

**REVIEW OF USDA FOREST SERVICE
COMMUNITY-BASED WATERSHED
RESTORATION PARTNERSHIPS**

APPENDIX F

Reviews of Watershed Projects

**Bob Doppelt and Craig Shinn, Portland State University
DeWitt John, Bowdoin College
For the United States Forest Service**

**Mark O. Hatfield School of Government
P.O. Box 751
Portland State University
Portland, Oregon, 97207
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PACIFIC COAST WATERSHED
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The Pacific Coast Large-scale Watershed Project (Pacific Coast Watershed Partnership--or coastal demo--PCWP) was created in 1999 when the Chief's office merged separate proposals for large-scale watershed projects from the Siuslaw and Siskiyou National Forests, the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, and Ducks Unlimited into a single coast-wide project. The PCWP now includes the Olympic and Mt. Baker National Forests as well.

The PCWP Has Provided a Number of Benefits to the Forests Involved, Including:

- The designation has engaged Forest Service staff from the Canadian border to the California state line in discussions about the value of and potential strategies for a coast-wide restoration program.
- A number of projects were completed with the funds that were provided.
- The designation as a national demonstration project brought recognition that opened the door to leveraging additional funds for projects.
- The coast-wide focus and special designation also helped some Forest Service employees to expand their thinking beyond a project and forest to a much broader landscape, and even coast-wide level.

Despite These Benefits, Overall Progress Has Been Limited By a Number of Factors:

- The way in which separate proposals were merged together at the start created a level of discomfort that has yet to be completely overcome.
- Until recently, the Regional Office did not make its support for the project as evident as needed and support from headquarters in Washington was also somewhat cloudy.
- There are some sharp differences of opinion among the partners about what the PCWP should be and what working in partnership means.
- Due to the issues listed above, it has been difficult for the existing partners to identify the benefits of linking their efforts to restore watersheds from the Canadian border to California, and no common vision, goals, or strategy for the project has emerged.
- The coastal Demo project has remained almost exclusively an internal Forest Service initiative and at the time this review occurred, no non-profits other than DU, and few private landowners, local, state, or other federal agencies are engaged in the project

(although the Forests were working closely with these types of groups on local watershed programs).

- Some key issues must be resolved between some of the Forests involved and Ducks Unlimited.
- When this review was underway the program lacks a full-time coordinator, which had limited efforts to knit the Forests together, develop a common strategy, and engage other partners in the effort. Discussion was underway about hiring a coordinator as this review was being completed.
- Lacking agreement on purpose, strategy, and desired outcomes, the Pacific Coast Demo has been viewed by Forest Service staff primarily as a source of additional funding.

As a result of these and other issues, the message from most Forest Service employees was mixed when we asked what would occur if the project ended. Some said the project is just getting started and that momentum and major opportunities would be lost if it were terminated. Others said because not much had happened yet, little would change if the Demo died. At the same time, almost everyone we spoke with said ending the project would in many ways be a significant loss. Even those who said not much would change if the project ended today, said the problems they face are so large and so complicated that they cannot be resolved without addressing whole basins and even the whole coast. Consequently, many Forest Service employees said in the past few months they had begun to realize there might be important benefits to a coast-wide watershed restoration initiative. Many agency staff members also said if the project ended just a few years after it started, it would increase the cynicism among Forest Service staff about the agency's ability to follow through and diminish their willingness to be involved in new ventures the agency proposed. These findings are consistent with the summary of a USFS staff meeting dated 3/29/02 regarding the PCWP.

Because There Seems To Be a Very Strong Interest In Continuing the Project and Resolving the Bottlenecks, We Recommend That, If The Project Is to Continue, These Steps Should Be Taken:

- A full-time coordinator should be hired. It may be beneficial to place the coordinator in a neutral location, not within a Forest Service office.
- The full-time coordinator, however, can succeed only if the Regional Office clarifies its support for the project.
- The partners should give careful consideration to the adoption of a governance structure and system that can meet the unique needs of partners spread throughout two states.

- A major outreach, marketing, and communication program should be instituted to engage key local, state, and other federal government agencies, non-profits, and private landowners in the project.
- After additional partners are engaged, the vision, goals, and strategies to be used by the project must be clarified, along with the size and boundaries of the project. This will require the resolution of the issues that exist between the National Forests and between some of the Forests and DU.
- If and when the fundamental questions of purpose and governance are resolved, a number of technical issues should be resolved, including how to make greater use of the Wyden Amendment, how to leverage additional funds, and how to resolve budgeting problems.

Successes

- **The Designation as a Demo Created a Dialogue Among Coastal Forests.**

The involvement of National Forests from the Canadian border to the California state line precipitated a conversation that would not have occurred without the designation of the special Demo. Many people said the coast-wide scale of the project that was thrust upon them forced them to raise their sights and to begin to think at bigger scales and in broader terms. Meetings have been held to plan what would be funded each year across a broad area. The expanded perceptions and thinking that resulted could lead to new ideas and different approaches in the future, no matter what the future holds for the PCWP.

- **Some Projects Have Been Completed With the Additional Funds Provided.**

Each of the partners used their funds in different ways. The Mt. Baker National Forest used the funds they were given to sustain their existing efforts, bring in new partners, and link existing projects together. Ducks Unlimited has completed a number of projects in coastal estuaries and forests.

- **The Designation as a National Demonstration Project Opened the Doors to Leveraging Additional Money.**

Forest Service staff said the designation as a national Demo project allowed staff to put “national priority” on grant applications and helped them receive additional funds.

- **The Large Geographic Scope of the Project Helped Some People to Look Beyond Their Own Tasks to a Watershed and Coast-wide Focus.**

Numerous partners commented that the large geographic scope of the demo project forced people to look at the coast on an ecosystem and watershed basis, instead of fragmented, isolated pieces. Strategies were discussed to connect the watersheds from Washington to Oregon. This is new for the region.

- **The Basic Concept Resonates With Many People**

Almost everyone we spoke with said the original concept behind the demo makes a great deal of sense. People said the size and complexity of the problems they face regarding watershed health and salmon cannot be resolved on Forest Service lands alone. A much broader framework is needed. Most people acknowledged that the framework had to go beyond their individual forests and associated watersheds. One person summarized this view by stating, "The problems are so huge that the Demo is the only meaningful way to solve the problems. Nothing else has been created to do this type of work. No other overall strategy. Money, yes, but no strategy." Another person said, "It was a great idea to involve the Forest Service, DU, and privates together to focus on whole watersheds."

- **People See Potential, and Support Exists, for Continuing the Project**

Because most people seem to understand the need and support the basic concept behind the large-scale watershed program, we found that most people felt the project still had significant potential. Solid support seems to exist for continuing the program, especially if the key obstacles can be resolved. Some of the support is due to the lack of another vehicle in which to accomplish the goals. One person said, "I think it [the PCWP] should continue because there is nothing else there to fill the hole to work outside of our boundaries for watershed management." Other people said the project should continue because terminating it would reinforce the belief that the USFS can't follow through with its commitments. Many people said canceling the project at this point would breed increased cynicism among employees about getting involved with any future new initiative the agency proposed.

Limitations/Obstacles

- **The Way the Project Came About Created Some Hard Feelings That Have Not Completely Dissipated**

Many people said the structure of the watershed Demo was dropped on them from the Chief's office without their knowledge or involvement. USFS staff was never asked if programs already existed that paralleled the Demo project. No one asked if the Demo could facilitate and improve what already was in place. Instead, they were given a new model to implement. The lack of input and the top-down nature of the process created some hard feelings that have not completely subsided.

- **The Size and Boundaries of the Demo Seem Problematic**

Almost every Forest Service employee we spoke with said the size of the Demo was a major problem. The two states involved are geographically, culturally, and politically different. There are many ecologically distinct watersheds included under the single umbrella of the coastal Demo. The almost 600 miles of coastline is too large to decide where money should be spent, given the small amount of money that is available. It is very hard for people to understand how a watershed close to the Canadian border relates to--or compares in terms of priority--a watershed in southern Oregon.

- **Important Differences of Agreement Exist Regarding the Role of the Forest Service in Partnerships**

Sometimes explicitly and other times implicitly, it became evident through our interviews that sharp differences exist among the Forests involved over what it means for the agency to be involved in partnerships. Some people believe the PCWP is an opportunity for the agency to take a leadership role and demonstrate that they have a plan to address issues throughout whole basins and the coast as a whole. Others said it was an opportunity for the agency to provide additional resources to existing local watershed programs. Still others said true partnerships mean that the agency is just one of many players that contribute on an equal basis to watershed restoration efforts and that the imposition of a pre-established strategy would undermine existing local efforts. Important questions remain unresolved about the role, responsibilities, decision-making process, and implementation methods the Forest Service should use when it is involved with partnerships.

- **No Formal Governance Structure and system Has Been Adopted**

Formal governance structures or systems for the partnership do not appear to have been adopted yet. Instead, the process appears to be informal, with the partners meeting when needing to decide how the funds will be divided. The lack of a conscious decision about the type of governance system that makes the most sense for the particular circumstances of the group may be one of the reasons behind the inability of the partners to agree on a common vision, goals or strategy.

- **The Lack of a Clear Governance System and Structure Has Created Unresolved Issues**

The lack of a clearly defined and agreed upon governance structure and system has generated a number of issues that need to be clarified among the National Forests involved and between the Forests and Ducks Unlimited. The issues relate primarily to the way funds are distributed and used and how decisions are made.

- **Due to the Issues Described Above, People Are Unclear About the Vision, Goals, Strategies, and Benefits of the Demo**

Because of the issues described above, there is confusion over the project's purpose, vision, strategies, and potential benefits. Some Forest Service employees believe that work being completed through the demonstration project is parallel to work they have been doing for the past 5-10 years. They also do not want to adopt a new model when they have achieved success using an existing model. These people, therefore, have a hard time finding the added value of the demonstration project. Others said although they work well with local watershed programs, the Demo was a much broader model that required them to think and operate at larger scales. As a result of these and other issues, we found no common agreement on what the Demo, as structured, should strive to achieve, how it would achieve its goals, what the outcomes would be, or what the benefits of the program are.

- **Headquarters Has Not Provided Clear Direction and People Are Unclear About the Level of Support from the Regional Office**

At the time of this review, almost every person we spoke with said they were unclear about the Regional Office's level of support for the project and, other than Jim Sedell's program, people said support from headquarters was weak. Because the amount of money involved was small, people wondered if the Regional Office would become fully invested in the project. More than one person said they felt that the RO had left it to the local forests to fight over the money. A number of people mentioned that they received no help from the fisheries or watershed program staff at headquarters in Washington. One person said, "Even the fish group at headquarters does not mention the project in their "Fish Tales" publication. Only Jim Sedell's small group mentions the projects."

- **The Lack of a Full-Time Coordinator Created a Major Gap in Leadership**

One of the most consistent themes we heard through all of our interviews was the need for an effective full-time coordinator. People said it was only after Margaret Peterson became involved that they began to realize that, despite its current shortcomings, the PCWP had significant promise. People are thrilled with the help that Margaret has provided. However, she has other responsibilities and works on the project only part time.

The lack of an effective full-time coordinator has delayed outreach efforts, limited the number of partners involved, and constrained efforts to leverage additional funds.

- **The Coastal Demo is Primarily an Internal Agency Initiative and No Local, State, or Other Federal Agencies, Non-Profits, or Private Landowners are Involved (Except at the Local Level)**

Although each National Forest works closely with local watershed groups, a glance at the e-mail list for the PCWP at the time of this review found that Ducks Unlimited was the only non-Forest Service group involved. Few state, local, or other federal government agencies, non-profits, or private landowners that we spoke with said they knew about or understood the purpose of the PCWP. Staff from the State of Oregon said they were told about the Demo when it was first getting started, but had heard very little about it since that time. Forest Service staff said marketing tools have been developed, but due to lack of a full-time coordinator, sufficient funds, and direction from the Regional Forester, they have not been used. Many people pointed out that no framework or structure exists to support communication between other government agencies, non-profits, or the private sector. People felt that instructions were given to communicate with others, but no tools were provided to accomplish this task. Instead, people expressed desire for the Regional Forester to help facilitate communication between the Forests and the other government agencies and institutions that should be involved. No common goals or basic standards exist to guide landscape-level management and restoration within or among agencies.

- **Funding Allocations Are Problematic**

Staff from at least one Forest complained that in reality the money that was provided for the PCWP was not additional funding--the funds were backfilled. When the Forest received funding through the Demo, their existing budget was reduced which left them essentially even, not ahead of the game. Although these individuals acknowledged that the agency was facing difficult choices regarding budget reductions, they also said the lack of real additional funding reduced their incentive to spend time on the PCWP.

Analysis

- **As a Result of the Issues Described Above, The PCWP Has Not Increased the Forest Service's Capacity to Work in Partnerships at the Watershed Scale**

The issues described above lead to the conclusion that the PCWP has not yet generated substantially better working relationships among the Forests involved or between the USFS and the many local, state, and other federal government agencies, non-profits, or private landowners with major stakes in coastal watersheds. The PCWP also has not, to date, helped the agency develop an effective method to decide what the priorities are or how to build the Demo into a larger effort that could be more sustainable and bring in more money.

- **The Forest Service Remains Too Inwardly Focused**

Despite the Demo's goal of broadening the vision and thinking of the agency, the majority of Forest Service employees involved in the PCWP still seem to look at the project as simply a way to accomplish more on USFS lands. Many people said this becomes apparent at planning meetings when the priorities for the agency all end up being on Forest Service lands. Due to budget shortfalls, the culture of the agency, and the mindset of employees, the agency still has a difficult time thinking or planning beyond its boundaries.

- **The Agency Seems Unclear About What Watershed Level Partnerships and Governance Entail**

In keeping with the point above, the Forest Service seems unclear about what working in partnership at the watershed level involves. Key questions regarding the type of governance structure and system to be used must be resolved if the Demo is to successfully achieve its promise.

- **Until the Forest Service Brings More People into the Partnership, The PCWP Is Not Likely to Grow or Be Successful**

Following up on the points above, the PCWP is not likely to grow and succeed until and unless many other private, non-profit, and public partners are fully engaged. The perception to date is that the PCWP is simply an agency initiative. One prominent state government employee summarized this well by stating, "This is a Forest Service deal, its not a grass roots or community program."

- **The Lack of Leadership Is a Key Problem**

Many of the problems described above can be traced back to the lack of leadership provided for the project. Headquarters in Washington and the Regional Office have provided limited leadership, and the lack of an effective full-time coordinator meant there was no on-the-ground leadership. Until and unless the leadership issues are resolved, the project is not likely to succeed.

Recommendations

- **The Regional Office Must Make it Clear That the PCWP is a Priority**

The PCWP will succeed only if the Regional Office makes it clear that it is a priority. This may involve the Region dedicating funds to hire a coordinator for a sufficient number of years. It may also require statements and symbolic acts from the Regional Office that show that the PCWP--and watershed-level partnership-based planning and management in general--is a priority.

- **Hire a Full-Time Coordinator and Consider Housing This Person Outside of the USFS**

If the Regional Office decides that the project should continue, a full-time coordinator should be hired. Consideration should be given to housing the coordinator in a non-profit organization or in another public agency office, not in a Forest Service office. This may help to resolve the leadership issue and demonstrate that the PCWP is not just an internal Forest Service initiative.

- **Engage as Many Private Landowners, Non-Profits, Local, State, and Other Federal Government Agencies as Possible**

A key to success for the PCWP will be the ability to bring a diverse array of non-profits, local, state, and other federal government agencies (e.g. NMFS), and key private landowners into the coastal project (i.e. not just working with these groups at the local Forest level). This should be a top priority for the coordinator.

- **Adopt a Governance Structure and System Appropriate for the Coastal Demo**

Once more non-profits, private landowners, and public agencies are involved, it will be important to help them understand and agree on the type of governance structure and system they want to use. There are many types of governance structures and systems. Each of the different approaches use different rules of engagement, and lead to different ways in which information is gathered and distributed, decisions are made, and power and resources are allocated. It will be important for the partners to choose an approach that is most beneficial to their needs and goals. With an effective governance system in place, it seems more likely that the many partners involved can reach agreement on a common vision, goals, and strategy.

- **Clarify the Project Purpose, Vision, Goals, Strategy, and Benefits**

The development of an effective governance structure and system may allow the partners to come to agreement over the project's purpose, long-term vision, goals, strategy and benefits. The buy-in from additional non-profits, private landowners, and government agencies will be enhanced if they participate in the development of the vision, goals, and strategy.

- **Implement an Effective Outreach, Marketing, and Relentless Communication Program**

In order to engage other players in the partnership, continual outreach, relentless communication, and effective marketing programs must be developed. The overall vision, goals, strategies, and benefits of the PCWP must be continually communication through multiple channels to all of the players that may have an interest in coastal watersheds. The development of comprehensive communication and marketing programs would substantially increase understanding and buy-in for the Demo.

- **Decide If the Boundaries Should be Changed**

Because so many people raised concerns about the scale of the project and its boundaries, it would seem prudent to resolve this question.

- **Resolve Some of the Funding Questions and Make Greater Use Of the Wyden Amendment**

One of the many technical issues that must be resolved is how project funding will be used. If the funds will be used as backfill when agency budgets are reduced, there will be little incentive for people to put time and energy into the demo. Consequently, this issue must be resolved. In addition, the Wyden Amendment has allowed the Forest Service to provide dollars to the State Foresters to work with private landowners. Consideration should be given to how this process could be expanded.