

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

APPENDIX L

Reviews of Watershed Projects

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UPPER SEVIER RIVER COMMUNITY WATERSHED
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Located in rural southwestern Utah, The Upper Sevier watershed encompasses 1.2 million acres. The Large Scale Watershed Program--called the Upper Sevier River Community Watershed Project--was initiated after the Utah Water Quality Division had already engaged the local SWCD in a project to address water quality problems. The river is listed on the State 303(d) list of water quality limited streams. A steering committee had been formed and the program was already expanding beyond water quality to a full CRMP when the Forest Service became involved. When the Chief of the Forest Service asked for large-scale watershed program proposals, staff at the Dixie National Forest saw an opportunity to join the existing effort and help expand it.

The project has four goals: restoration and maintenance of watershed ecosystems; cooperation, coordination and collaboration; research, monitoring and adaptive management; and demonstrating restorative techniques.

The Project Has Taken Important Steps Towards These Goals Including:

- Many government agencies are now at the table discussing watershed-related problems.
- Over 100 projects were implemented on the National Forest in 2001 and 65 projects were completed by program partners. \$4,223,500 has been spent on the project as of the end of 2001.
- The Forest Supervisor and local agency employees are strongly committed to the program. Some important local landowners and government leaders show strong support for the program.
- A watershed assessment is nearly complete.
- The Upper Sevier project provided a model for other programs, such as the Virgin River watershed program.

Although Progress Has Been Made in Many Areas, a Number of Obstacles Exist Which Constrain the Program Including:

- Significant time and momentum has been lost due to staff changes at the USFS, and the lack of a full-time coordinator.
- While individual assessments have been completed, they have not been integrated into a comprehensive watershed plan.

- Many projects have been implemented, but because the watershed assessment is not complete, they may not be high-priority projects.
- Most of the measurement indicators that exist are focused on project outputs, not outcomes, and there are no indicators specifically focused on the socio-economic benefits of the project.
- Not all of the key government agencies with interests in the watershed have committed to the program.
- Few private landowners and no environmental groups are directly involved.
- While communication and decision-making within the partnership appear good for a start-up program, a number of important governance issues have yet to be addressed which could threaten future progress.
- Support for the program is tepid at the regional level, which, combined with reduced support from the Chief's office, could seriously harm the project.
- Despite the obstacles, the project has generated a significant level of support among the partners.

Resolution of the Key Obstacles Would Provide for Continued and Greatly Expanded Future Success. In Specific, We Recommend That:

- One or more full-time coordinators or staff be hired.
- A major effort be made to complete the integrated watershed plan.
- Outreach to private landowners, non-profits, and others be expanded so that additional constituencies are engaged.
- Key governance issues such as how decisions will be made, and the roles and responsibilities of each partner, be explicitly clarified.
- The BLM be encouraged to become fully engaged in the project.
- The USFS take specific steps to embed landscape-level partnership-based thinking and behaviors into agency culture.
- Consideration be given to expanding the authority of the Wyden Amendment.
- In addition, we find that continued leadership is needed from the Chief of the USFS, and that the Regional Office must also become a champion, if the program is to survive and prosper over the long term.

Successes

- **The Program Has Engaged a Number of Public and Private Entities in the Development of a Common Vision for the Watershed**

Many federal, state, and local government agencies are working together to develop a common vision, assessment, and future plan for the watershed. This is an unprecedented step for the parties. The vision now goes beyond the original water quality focus: it's a full-fledged watershed restoration program covering all resources. Some key private landowners and landowner groups are involved, although most are represented by government agencies. Numerous people praised the efforts of Tyce Palmer and Allen Henrie for their efforts to bring private landowners and local government into the process. Tyce works for the Utah Association of Conservation Districts. Alan chairs the watershed program steering committee and is a local rancher, landowner, city manager in Panguich, and SWCD board member. One government employee summarized the feeling of many by stating, "This has been a very good experience for everyone. Getting around the table has been invaluable. This is new thinking."

- **The Original Business Plan Was Helpful In Developing the Initial Vision.**

USFS staff said the business plan was "a terrific idea." The process of developing the original business plan was instrumental in helping all the parties involved develop a common vision and focus. Many people with different skills and roles helped to develop the business plan. The authors shared their document with many of the agencies and private parties that eventually become partners in the project. Thus, it also served a useful role in educating and engaging others in the process.

- **The Forest Supervisor and the Original Project Coordinator Have Provided Solid Leadership.**

Mary Wagner, Supervisor of the Dixie National Forest, has provided strong support for the program. Mary is a leader with a big-picture perspective and a future orientation. Steve Robertson, the original project coordinator, has been vital to the success of the project in many ways.

- **Over 100 Projects Were Implemented on the Forest in 2001 and 65 Projects have Been Completed by Program Partners**

The projects include 8,500 acres of prescribed fire and fuel reduction treatments, 85 miles of recreational site development and improvement, 440 acres of riparian restoration and two miles of stream bank stabilization, 23 miles of road improvement, 10 wildlife habitat improvements, three miles of water development improvement to help protect riparian areas, an increased emphasis on watershed monitoring, and five environmental education projects.

- **A Significant Amount of Money Has Been Leveraged By The Program.**

As a direct result of the partnership, and the common focus that has developed, a significant amount of money has been leveraged from USFS grants, the EPA and other sources. For example, \$154,000 was generated from the EQIP program. Many of the partners acknowledge that they were successful in raising these dollars because the steering committee that has been formed and the common plans are being developed.

- **Many Issue Specific Environmental Assessments Have Been Complete**

An effort was begun three years ago to develop a comprehensive landscape assessment. Most of the individual assessments (e.g. water quality, soils, wildlife) are complete or near completion. Many state and federal agencies have provided data and participated in the development of the assessment. The process is linked with the partnership which means that the local government and private partners know that the process is underway. Completion of an integrated watershed plan may provide a platform for generating consensus on project vision and goals while providing a systematic method for project prioritization.

- **A Public Education Program Has Been Initiated**

With support from staff at the Forest and the effort of local volunteers, three newsletters have been published about the project. The Extension Service and local newspapers publish articles about project events and funding opportunities. A seven-week outdoor school has been developed which serves about 40 children from the Panquich school district. Three Watershed Days are planned for spring 2002, where school children will become involved with fencing, wildlife habitat enhancement, and other projects. Tours of the watershed are given annually to show local citizens what is going on.

- **The Model Provided by the Upper Server Stimulated the Development of Additional Programs and Projects**

The Virgin River watershed program, the Governor's Rail to Trails program, and other initiatives have either been launched as a result of the Upper Sevier project or have benefited from links to the project.

- **As A Result of the Above, Many People Believe That the Local Image of the USFS Has Substantially Improved**

The large-scale program has allowed the USFS to demonstrate that they will use their resources to help the community. USFS dollars were used to help people do restoration work via the Wyden Amendment in 2001. The sharing of resources and the willingness to work in partnership has improved the local public image of the Forest Service.

Obstacles

- **The Lack of a Full-Time Coordinator Has Constrained the Project**

Significant momentum was lost after Steve Robertson moved to a new position. The project coordinator's position sat empty for almost eight months. Many people said that other than work on issue-specific environmental assessments and some project implementation, the project essentially came to a stop during that time. Lack of staff created a void in project oversight and some of the funded projects have not been completed. The partners seem pleased that Rich Jeros has recently been assigned to take Steve's position, but Rich is working just ½ to ¾ time on the project. At the time of this writing there was also talk of hiring a coordinator who lives in the community.

- **The Failure to Finalize the Watershed Plan Has Hurt the Program**

In large part as a result of the lack of dedicated staff, while individual pieces of the watershed assessment have been completed, they have yet to be integrated into a comprehensive watershed plan. Due to the delay in finalizing the plan, numerous projects have been implemented without the benefit of knowing if they address priority issues and projects are no longer targeted to focus areas. Many people said the complete assessment was the key piece of information needed to take the project to the next level, but it was at least a year overdue. Further, members of the technical teams question if a sufficient number of qualified staff exist to integrate the various reports into a single coherent watershed plan. Some of the momentum for the project among the partners has been lost as a result of the delays in completing the assessment, the lack of steering committee meetings, and other signs of forward progress. One person summarized these concerns by stating, "It's been disappointing that it [the assessment] has taken three years. Two years would have been a lot, but OK. Three years is just too long." In short, the sense of urgency is waning, which may threaten future work.

- **Few Measurement Indicators Exist and There is Little Focus on Socio-Economic Linkages and Measurements**

Although some site-specific monitoring protocols have been implemented (e.g. photographic plot monitoring), and although it is too early to know the ecological outcomes and effectiveness of the various projects, few indicators have been developed to measure progress. The achievements that have been quantified relate to outputs-- projects completed, miles of stream treated, money spent, etc. Further, despite the fact that the community within the watershed faces significant economic challenges, there are no indicators aimed at measuring the linkages between the environmental outcomes and community well-being. Consequently, some local residents question how the project will benefit them economically and socially.

- **Not All Key Government Agencies Have Committed to the Program, and Few Private Landowners or Non-Profits Are Directly Involved**

Many partners singled out the Bureau of Land Management as an important agency that has not fully engaged in the project. Despite being responsible for about 50% of the land in the watershed, including key riparian areas, the BLM apparently decided the Upper Sevier was not a top priority. People complained that the BLM has not been forthcoming with data relevant to the assessment and in other ways failed to contribute to the process. The BLM has many issues on its plate and its closest office is in Kanab, about 80 miles from Cedar City. Nevertheless, the level of concern voiced by the partners indicates that the absence of this agency is a significant issue. Numerous people also said the NRCS has also not been very helpful or effective in apprising or involving private landowners in the project. Although private landowners participate in the process, government agencies or leaders represent them. It has been difficult to get private landowners to attend meetings or fully participate in other ways. Part of the problem is that many landowners fear government. Insufficient outreach, communication, and public education are other likely causes. One person summarized the private landowner issue by stating, "Its getting better, but more work is needed to get information to landowners and to explain the benefits." There are no environmental groups involved. Despite the progress that has been made, the limited participation means that there is still a ways to go before watershed-level planning will be fully implemented in the basin.

- **The USFS Is Driving the Process and Other Partners Have, to Some Degree, Abdicated Their Responsibilities to the USFS**

Although numerous public agencies are involved with the partnership, a number of people said it was difficult to get people other than USFS staff to actively promote the vision, goals, and activities of the project. Once the USFS received funds and hired the coordinator, people looked at the agency as the primary driver of the project and consequently reduced their own efforts to secure additional funds and promote the project to potential participants.

- **Key Governance Issues Have Yet to Be Clarified**

This issue is related to the point above. Through our interviews we heard a number of issues raised that suggest the way in which information is shared and decisions are made by the steering committee would benefit from further clarification. For example, almost all partners agree the project should not be federally driven or government controlled. Yet, the steering committee is heavily weighted towards government agencies and only two private landowners sit on the committee (although landowners are represented by some of the government agencies on the committee). Despite the representative imbalance, the committee has apparently not clarified how decisions will be made (e.g. majority rule, consensus, etc.) or how conflicts will be handled. For example, how will decisions be made if and when the USFS decides it should pursue projects on its lands that conflict with the views of other government agencies or private landowners and local

governments? These and other key governance issues should be resolved. Further, the steering committee apparently has not had much to do (primarily because the assessment is not completed) and therefore not met very often in the past 8-12 months. The steering committee has also not reviewed or had a say in all of the projects the USFS has implemented on their lands, and other agencies apparently have implemented projects without the review of the committee. The steering committee may not be aware agency line officers apparently changed the make-up of at least one important project that was approved by the steering committee over the objection of the technical staff. These issues suggest the projects governance system could be improved.

- **Numerous Funding Obstacles Exist**

While the Wyden Amendment allowed USFS funds to be used to assist private landowners, many agency employees said it was very difficult and time consuming to get funds where they wanted them to go. The restrictions on how money can be distributed to private landowners, and other issues, make the distribution of funds difficult.

- **NEPA Processes Take Too Long – but More Than One Person Said This Was as Much an Internal USFS Problem as a Legal Issue**

It takes a year or more to get projects through the NEPA process. The long time lag means that many of the projects the steering committee has initially reviewed, and those which have been implemented, were in the pipeline for some time. Only recently have some of the newer projects made it through the NEPA process. Although people generally understand the legal constraints the USFS works under, the delays in getting projects out the door have frustrated many of the partners. One private partner summarized the feeling of many by stating, "I hear lots of lip service [to watershed restoration], but not much action." A number of partners from outside the USFS and at least one USFS employee said the delays are a much the result of the fragmented and siloed management structure of the agency and their lack of expertise with NEPA as they are with NEPA itself. "We are not very efficient," said the USFS employee.

- **Public Education and Communication Efforts Need Expansion**

The newsletters, news articles, and other educational tools are excellent starts on education and communication programs. However, through our discussions we found a lack of awareness and understanding among private landowners and the general public about the purpose, vision, and goals of the project and grant opportunities available. This suggests that current education and communication efforts may not be sufficient to build broad understanding, support, and participation in the project. One government employee summarized this issue by stating, "Once we developed the broad partnership, we fell down on the need to constantly communicate and share the vision."

- **People Seem Unsure About the Support from the Regional Forester's Office and Headquarters**

Numerous USFS employees said Jim Sedell and his team have done a good job initiating and supporting the project. The only concern we heard about Sedell's efforts was the lack of effective marketing program. At the same time, these individuals said they receive mixed direction from the Regional Office or almost no support from others at the Washington D.C. headquarters office. Many USFS employees asked why the national fisheries, wildlife and the watershed staff did not originate the large-scale watershed programs and why they are not providing on-going technical support. One person seemed to summarize the feeling of many when he said "This is the only way those people can achieve their goals, but they just don't seem to get it."

Analysis

- **Although Many of the Technical Aspects of Partnership-Based Landscape-Level Management Have Been Adopted, It is Still Not a Central Part of Agency Culture**

Every Forest Service and non-agency partner we spoke with acknowledged that while the Forest Service was moving in the right direction, the mindset and behaviors related to managing at the watershed scale and achieving its goals through partnerships are not yet integrated into the culture of the agency. The effort is seen as a separate project within the agency, not as a standard way of doing business. The agency still has powerful functional stovepipes, tends to manage on an opportunistic project-by-project basis rather than on a programmatic basis, and gravitates to operating as a lone ranger. As one senior staff member said, “Only when the private partners can describe the new way the Forest Service is operating will we know its become cultural.”

- **The USFS Has Not Determined How to Share Decision-Making and Power**

In part because of the issue above, in part because the watershed assessment is not completed, and due to other reasons, the USFS is still struggling with key questions about how to distribute decision-making authority when working in partnership with others. The USFS--and other project partners--move forward with their own projects based on their view of needs and opportunities on the lands. USFS is the key driver of the project, complains about this fact, but then reinforces this problem by not sharing planning and decision-making authority with the steering committee. The agency needs to decide how decision making and power will be distributed when it works with partnerships.

- **Only The Low-Hanging Fruit Has Been Addressed**

Due to the issues described above and the lack of a completed watershed plan, most of the projects that have been implemented involve little controversy. Tougher issues such as vegetation projects have yet to be attempted. To move beyond low hanging fruit, the project will need to complete the watershed plan, clarify its decision-making processes, and involve more key private landowners and non-profit groups.

- **Confusion Seems to Exist Between Communications, Marketing, and Outreach**

Marketing involves identifying the desires and needs of consumers and matching them with the attributes of a product or service. Communication is an interactive process of continually sharing and developing a mutual understanding of views and values. Outreach is a process of reaching out to others to inform them of products or services and engaging them in communication. The project is weak in marketing, communication, and outreach.

- **Significant Potential Exists for Further Progress and Success**

Despite the loss of some momentum and the obstacles that exist, every person we spoke with voiced a great deal of hope and optimism about the future of the program. If the bottlenecks can be addressed, the USFS and its partners have a unique opportunity to reshape the image of the agency, resolve a number of important watershed issues, improve the efficiency of the operations of the USFS, and provide important benefits to the community.

Recommendations

- **Hire a Full-Time Coordinator(s)**

One or more full-time staff is needed to coordinate the program and complete important tasks. Failure to properly staff the project may doom the initiative.

- **Develop An Integrated Set of Environmental, Social and Economic Indicators and a Monitoring and Reporting System to Measure Progress Over Time**

A system of Lead and Lag (pressure-response) indicators focused on environmental, economic, and social outcomes should be developed. A systematic monitoring and evaluation system should also be installed to gather data relevant to the indicators, measure, and report progress towards all three goals.

- **Upgrade and Expand Outreach, Marketing, and Communication Efforts to Private Landowners, the BLM, the General Public, and Others**

More private landowners, the BLM, and non-profits must be engaged if the project is to generate sufficient credibility to prosper over the long run. More direct outreach to private landowners, the BLM, environmental groups and others is needed. A well thought out marketing program may be needed to achieve this goal. An effective communication system will also be required.

- **Further Clarify the Project Governance Structure and System**

The partners involved in the project need to clarify the governance *structure* to be used by the partnership as well as the *system* to be used to make decisions and ensure accountability. By structure we mean organizational arrangement. The governance system relates to how information will be gathered and distributed, how decisions will be made and conflicts resolved, and how rewards and resources will be shared among the partners. Clarification of these issues will require that the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners be clarified. Accountability mechanisms must be developed to help all of the partners feel confident that group decisions will be carried out by those responsible. Options may include these and other governance systems and structures:

Joint Ventures: The USFS combines with other organizations to form a new, distinct organization in order to pursue complementary objectives. When in a joint venture, information, decision-making, power, and resources are equally shared.

Strategic Alliances: Similar to a joint venture, where the USFS joins with others to pursue mutual gain, but a new organization is not created. In this case, the various organizations involved must agree to cooperate with and depend on each other. Clear rules of engagement must be established and agreed to (often in writing).

Informal Networks: Organizations join forces to capitalize on potential efficiencies in the production of specific outcomes. Each participating group is responsible for one area of output and the participating organizations are highly dependent on one another for the ultimate delivery of their products. Each entity makes decisions unilaterally, although in consultation with other partners.

Consortiums: The USFS pools its resources with other organizations to procure access to information or technologies, or achieve goals that are too costly or difficult for one entity to do alone. No separate entity is created for the management of this relationship. Each entity makes decisions unilaterally, although in consultation with other partners.

Each of these structures and systems operate under different rules of engagement. The partners need to spend some time to understand the different structures and systems and choose a model that best fits their needs.

- **Continue to Take Steps to Embed Landscape-Level Partnership-Based Thinking and Behaviors into Agency Culture**

Time alone will not allow watershed level management to become embedded in agency culture. The Forest Supervisor and others may benefit from careful examination of a variety of steps and tools that can facilitate cultural change.

- **Consider Expanding the Authority of the Wyden Amendment.**

To facilitate the distribution of funds to private landowners for important projects, consideration should be given to ways to expand the authority of the Wyden Amendment.

- **Continued Support from the Chief's Office and the Regional Office Seem Vital to the Long-Term Success of the Project.**

The project is not likely to survive or prosper over the long term if the Chief's office reduces its leadership and supportive roles and the Regional Office remains somewhat indifferent. Every Forest Service employee we spoke with said earmarked money, priority status, and national tie established by the previous Chief (Dombeck) were critical to launching the program. These employees said continued prioritization from the Chief and support from Jim Sedell's shop are needed to keep the project moving forward. People feel that the watershed assessment must be completed, and the community needs more time to get engaged before the Washington office backs off. In fact, one federal government employee said national support should be broadened. The Departments of Interior and Agriculture as well as the EPA should declare the watershed projects to be a top priority. This would force the BLM and other federal agencies to make the watershed project a local priority. Without continued support from headquarters, improved support from the Regional Office (and without Jim Sedell's shop continuing to champion the program) there is great fear that the positive efforts that have been started will soon lose steam and fade away.