched in 2011 in Region 6, through a cooperative agreement with the Forest Service and NRCS. At this time all funds are federal and come solely from regional Forest Service offices. The program is in neither legislated nor appropriated. Some private foundation funding has provided additional support for the program, and the National Forest Foundation is currently fundraising to bring additional resources to the program.

How do I apply?

Eligible applicants include non-profits; universities; and Native American tribes. Each region has different timelines for proposals. Requests for Proposals typically occur once a year. Proposals must include a letter of support from your Forest Supervisor, and projects typically need to be completed within a year.

Things to Know:

- Funds *can* be spent on projects on private land, using the Wyden Authority, but they must provide a clear, tangible benefit to the adjacent forest service lands. Nearly all funding in the past has supported work on or adjacent to NFS land.
- Proposal requests are limited to a maximum of $24,000. Approximately half of the proposals in 2014-2015 were funded.
- CCLS is a discretionary program and could be eliminated depending on budgetary constraints.
- CCLS award funds cannot be used to meet the matching requirements of any federal award program.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Identify other sources of funds to leverage**, such as technical assistance or state sources, to make your application more competitive.
- **Work with a fiscal sponsor** to develop a project proposal if your organization or group is not eligible to apply (e.g. if your forest collaborative is not a registered non-profit).
- **Work with your Forest Service staff!** Their support is critical for project success.

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.

Photo Credit: Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

Ask an Expert!

Adam Llijeblad / Director, Conservation Awards / National Forest Foundation
Adam oversees NFF's national grantmaking program and helps coordinate conservation partnerships.

Call Adam at (406) 830-3358 or email aliljeblad@nationalforests.org.

Maia Enzer / Acting Assistant Director, Office of Communications and Community Engagement / USFS Region 6
Maia advises leadership and provides support to the field on collaboration and partnership issues. She has expertise in advancing policy solutions related to forest restoration and community economic development, with a focus on federal lands policy.

Call Maia at (503) 808-2320 or email mjenzer@fs.fed.us.

Joint Chiefs Restoration Partnership

Forest Service & NRCS

What is it?

The Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership supports all-lands projects that reduce wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protect water quality and supply, and/or improve habitat for at-risk species across public and private lands. Sometimes called Two Chiefs, the initiative also encourages and facilitates coordination between the agencies while providing technical and financial resources to partnership-based projects.

How is Joint Chiefs funded?

The Joint Chiefs Initiative was created in 2014 by NRCS and USFS leadership, and is not the result of Congressional action. Therefore, rather than receiving specific appropriations, the agencies award targeted resources through existing programs and budgetary line items, which are allocated to the appropriate NRCS state office and USFS forest unit. NRCS provides technical and financial resources through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The Forest Service provides technical and financial resources through various programs and budgetary line items in the State and Private Forestry division and the National Forest System division.

How do I apply?

Projects must be jointly designed and submitted by local NRCS and USFS offices and can last up to three years. Individuals or entities interested in engaging in the design of a potential project should approach their local or regional leadership. Applications are generally accepted in late summer and early fall, and are reviewed in a nationally competitive process by USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Joint Chiefs Must Do's:

- Obtain two levels of signatures: the local NRCS Conservationist and Forest Supervisor, and the NRCS State Conservationist and USFS Regional Forester.

Photo Credit: Lindsay Warness

- Address at least one of the following goals:
  1. Reduce wildfire threats to communities and landowners
  2. Protect water quality and supply
  3. Improve habitat for at-risk species across public and private lands

- Include a combination of activities on private land and National Forest or state land.

- Include land treatments and education, outreach, or coordination activities on public, state, tribal or private land.

- Leverage non-federal resources (in-kind and/or financial). There is no formal requirement for the type or amount of these outside resources, but higher levels of leverage make a proposal more competitive.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Work with NRCS and USFS early on, and enlist their help in designing the proposal.** Their support is essential, because both agencies must sign-off on your proposal for it to be eligible for funding.
- **Competitive proposals seek support for implementation, not planning processes.** For work on federal lands, NEPA decisions may be required. Therefore, project partners should ideally have experience working with one another.
- **Work with your Forest Supervisor and State Conservationist to socialize your project proposal within their agencies.** Garnering interest in your project with leadership in Washington, D.C. will help your project stand out among other applicants.

Things to know:

- Because Joint Chiefs is an initiative designed by both agencies, and is not a formal, Congressionally-authorized program, future changes to agency leadership could impact the continuation of this initiative.
- In the 2015 and 2016 funding cycles, approximately 40 applications were received each year. Of those, 15 projects were approved in 2015, and 11 were approved in 2016.
- Total funding for new Joint Chiefs projects fluctuates each year depending on agency budgets and competing needs. In 2016, combined NRCS and USFS funding per project ranged from $148,000 to over $4 million. Of all projects funded to date, over 35% exceeded $1 million.

Photo Credit: Nils Christoffersen

Ask an Expert!

Bill Gamble / District Ranger / Wallowa Whitman National Forest
Bill oversees the implementation of a Joint Chiefs project in eastern Oregon called East Face of the Elkhorn Mountains.

Call Bill at (541) 963-7186 or email bgamble@fs.fed.us.

Reach out to your local USDA Service Center and your local forest unit for more information on designing a joint proposal.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

NRCS

What is it?

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) supports the design and implementation of conservation activities on private working lands through a range of technical and financial assistance.

Who can apply?

Non-industrial private forestland owners, tribes, and agricultural producers are all eligible for EQIP contracts, which range from 1 to 10 years in duration (but typically average 3 years).

How does it work?

All assistance through EQIP begins with a conservation plan that outlines recommended conservation practices for a property. NRCS works with producers to develop these plans, which include an inventory and analysis of a property's soil, water, and other natural resource needs, as well as a package of recommended NRCS conservation practice alternatives. The producer can then choose from those alternatives and apply for EQIP funding to assist with their implementation. There are numerous conservation practices for forest stand improvement, forest trails and landings, fuel breaks, weed control, prescribed burning, riparian forest buffers, and more.

How is it funded?

The 2014 Farm Bill provided mandatory permanent funding for EQIP. Program dollars are allocated to each state from the national NRCS budget.

EQIP contracts provide "practice" or "cost" payments that cover a portion of the implementation costs of a conservation practice. The remaining cost is borne by the landowner or can be matched using other sources. The amount of support is based on regional costs, on a per-acre or per-practice basis. Payment schedules are available on each state's NRCS website.

How do I apply?

Producers apply directly to NRCS field offices for EQIP support, and applications are accepted on a continual basis. They are then batched together during scheduled periods and ranked with other applications in the fund pool for selection (each state creates their own EQIP initiatives with separate pools). Requests are ranked based on their expected conservation benefits and whether they address the priority natural resource concerns of the fund pool.

"It can go a long way when a partner advocates for a particular tool or program, especially as line officers are often busy and some opportunities just aren't on their radar screen. A friendly nudge can encourage us to think about things in a different way."

- Tera Little, USFS

Things to Know:

- Descriptions of each state's approved conservation practices can be found in its Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

- Individual contracts cannot exceed $450,000, and can cover costs essential to the planning, design, materials and installations of the practice, as well as forgone income resulting from the practice.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Become an advocate.** As a community partner, there are many ways you can facilitate the use of EQIP in your region. These include promoting awareness of the program, its eligibility requirements, and application sign-up periods; and assisting NRCS offices in understanding local resource concerns to develop appropriate funding pools.

- **Apply early!** Generally, EQIP funding is fully utilized every year. Be sure to apply before the posted "batch date," and for the most appropriate funding pool.

Learn More

Contact your local NRCS Service Center to learn more about selection cycles, funding priorities, and any special EQIP initiatives offered in your state.

Photo Credit: Bob Christensen

Conservation Innovation Grants
NRCS

What is it?
Conservation Innovation Grants (CIGs) fund on-the-ground projects that test, scale-up, and/or stimulate the development of new conservation innovations or technologies on private working lands. The program aims to transfer conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) into NRCS technical manuals and guides, or into the private sector.

What kinds of projects are funded?
Funds are awarded to non-federal partners for single or multi-year projects of up to three years. They must promote on-the-ground conservation related to forest stewardship or agricultural production, and can include activities like:

- Pilot projects and field demonstrations of promising approaches
- Conservation outreach and education that improves the accessibility or adoption of practices among under-served communities
- Developing new tools to measure the conservation benefits of certain practices

How is CIG funded?
CIG is authorized in the Farm Bill and uses EQIP program funding. Applicants must provide at least a 50% match through non-federal cash or in-kind resources.

How do I apply?
There are two funding pools to which state and local governments, tribes, non-governmental organizations, and individuals are eligible to apply:

- The **national CIG funding pool** is offered on a yearly basis, and Requests for Proposals may be published between fall and late winter (often January). Applicants must first submit a pre-proposal for review, followed by a full proposal if invited. Project scopes may include watershed-

Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

level, regional, multi-state, or nationwide challenges.

- NRCS State Conservationists are authorized to use up to 5% of their yearly EQIP allocation for a **state-based round** of CIG funding. Depending on the state, funding may be made available every year, or less frequently (every few years). Application deadlines are typically publicized after the national pool deadlines are announced. Allowable project scopes are multi-county, small watershed, or statewide.

CIG Must Do's:

- Directly address one of the annually selected natural resource priorities, as outlined in the Request for Proposals. There are usually several priorities each year (e.g. water quality, soil health, environmental markets).
- Involve EQIP-eligible farmers or ranchers.
- Include a 50% match (or more) of the award through non-federal and/or in-kind contributions, as well as all necessary technical assistance.

Things to know:

- The average annual national CIG pool of funding totals approximately $20 million, with individual projects receiving up to $2 million in federal resources. State-level projects can be awarded up to $75,000.
- In Fiscal Year 2015, over 430 national pool applications were received (in over 9 funding categories), and 45 were awarded funding.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Deliverables should be specific** and have a clear connection to the funding being requested. Make a clear case for how the project 1) connects to a future technology transfer, 2) could be scalable by NRCS, or 3) is a conservation practice standard modification.
- **Focus on partnerships!** Long-standing or creative partnerships make a proposal more attractive, especially when accompanied by matching funds.
- **Consider applying to state funding** rather than national funding, if the maximum allowable award is sufficient for your needs. State funding processes can be less competitive and provide more pre-application assistance.

- Up to 10% of the national pool funding can be directed to underserved populations, such as tribes and beginning ranchers. These projects may also be able to receive a higher level of federal match.

Getting Started:

- Your NRCS state program manager is a helpful resource when applying to either pool of funding.
- Potential applicant webinars are offered by NRCS headquarters during every application period (one at beginning, and one two weeks before the closing date).
- Application and webinar information is all available on the national CIG website.

Ask an Expert!

Gary Burnett / Executive Director / Blackfoot Challenge
As Executive Director of Blackfoot Challenge, a watershed stewardship group in Montana, Gary has adminstered three Conservation Innovation Grants related to wildlife, water or irrigation, and forestry.

Call Gary at (406) 793-3900 or email gary@blackfootchallenge.org.

Conservation Stewardship Program

NRCS

What is it?

The Conservation Stewardship Program provides financial incentives for private landowners and operators to maintain and improve existing conservation systems on their land. Participants such as forestland stewards, producers, and landowners enter into five year contracts with NRCS, and earn payments based in part on their conservation benefit - the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

What kinds of projects are funded?

A voluntary program, CSP provides incentives for landowners to invest in additional conservation practices, above and beyond existing practices. Forestry-related enhancements can facilitate treatments such as wildlife habitat and wildlife-friendly fencing, extension of riparian forest buffers, prescribed burns, and weed management.

How is it funded?

CSP is funded through the Farm Bill, and is authorized to enroll an additional 10 million acres each year. Individual contracts can be awarded up to $40,000 per year or $200,000 over the life of the contract; a joint operation can receive up to $80,000 a year or $400,000. The value of payments and technical assistance average $18 per acre nationwide.

How do I apply?

Eligible applicants include individuals, legal entities, joint operations or tribes. CSP can enroll various land uses, including nonindustrial private forestland, grassland, rangeland, pastureland, tribal agricultural land, and cropland. Land must meet the "stewardship threshold" for at least two priority resource concerns at time of application (and must address another resource concern by the end of the contract period).

Applications are accepted on a continual basis, reviewed in periodic batches by the state office, and ranked according to resource benefit. The NRCS national office establishes at least one ranking period annually. Reach out to your local USDA Service Center for more information on applying.

Things to Know:

- As of FY17, the system for CSP payment rates has changed. Applicants will receive a base payment, plus additional performance payments based on the degree to which enhancements are applied.

- Contracts are for five years, with an option to renew one time. If renewed, applicants are required to meet additional resource concerns beyond those in their previous contract.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Consider starting small.** Although not required, it's common for operators to get started with other USDA programs, such as EQIP, and graduate on to CSP.

- **Write a forest management plan.** Since CSP is designed to build upon the existing conservation efforts of landowners and operators, it may be smart to convey that active management is being performed on your property.

- Take a look at the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Self-Screening Checklist to see if you meet CSP's stewardship thresholds.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

NRCS

What is it?

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) supports landscape-scale conservation projects developed and driven by local partners. The first program of its kind, RCPP consolidated several existing NRCS programs in the 2014 Farm Bill and is intended to coordinate conservation practices across regions and landscapes.

How does it work?

Partners apply for the resources of multiple NRCS programs in one application and then work with NRCS to deploy those resources among targeted landowners and operators in their project area. Projects must address a specific resource of special concern in a given watershed or region, or with private land stewards that are interested in pursuing innovative conservation objectives. Projects can last up to 5 years.

How is it funded?

RCPP utilizes resources from various programs, such as the EQIP, CSP, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, and Healthy Forests Restoration Program. Within a single RCPP application, partners apply for financial and technical assistance from the appropriate NRCS source, to achieve the broader vision of the project. Partners are expected to contribute significant non-federal resources, whether through cash or in-kind services such as monitoring or technical assistance. Although there is no official definition of "significant contribution," partner proposals receive higher rankings in the selection process with greater non-federal leverage.

How do I apply?

Funding announcements are made each year, typically in March. Partners initially submit pre-proposals, after which selected projects are invited to submit full proposals. Awards are made by the end of the calendar year.

Eligible partners include non-profits, local government agencies, and tribes. Partners jointly design and submit project proposals to one of three funding pools:

"The best way to push boundaries is to find an example of a successful project somewhere else that did what you are trying to do."
- Bob Christensen, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

- The **national pool** makes awards based on conservation priorities that are announced each year. Applications are submitted directly to the national office, where funding decisions are made.

- The **states** receive funding for in-state projects, which are awarded based on conservation priorities set by the NRCS State Conservationist each year. Funding decisions are made at each state office.

- Eight **Critical Conservation Areas** (CCA's) have their own priority resource concerns (e.g. the Columbia River Basin). Applications that fall within a CCA are submitted directly to the national office, where funding decisions are made.

Things to Know:

- According to the RCPP website, the National pool receives 40% of all RCPP funding; states received a combined total of 25%; and CCA's receive 35%.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Work closely with your NRCS State Conservationist and state office** while developing your proposal. They can advise which funding pool to apply to, which NRCS programs will fund your proposed activities, and how to strengthen your overall application given existing efforts and past RCPP awards. At the same time, you can make a case for why your project fits into the RCPP mission.
- **Provide details!** Although the pre-proposal requirements call for less specificity than the full proposal, include as much detail as possible.
- **Stress the outcomes** resulting from proposed activities, and have landowners/operators ready and willing to engage in the project if approved.
- RCPP funds can support **technical assistance for third party providers** (such as staff support for community based organizations), but they are tightly coupled with expectations of helping private landowners utilize NRCS programs.

Field crews for the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership. HNFP received $2 mil. from the Alaska State RCPP fund in 2015. Photo Credit: Bethany Goodrich.

- In 2016, ~32% of applications were funded.
- You must select one pool of funding to apply to; you may not apply to all three!
- There is no minimum funding award; the maximum award is no more than $10 million per project over the 5 years of the RCPP contract.

Learn More:

- Reach out to your State Office's NRCS Leader for Programs, or equivalent position, to discuss your project ideas.
- Information on application deadlines, forms, informational webinars, and past awards is available on the national RCPP website.

Ask an Expert!

Bob Christensen / Regional Catalyst / Sustainable Southeast Partnership
Bob coordinated the successful application of the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership to the RCPP Alaska State fund. He now coordinates the project's implementation in Southeast Alaska.

Call Bob at (907) 209-3006 or email baidarkabob@gmail.com.

"In my experience, keys to success are often more about people than programs. Having a district ranger that is willing to take risks, line officers that can be flexible in staff time investments, and field staff who are good listeners and patient with collaboration, plus community groups, businesses, and individuals that have a vested interest in project success are essential."

- Bob Christensen, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

AUTHORITIES

Photo Credit: Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

Good Neighbor Authority

Forest Service & BLM

What is it?

The Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) allows the Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management to pass-through federal dollars to state agencies in order to implement watershed and forest management activities on federal lands. Permanently authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill, GNA facilitates cross-jurisdictional, all-lands projects, expands limited federal capacity to plan and implement projects, and addresses shared priorities like fire-risk, invasive species, water quality and wood products supply. The federal agency retains decision making authority.

By using the authority, states can conduct work such as:

- Emergency watershed stabilization on federal lands
- Planning and research required in a NEPA process
- Forest thinning through timber sale contracts
- Restoring fish habitat and water quality

How does it work?

Good Neighbor Authority projects draw from regular appropriations of the Forest Service or BLM, as GNA was not authorized with additional, or specifically appropriated, dollars. The funds can come from a variety of sources, such as appropriated dollars, stewardship receipts, or program income generated from a timber sale so long as the purpose of the work being conducted and funding are aligned.

What is the role for partners?

Partners can encourage the use of GNA on a National Forest by bringing their suggestions to the relevant state agency or forest. State agencies that have signed master agreements with the Forest Service can then develop forest-level Supplemental Project Agreements to outline and accomplish specific work and budgets. Additionally, partners or collaborators already deeply engaged with the Forest Service might serve as liaisons with state partners, particularly with respect to understanding Forest Service processes.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Engage your state agency partners** in order to build relationships, trust and understanding early on (a good idea regardless if there's a GNA agreement already in place).
- **Help monitor!** Because GNA is relatively new, there are important opportunities for partners to help monitor the efficiencies, effectiveness, and differences between state and federal implementation on particulars such as cost, time, and quality of work.
- **Evaluate new methodologies** other than those prescribed in USFS handbooks and guidance documents. These are great first opportunities to explore different approaches to project implementation (e.g. timber sale layout and marking).
- States like Oregon and Montana have made complementary investments in federal forest health, either financially (e.g. Oregon's Federal Forest Restoration Program) or with staff time (both have hired state liaisons), paving the way for thinking about new models of cooperation.

Things to know:

- GNA began as a pilot in 2009 with the states of Colorado and Utah, and was expanded to all 50 states and Puerto Rico in the 2014 Farm Bill. For that reason, the authority is fairly new to most forest units, and the flexibility of the authority has not been fully explored.
- GNA does not have a matching requirement

"In Montana the Department of Natural Resources funded a liaison position with the US Forest Service whose role is to help identify opportunities with new Farm Bill authorities. This position, and the Governor's Forests in Focus initiative, has been instrumental in spurring conversations, coordination and collaboration between federal and state agencies."
- Tera Little, US Forest Service

(although it is encouraged), nor does it require mutual benefit between the parties.[1]

- The 2014 Farm Bill and the 2014 Appropriations Act provide differing guidance on GNA, which will continue to influence how it is used until the appropriations language expires in 2019. The Forest Service plans to primarily use the Farm Bill language when implementing GNA, but may lean on appropriations language depending on the work that is required.

- Federal environmental laws, such as NEPA, ESA, and CWA still apply to any management action achieved through GNA. However, because state and federal laws have differing provisions for procurement and contracting, there may be a difference in wage requirements, labor laws, and protection for small business owners included in state versus federal contracts.

Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

1 *Good Neighbor Authority Questions and Comments.* (2015, December 14). Retrieved from http://www.fs.fed.us/farmbill/documents/gna/GNA-FAQs20151214.pdf

Ask an Expert!

Chad Davis / Senior Policy Analyst / Oregon Department of Forestry
Early in 2016, Oregon's Governor, Department of Forestry, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Regional Forester signed a GNA Master Agreement. As an ODF Policy Analyst, Chad is an expert on GNA policy and implementation.

Call Chad at (503) 602-2130 or email chad.davis@oregon.gov.

Stewardship Authority

Forest Service & BLM

What is it?

Stewardship contracts and agreements allow the Forest Service and BLM to provide social, ecological, and economic benefits to public lands and nearby communities. The purpose is to "achieve land management goals for the national forests and the public lands that meet local and rural community needs" (P.L. 108-7). Initially piloted in 1999, the now-permanent authority is widely used across the National Forest System and BLM lands, leading to creative and efficient bundling of timber and service activities.

How does it work?

The stewardship contracting authorities provide several unique ways for federal agencies and community members to design, package, and offer innovative forest stewardship treatments. Defining features include the ability to combine timber sales and service work into one contract, and the inclusion of collaborative input. In addition, stewardship allows the Forest Service (or BLM) to:

- Award long-term contracts/agreements (up to 10-years)
- Exchange the value of forest goods for the cost of services
- Use "best value" contracting, meaning the federal agency must consider the best value to the government, not just price
- Focus on the "end result" desired, allowing contractors to determine the best approach
- Reinvest remaining funds ('retained receipts') in additional restoration projects

Activities performed under stewardship contracts can include vegetation removal, road and trail maintenance or removal, watershed restoration, and fish and wildlife habitat improvement.

What is the role for partners?

Stewardship contracting was built around the principles of community and collaborative engagement, making the role for partners numerous. Although federal land managers retain decision making authority, interested parties can collaborate throughout the process, from concept to design, through implementation and monitoring. Partners can be particularly helpful in the development of desired end results, in determining best-value criteria (focusing on how proposals will be evaluated upon the basis of price, technical approach, past performance, and local community benefits) and multi-party monitoring. As with many tools, partners also play a critical role as liaison to local community interests and knowledge.

When is this the right tool, and when is it not?

Many factors determine whether stewardship is the right approach for a given project.

- The **scope** of a project may determine if it is more cost effective for the Forest Service to bundle contracts and activities, or issue smaller discrete contracts instead. Stewardship contracts are most efficient and effective where the scope of activities match the capabilities of existing contractors, or where contractors have a track record of working cooperatively according to their individual proficiencies.

- If a task has a high degree of **specialization**, it may be more efficient to issue a separate service contract with an expert contractor. This allows the Forest Service to assign a subject matter specialist to track that contract's requirements, rather than requiring the administrator of a stewardship contract to track it alongside many other pieces of a larger contract package.

Things to know:

- The decision to create a stewardship project can come before or after the NEPA process, and is not part of the NEPA process.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Include community benefit.** The Forest Service considers local community benefit in the evaluation of stewardship contract offers.
- **Begin with small projects** and move toward larger projects. This creates a strong foundation for future partnerships.
- **Use stewardship and Wyden authorities in a complementary fashion.** Retained receipts from Stewardship can be used to fund projects on proximate private land and waters where benefits to public lands can be demonstrated.

- An Integrated Resource Timber Contract (IRTC) is used when the value of the timber being removed exceeds the value of the service work; an Integrated Resource Service Contract (IRSC) is used when the cost of the service work is more than the value of the timber removed, and receipts cannot be retained.

- Along with contracting authorities, the authorizing legislation for Stewardship also provides for stewardship agreements. Both the USFS and BLM have created stewardship agreement templates and have implemented several around the nation, typically in partnership with national and local NGOs.

Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

Learn More:

Many partners have developed excellent guidance, recommendations, and case studies for stewardship contracting since the tool was first created, including RVCC. Some key references include:

- Sustainable Northwest's Stewardship Contracting Guidebooks - three guidebooks focused on best value criteria, best practices for collaboration, and multi-party monitoring.

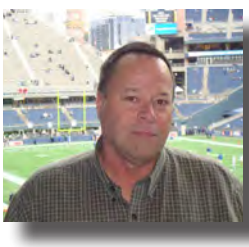
- National Forest Foundation stewardship contracting resources

Ask an Expert!

Cass Moseley / Director / Ecosystem Workforce Program

Cass Moseley is a professor and associate vice president for research at the University of Oregon. Her work focuses on sustainable rural development and community resilience, especially workforce development and conditions for forest workers.

Call Cass at (541) 346-4545 or email cmoseley@uoregon.edu.



Michael Daugherty / USFS

Program Lead for Project Preparation and Implementation including Valuation, Contracts and Provisions, and Regional Stewardship Coordinator

Call Michael at (503) 808-2519 or email mdaugherty@fs.fed.us.

Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

Wyden Authority

Forest Service & BLM

What is it?

The Wyden Authority allows the Forest Service and BLM to conduct restoration work on non-federal lands if the work provides tangible benefits to watersheds on public lands. Projects must advance agency goals and objectives, and should include protection, restoration, and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and other resources; or reduction of risk for natural disaster where public safety is threatened; or both.

How does it work?

The Forest Service or BLM can enter into cooperative agreements with landowners, non-profits, state, local or tribal governments, and other federal agencies to improve fish and wildlife habitat or reduce the risk of a natural disaster. Unlike the Good Neighbor Authority, cost-sharing and mutual benefit between the parties is usually required. The Wyden Authority has often been used for projects such as riparian restoration, fish passage, watershed assessments, surveys, and monitoring.

What is the role for partners?

The expectation of mutual benefit and the application to private lands make partnerships essential. Community groups and collaboratives interested in a project that might benefit from the Wyden Authority should work closely with their local forest staff.

TIPS & TRICKS

- The Wyden Authority does not appear to be very well understood either with partners or internally - there is some ambiguity and potential flexibility.
- Some forests have applied retained receipts from stewardship contracts to implement restoration work on adjacent private lands, using the Wyden Authority as justification.

Things to know:

- The Wyden Authority is always used in conjunction with an agreement, whether participating, cooperative, or other type.
- The Forest Service and BLM use different approaches and policies for establishing cooperative agreements. What might work for one agency won't necessarily work for the other.
- The authority does not come with dedicated funding. Any funds must come from existing appropriations.

Ask an Expert!

Johnny Sundstrom / Executive Director / The Siuslaw Institute, Inc.
As one of the first pilots for Stewardship Contracting, the Siuslaw National Forest and its partners have long been recognized for exemplary leadership in creating, initiating, utilizing, and maintaining improvements in the application and use of the Authority. Johnny and his partners were also the first to successfully challenge the agencies (USFS & BLM) to allow the Wyden Amendment Authority to be applicable for retained receipts from these contracts.

Call Johnny at (541) 964-5901 or email siwash@pioneer.net.

National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy

Forest Service & BLM

What is it?

The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (the Strategy) was mandated by the 2009 FLAME Act, which called on the US Departments of Agriculture and Interior to create a collaboratively developed and implemented approach to wildfire challenges across multiple jurisdictions. This was the first time all stakeholders involved in wildfire management jointly developed a shared national strategy.

How does it work?

The vision of the Cohesive Strategy is to safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a nation, live with wildland fire. The Strategy has three primary goals:

1. Restore and maintain resilient landscapes across all jurisdictions
2. Create fire-adapted communities
3. Promote safe, effective, efficient, risk-based wildfire response

Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

Broadly, implementation of the Cohesive Strategy includes responsible agencies and stakeholders' strategic investment of resources, alignment and coordination of activities, and management of landscapes according to each agency's or organization's respective responsibilities.

What is the role for partners?

The Cohesive Strategy is not a program with designated funding - rather, it is a strategic approach that guides how federal and state land managers, and other stakeholders, prioritize their activities, and coordinate across boundaries. The Forest Service and DOI agencies seek non-federal partner engagement in the implementation of the Cohesive Strategy through three regional strategy groups, a national strategy group, and through state and local partners working with landowners and managers on developing and implementing innovative and aligned strategies that integrate strategy goals to achieve improved fire management outcomes for landscapes and people.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Explain your alignment with and implementation of the Cohesive Strategy** in your materials when applying for funding from federal programs, such as Joint Chiefs.
- **Incorporate Cohesive Strategy goals into local planning and implementation efforts.** This can help to improve competitiveness for existing federal funding. Examples include Community Wildfire Protection Plans, Spatial Fire Management Plans, or Hazard Mitigation Plans.

Things to know:

- Wildland fire is an ever-increasing threat to communities, natural resources, and infrastructure, particularly in the West. The Cohesive Strategy is intended to help all stakeholders work better together to address a highly complex problem.

- Working groups developed three regional action plans (Northern, Southern and Western) to acknowledge the unique regional contexts. Each establishes regionally relevant strategies for addressing the biophysical, social, and institutional conditions present existing in those regions.

- While there is no funding directly attached to the Cohesive Strategy itself, the Forest Service, NRCS and DOI have prioritized funding support for projects that advance the goals of the regional action plans using cross-boundary collaboration. The Forest Service, in particular, has chartered several "Cohesive Strategy Pilot Projects," using discretionary funding to help demonstrate innovative approaches and best practices for Cohesive Strategy implementation.

Learn More:

- Forests and Rangelands - a hub of information on fire, fuels, and land management for federal land managers and their partners - has a webpage on the Cohesive Strategy.

- Western Regional Strategy Committee Blog

- Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

Ask an Expert!

Katie Lighthall / Cohesive Strategy Coordinator / Western Governor's Association

Katie provides leadership for the implementation of the Cohesive Strategy in the Western region.

Call Katie at (541) 408-3048 or email westerncohesivestrategy@gmail.com.

Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

Tribal Forest Protection Act

Forest Service

What is it?

Through the Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA), eligible tribes may propose a specific project to the Forest Service that addresses a resource concern originating on federal lands but impacting adjacent tribal trust land or tribal communities. Resource concerns include fire, insect infestation, disease, and other threats. Projects can include but are not limited to on-the-ground restoration projects, technical assistance, and trainings. USDA and DOI are authorized to give special consideration to projects proposed by tribes under the TFPA.[1]

How is it funded?

TFPA is an authority, not a funded program, and therefore it does not receive separate appropriations. Activities conducted within a TFPA project may be funded by an appropriate line item or program (e.g. using the Hazardous Fuels line item to pay for controlled burning), or other non-appropriated sources. Third parties, such as community partners, may also be involved in funding and doing work on the ground.

TIPS & TRICKS

- **Submit proposals before the beginning of a new fiscal year**.
- **Know your role as a partner.** While federally recognized tribes must propose a TFPA project, other stakeholder groups can be partners and support the proposed efforts.
- For more background on this program and its opportunities and challenges, consult the report "Fulfilling the Promise of the Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004," written by the Intertribal Timber Council in consultation with the USFS and Bureau of Indian Affairs.

1 *Tribal Forest Protection Act Briefing Paper*. (2005, April 5). Retrieved from http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/tribalrelations/documents/policy/tfpa/USDA_FSBriefing_paper_TFPA_040505.pdf

A tribal house dedication by the Huna Tlingit tribe at Glacier Bay in Southeast Alaska. Photo credit: Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership.

Celebration of Haida culture at the 2015 Hydaburg Culture Camp in Southeast Alaska. Photo credit: Bethany Goodrich, Sustainable Southeast Partnership.

How do I apply?

Eligible tribal partners should consult with local Forest Service units prior to submitting a letter of intent and proposal, such as by organizing collaborative dialogue and field trips with district rangers. Non-tribal partners interested in launching or supporting a TFPA project can offer this assistance to tribal partners in their region.

Proposals are accepted on a continual basis, and your local forest unit can supply the appropriate templates if required. Projects are reviewed by forest supervisors and then recommended to the regional forester for approval. Applicants should receive a response within 120 days.

Things to know:

- TFPA requirements are flexible. A resource threat from non-adjacent federal lands (such as invasive species) may still be eligible, and in addition to on-the-ground restoration projects, TFPA can support trainings and technical assistance.[2]

- TFPA is underutilized. Since its passage in 2004, only 13 proposals have been submitted nationwide, and only six are underway. If a local forest unit is not familiar with utilizing this authority, the Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations can provide assistance.

- The USFS can use "best value" contracting and give special consideration to tribally-related factors such as the status of a tribe, its land, and the cultural, traditional and historical connection of the tribe and the land.

2 *TFPA Webinar*. (2016, April 26). Intertribal Timber Council. Retrieved from http://www.itcnet.org/issues_projects/issues_2/tfpa/tfpareports.html

Learn More

Additional information on USDA resources for tribes can be found in the USFS guide for tribal governments.

Reach out to your local forest unit for more information on proposing a project.

AGREEMENTS

Photo Credit: Ecosystem Workforce Program

Agreements
Forest Service & BLM

To take advantage of existing programs and authorities outlined in this guidebook, it's helpful to be familiar with tools available to accomplish forest stewardship. Some instruments simply document shared goals, objectives and interests (like a Memorandum of Understanding), and others allow for the transfer of funds (such as grants and cooperative agreements). Agreements allow federal agencies to create formal partnerships that can accomplish work on public and private lands where the parties have mutually agreed upon objectives. A few of the commonly used agreements, and their unique features, include:

Participating Agreements

Work must be cooperatively performed and mutually beneficial national forest projects with non-federal partners. Participating agreements cover pollution abatement, job training, forestry protection and environmental education. Unlike challenge cost-share agreements, advance payments are permitted. Eligible partners include non-profits; local, state, and tribal governments; and institutions.

Stewardship Agreements (BLM and USFS)

Similar to stewardship contracts, these agreements support land management activities that meet local and rural community needs, such as forest and watershed restoration. Unlike other agreements, they can be entered into for up to 10 years, and are often used in large landscape areas where long-term work needs to be accomplished. Eligible partners include non-profits, tribes, and local governments.

Challenge Cost-Share Agreements

Used when the Forest Service cooperatively develops, plans, and implements projects with other parties that are mutually beneficial to both parties and that enhance Forest Service activities. Unlike participating agreements, the Forest Service is substantially involved and both parties contribute funds. A 20% match is generally required from partners, and eligible entities include institutions and public and private organizations.

TIPS & TRICKS

- Approach your line officer and your grants and agreements, or procurement, staff with the outcome you're seeking to achieve, as opposed to the instrument you think is right. Working with staff will help you decide which tool will best achieve those goals.
- Include your grants and agreements staff early on in a project!
- The goal of the project, who benefits, and the source of the funding largely determine the instrument used.
- Agreements with community-based organizations (CBOs) provide particularly ripe opportunities for innovation and creativity, as CBOs are uniquely positioned to help align the goals, objectives, and resources of federal and state programs with the activities of local conservation-oriented landowners and businesses.

Learn More

There are many more mechanisms to facilitate partnerships and mutual benefit than can be documented here. The USFS and BLM have good resources, including this Partnership Guide.

Check out the Ecosystem Workforce Program's case study on how agreements can create community benefit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank everyone who completed our online survey on federal programs and to all of our phone interviewees for their time, edits, and expertise. We would also like to extend a special thank you to those interviewees who agreed to be the 'experts' listed throughout this primer.

This primer would not be possible without the financial support of the USDA Forest Service, the Northwest Fire Science Consortium, and the RVCC Leadership Team members (see opposite page). Thank you for your continued committment to RVCC.

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition is also supported by Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior —Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service—through a subaward to the Watershed Research and Training Center. For more information, contact Michelle Medley-Daniel at michelle@thewatershedcenter.com or (530) 628-4206.

RVCC Leadership Team

Wallowa Resources is a local non-profit organization in northeast Oregon whose mission is to develop, promote, and implement innovative solutions to help the people of Wallowa County and the Intermountain West sustain and improve their communities and their lands. Since its formation in 1996, Wallowa Resources has worked to bring people together in a common goal: to blend the ecological needs of the land with the economic needs of the community. The organization strives to balance Wallowa County's economic well-being with the stewardship and conservation of its resources, preserving the area's heritage of making a living from the land. www.wallowaresources.org

Sustainable Northwest helps people and communities restore and maintain ecological health, balance diverse interests, and promote economic opportunities. Through collaboration, we bridge rural and urban interests, encourage entrepreneurship, and build trust in sustainable natural resource management and utilization in the western U.S. www.sustainablenorthwest.org

The Ecosystem Workforce Program is in the Institute for a Sustainable Environment at the University of Oregon. Founded in 1994, EWP undertakes applied research, policy education, and technical assistance to foster ecological health, economic prosperity, and democratic governance. ewp.uoregon.edu

The Watershed Research and Training Center (WRTC), a community-based nonprofit organization, was started in 1993 to promote healthy communities and sustainable forests through research, education, training, and economic development. This work centers around the belief that the relationship between local communities and the public forest must change so that the economy can rebuild itself based on an ethic of land stewardship. www.thewatershedcenter.com

The Siuslaw Institute, Inc. was founded in 1994 as a locally-based, not-for-profit organization, dedicated to the "sustainable improvement of community and habitat." We engage in programs of research, education, project management, monitoring and outreach communications designed to restore, enhance and utilize the watersheds of the Pacific Northwest. We are also involved in similar work in the Russian Pacific regions, and with the International Riverfoundation, based in Australia. www.siuslawinstitute.org

The Forest Guild practices and promotes ecologically, economically, and socially responsible forestry as a means of sustaining the integrity of forest ecosystems and the human communities dependent upon them. The Guild engages in education, training, policy analysis, research, and advocacy to foster excellence in stewardship, support practicing foresters and allied professionals, and engage a broader community in the challenges of forest conservation and management. www.forestguild.org

Salmon Valley Stewardship works to promote a sustainable economy and healthy environment in the Salmon River Region. SVS coordinates the collaborative Lemhi County Forest Restoration Group and also leads community local foods initiatives and many other projects that help connect people with the land. www.salmonvalley.org

Mt. Adams Resource Stewards mission is to promote sustainable connections between the land, local economies, and rural communities in the Mt. Adams Region. Their efforts seek to grow more vibrant rural communities by: maintaining and creating reliable, living wage jobs; facilitating and demonstrating land stewardship that supports resilient, functional ecosystems across ownerships; and providing opportunities for youth to engage in rural issues and traditions. www.mtadamsstewards.org

The Blackfoot Challenge is a landowner-based group that coordinates management of Montana's Blackfoot River, its tributaries, and adjacent lands. It is organized locally and known nationally as a model for preserving the rural character and natural beauty of a watershed. The Mission of The Blackfoot Challenge is to coordinate efforts that will enhance, conserve and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyles of the Blackfoot River Watershed for present and future generations. www.blackfootchallenge.org

The Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) is a diverse network of organizations working together to meet the challenge of sustainable community development in Southeast Alaska. SSP's mission is to empower rural Alaskan communities to reach cultural, ecological and economic prosperity. The partnership includes international, regional and community-based organizations who collectively support locally-identified priorities. www.sustainablesoutheast.net

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