

Ecosystem Workforce Program Forum 2001
Advancing Oregon's Sustainability Agenda:
The role of the ecosystem management industry in achieving sustainability -
ecological, social and economic
April 26-27, 2001 Pendleton Oregon

Forum Summaries

The 2001 Ecosystem Workforce Program's Annual Forum was held in Pendleton OR April 26th and 27th. The focus of this year's forum was to share knowledge and examples of the ongoing efforts of the ecosystem management industry's crucial role in advancing Oregon's sustainability agenda. Over 70 practitioners and natural resource agency representatives took part in the two-day meeting. The following summaries offer a brief outline of those presentations and discussions which captured the forum's focus. The concluding section is a report of suggestions forum participants offered as the next steps for the Ecosystem Workforce Taskforce to consider. The Task Force is a group convened by the Oregon Community and Economic Development Department to explore opportunities for linking sustainable natural resource goals and sustainable community objectives. Contact information for forum presenters is listed in this last section.

Lake County Commissioner Jane O'Keefe set the tone for the two-day event in her keynote address chronicling the difficulties and ultimate success of the Lake County Sustainability Initiative in gaining reauthorization of the Lakeview Federal Sustained Yield Unit (now informally referred to as the Lakeview Federal Stewardship Unit) amidst the changes in federal timber harvesting policy. Commissioner Okeefe's emphasis was that this success was dependent upon the realization that what had traditionally been good for the economic well being of the community was not necessarily good for the health of the forest. Community leaders translated this realization into action. As forest policy had become a national issue, a multi-stakeholder approach that incorporated much shared learning became necessary. The many successes of this approach are evident. The Sustained Yield Unit was reauthorized with an emphasis on restoration practices and local jobs but perhaps just as important, this was accomplished with a very diverse group of people with very different philosophies and perspectives. Commissioner O'Keefe stressed that the reauthorization success was a matter of creating opportunities out of what seemed to be nothing but obstacles.

Other opportunities and obstacles were highlighted by Jennifer Allen through a presentation of her work as the Sustainable Business Liaison of the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department. In Jennifer's words, the ecosystem management industry offers a "new framework for thinking about the relationship between ecosystems, communities, and economic values," and most importantly, it "captures the full range of opportunities - and challenges - involved in making sustainability real." A preliminary definition of the ecosystem management industry was offered through a discussion of a joint research project by the Organization for Economic Initiatives and the Ecosystem Workforce Program. Cassandra Moseley of the University of Florida presented a study showing the regional breakdown of contractor location in regard to contracted work. Jeffery Campbell of the Ford Foundation led a discussion of community and forest sustainability from a national perspective.

Reporting on current efforts to meet the challenges of community collaboration with public agencies, Lisa Freedman and Ron Ochs of the Forest Service Region 6 Office of Strategic Planning presented the long awaited Forest Service *Toolkit for Linking Socioeconomic and Biophysical Objectives*. The *Toolkit* effectively compiles existing legal authorities that allow federal contracting agencies to link ecosystem and community health objectives and is a fantastic resource for contracting officers to advance the quality jobs initiative. Curtis Qual of the Forest Service, Julie Gassner of the Training & Employment Consortium, and Barb Higinbotham of the Oregon Employment Department shared their experiences with public agency partnerships in detailing their agencies' collaboration in the Blue Mountain Demonstration Area. The diverse goals and objectives of these agencies have come together in an effort that has developed a unique approach that provides contracting, training, and sustainable employment opportunities for communities while pursuing ecosystem health objectives of three national forests. Maia Enzer of Sustainable Northwest discussed the opportunities that the National Fire Plan offers for collaboration with an emphasis on the benefits of community-based monitoring projects.

More examples of what local organizations can accomplish when their capacity is united in collaborative projects were presented on the forum's second day. Diane Synder of Wallowa Resources Diane quoted Teddy Roosevelt in explaining Wallowa Resources' fundamental requirement of community collaboration: "Do what you can with what you have where you are!" Wallowa Resources' success as a community-based non-profit organization can be directly traced to at least three things: its organizational development strategy that includes communication programs and fundraising strategies that are integral to its ten-year strategic plan; its continual program and organizational assessment monitoring; and its collaborative partnerships with over twenty local and national organizations and agencies. Bjorn Everson detailed the successes of REACH Inc, particularly in its juniper eradication and utilization program in southern Oregon. Charles Spencer showed what the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management can accomplish when their internal capacity is aligned for inter-agency collaboration with the quality jobs initiative through an analysis of the contracts offered by the Willamette Province Workshop Partnership.

One persistent theme throughout the forum was the necessity for adequate assessment of local capacity and effective monitoring of how programs are actually working. Marcus Kauffman of Sustainable Northwest shared his insights concerning labor market assessments through a discussion of the accomplishments of the Lake County local contracting assessment he initiated. Nils Christoffersen of Wallowa Resources, Michele Johnson of the Grande Ronde Model Watershed and Elaine Kohrman of the Forest Service presented their valuable work in categorizing the effects of ecosystem-task contracting on the local labor markets in northeast Oregon. Lita Buttolph shared lessons on socioeconomic monitoring gained from the experience of Forest Community Research (FCR) working with collaborative monitoring processes and FCR's current evaluation of the Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative. The challenges inherent in developing effective monitoring protocols across agency and geographic jurisdictions include questions as to all-party or multi-party approaches, integration of multiple and different kinds of knowledge, and the inclusion and recognition of all forest workers and users, especially non-local stakeholders and the mobile workforce.

Insights concerning the industry were detailed by local-based and mobile workforce contractors and workers in the forum's final session. Tim Sweet of Florence and Eric Schroeder of Cottage Grove gave the forum a realistic view of the difficulties that the mobile workforce faces in light of the emphasis on local-based contracting. Danny Nichols of Coquille related how the challenges of persevering to work in the industry were tempered by the joy and satisfaction inherent in the accomplishments of watershed restoration work.

Challenges & Opportunities

The next steps: What should we tell the Ecosystem Workforce Taskforce?

Forum participants spent the last part of the event detailing their suggestions for the Ecosystem Workforce Taskforce to consider. Jeff Oveson of the Grande Ronde Model Watershed moderated the discussion. The predominate message was captured in the statement: "Its about time - its past time."

1. Oregon's sustainability agenda

The variations of economic prosperity between urban and rural communities continues to be a real threat to the advancement of sustainability and the quality jobs agenda as rural communities persist in losing both their economic base and skilled residents. While there is undoubtedly incremental progress, the continued commitment of energy and funds are needed to keep community capacity at a level where it can take advantage of the successes already accomplished and meet the challenges of the future. In order to maintain the rural natural resource economic base, communities, agencies, and businesses need to continually adapt their practices to better integrate community and social needs with ecological needs. Any increased investments in restoration need to dedicate a percentage to general public education in order to move away from polarization of environmentalists, businesses, and workers.

2. Tools & strategies for public agency partnerships with communities

Defining what success means in terms of a multi-stakeholder approach is imperative. Recognition that multi-stakeholder approaches take a long time in establishing trust and avenues toward consensus necessitates a long-term outlook. The Forest Service Region 6's *Toolkit for Linking Socioeconomic and Biophysical Objectives* is a huge step forward in publicizing that agency's commitment to the goals of sustainability. Other changes in procurement procedures still needed concern contract design that takes into account the impacts that contract structure has on local communities. Contracts that incorporate "forest based" or "local contractors" into award criteria needs to be implemented, especially on the state level.

3. What local organizational capacity can accomplish

Learning from, building on, and publicizing the successes and leadership shown by groups such as Grande Ronde Model Watershed, Wallowa Resources, Lake County, the Willamette Province Workforce Partnership, REACH Inc and watershed councils are crucial avenues toward catalyzing increased involvement by communities, businesses and agencies. The emerging restoration economy includes value-added manufacturing and access to capital is an elementary component. While various regional investment programs are available, publicity is needed to communicate this fact to communities and organizations. Workforce training is still a priority, but until adequate long-term budgets are dedicated to restoration efforts, contractors and workers will not see any advantage in expending time and energy on training programs.

4. Assessment & monitoring for linked objectives: making benchmarks work

Monitoring is critical. An aggressive monitoring program offers possibilities for collaboration between community groups, workers, environmentalists, business interests, and federal and state agencies that are often overlooked. There is a genuine opportunity for a number of community-based organizations to do independent monitoring which builds on the successes of the multi-stakeholder approach and which offers an accurate assessment of environmental, economic and social conditions. Assessment and monitoring efforts such as those undertaken by approaches the Lake County Sustainability Initiative, Wallowa Resources, and the Grande Ronde Model Watershed should be aggressively supported by the Taskforce and emulated across the state. The challenges to effective monitoring are not few, but the necessity to begin establishing protocols, integrating data across jurisdictions, selecting measures that reflect the impacts of forest management decisions while providing feedback to policy makers is urgent. The requirements of intelligent informed decision making demand this. The suggestion was made that an assessment or monitoring czar was needed to help rationalize and integrate multiple assessment efforts. Jeff Tryons was suggested as one such candidate.

5. Building a state agency agenda for sustainability

State agencies that contract need to shift their focus from low-bid to “best value” contracting with the understanding that quality jobs that link watershed and community health are one of the best means toward achieving sustainability. From this perspective, the Taskforce needs to focus its efforts on the state procurement agencies for inclusion of quality job criteria in agency’s contracting & granting procedures. The suggestion was made that Oregon Solutions Team would make an excellent partner in this endeavor and Jennifer Allen was nominated to help get procuring agencies on board. The fact that state natural resource agencies are not part of the Community Solutions Team compounds the difficulties that multiple agency requirements pose to the quality jobs initiative. Agency requirements need to be better integrated and made simpler. Something akin to an ombudsman’s office which could organize such an approach was suggested. More two-way outreach is needed from state agencies and communities so that the state can hear and understand local concerns. Additionally, the benefit of collaboratively partnering with non-agency organizations must be recognized in this arena. State budgeting procedures need to connect workforce training and employment opportunities early in the budget

formulating process. A low-cost flexible bonding program for contractors was suggested as a way to make the Department of Forestry's contracts available to a greater number of competitors.

6. Directions for EWP

For future forums EWP was advised to coordinate field visits to work sites so that participants can see what great things are happening on the ground and understand the actual destination of all of their efforts. EWP was also advised to consider a voice or comment in the next issue of "*Oregon: State of the Environment.*"

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