



# Ecosystem Workforce Program

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## THE BENEFITS OF USDA FOREST SERVICE AGREEMENTS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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**T**he federal government is the largest landowner in many western communities. It can contribute to local socioeconomic vitality by providing opportunities for businesses and partners to perform land management activities and process natural resources. However, little is known about how the Forest Service engages nonprofit partners to accomplish this work and produce community benefits. We examined how formal agreements between the Forest Service and community based-organizations under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009-2010 created social and livelihood benefits. We found that different kinds of agreement structures can make these benefits possible.

### Approach

We conducted case studies of Forest Service ARRA agreements with three community based-organizations: Wallowa Resources in northeastern Oregon; the Lomakatsi Restoration Project in southwestern Oregon; and the Watershed Research and Training Center in northern California. We obtained data on value, costs, duration, and outcomes of case study agreements from Recovery.gov; and conducted 13 interviews with Forest Service and CBO staff, county and community leaders, and local businesses.

### Results

Through agreements, CBOs helped the Forest Service plan and implement projects that fit local social agreement about forest management, enabling some projects to go forward without litigation or appeals, and leveraging local resources. Projects that successfully implemented collaborative priorities may have helped build support for future stewardship. However, the outcomes of

agreements depended on the context in which they originated. Underlying limitations in a national forest's planning process or a lack of robust partnerships may have inhibited some social or livelihood benefits.

We also found that different types of agreements had different mechanisms for creating community benefits in the short- and long-term:

- Participating agreements that designated work-force training and development as a primary objective built local capacity to implement future projects.
- Stewardship agreements that specified a range of best value criteria according to local socioeconomic and ecological priorities engaged local businesses and organizations.
- Research and development agreements allowed for innovation around restoration and biomass utilization, which may support more active management in the future by improving



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product removal techniques and increasing understanding of costs and logistics associated with alternative implementation methods.

## Conclusion

Forest Service agreements with CBOs in the Northwest helped support forest management projects and implementation strategies that met community needs and priorities, allowed experimentation and innovation, and fostered opportunities for

local restoration businesses. These outcomes depended on the structure of the agreement used and the local context.

## More information

The complete study can be found in EWP Working Paper #38, “The social and livelihood benefits of USDA Forest Service agreements with community-based organizations” which is available on the web at [t ewp.uoregon.edu/publications/working](http://ewp.uoregon.edu/publications/working).

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