

LARGE-SCALE WATERSHED RESTORATION PARTNERSHIPS

Annual Report

From:

The Lost Rivers National Learning Site

I. Partnership Overview

The Lost Rivers Project Team is made up of community members, Mackay Action Center, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the USFS, and the Savory Center for Holistic Management. In addition, we have brought into the original team the following:

- Private landowners and permittees on public lands;
- Bureau of Land Management;
- US Fish & wildlife;
- County government;
- Town Councils;
- County Commissioners
- Nature Conservancy
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- Soil & Water Conservation Districts
- Local High School
- INEEL - national labs;
- ID Dept. of Ag;
- ID Fish & Game;
- Cooperative Extension;

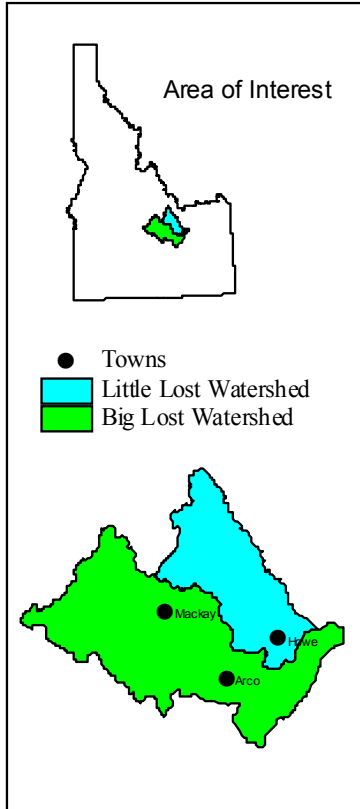
Our project was borne out of two merging events:

1. A challenge to the USDA from The Savory Center in 1999 to work in partnership on a piece of public land and learn together with conservationists and producers what Holistic Management might bring to the table in helping federal and state agencies use more of their human and financial resources on resource management and less on lawsuits;
2. The pilot work of members of the Lost Rivers Valley, including the USFS and NRCS, in forging new paths of success on public lands with the help of Holistic Management planning and decision making.



OUR PLACE

The towns of Arco, Mackay and Moore sit nestled in the Rocky Mountain Range of Idaho boasting the three highest peaks in the State, Craters of the Moon, one of the largest lava flows in the world, and the Idaho National Environmental Engineering Lab (INEEL), a nuclear site. The Lost River Valley, just over the hill from Sun Valley, is nationally known for its unique, majestic



landscape, wildlife habitat and, increasingly, the conflict that has arisen during the last 10 years over natural resource use and management.

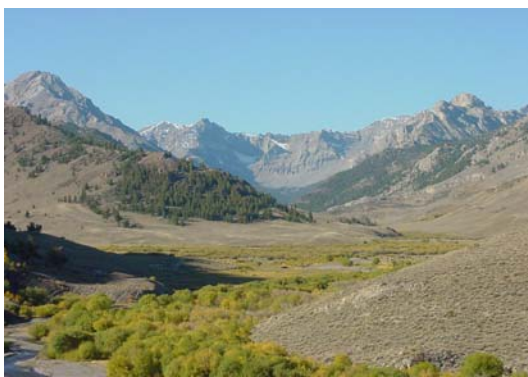
Custer and Butte Counties are being severely impacted by changes in both demographics and federal land management policy. With only 6-10% private land left and the remainder in, mostly, federal hands public land, the local economy depends on federal land for income- producing activities such as grazing, recreation and timber. With just 4% private land the area has virtually no property tax base and populations are declining. In many cases, land management policies and turnover at agencies hinder individual and collective efforts to create a more stable economy and sustain the natural resources. And, many management, production, and distribution decisions are being made by large corporate buyers and industrial packing plants. Rarely do people on the land have a significant opportunity to shape the policies that directly and often, negatively, impact them.

OUR CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The choices for the Lost Rivers Project Team and the people who live in this area are many. They include a range of options from accepting changes largely imposed from the outside to actively managing those changes in designing our own future and maintaining the values, traditions and culture that define us. With the trends of increasing federal lands regulations and market consolidations, the choices appear limited. Our communities are generally clear they do not want to create the fast, uncontrolled growth towns like Sun Valley have experienced. Some knowledge of how to move toward something different exists, but the challenge to create momentum throughout the community can be overwhelming.

Creating momentum requires a common vision;

ensuring a more sustainable future requires asking deeper questions:



Are our actions environmentally sound?
Are our actions financially sound?
Are our actions socially sound?
... are they in line with our values?

In order to better control our own future, our communities can create a new kind of economy - one based in regenerative harvesting of natural resources, mixed with tourism, recreation and other enterprises that align with our values. And, for the agriculture industry to flourish, models of ranching, farming and timbering that produce increasingly healthy land and habitat need to be built before development, policies and regulations eliminate these sources of revenue and the open landscapes that accompany them. Finally, common ground among producers, town's people, agencies and recreationists need to grow with all sides working toward solutions that produce - healthy land, stable economies, and beautiful places.

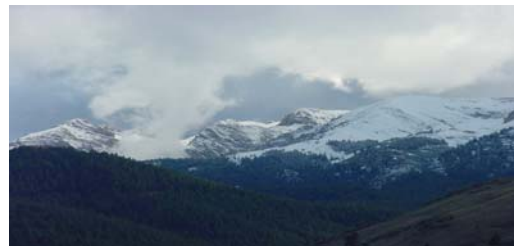
OUR PROJECT'S PURPOSE

The purpose of our efforts is to provide a site and opportunity where producers, conservationists, agencies, and other citizens can use Holistic Management (www.holisticmanagement.org), as a principal decision making process in their efforts to enhance and restore natural resources and build a stronger economy. This planning and decision making process has a track record of helping rural producers and diverse community groups create more productive land (including wildlife habitat) and increased wealth.

We will focus on the development of human and natural capital. The activities we undertake will rise from the people whose long-term livelihoods depend on the resources here. The working teams are designed with the premise that real change rises up - it's not imposed from above. It draws forth the creativity, integrity and motivation of local citizens to find solutions to these often, contentious situations on the western landscape.

We plan to produce:

- Increased productivity of land;
- Increased income;
- Strong relationships;
- A culture of lifelong learning



... sustainability is not an event, it's a process.

II. Partnership Goals - 2001

Our project, which is the most recently funded of the Large-Scale initiative projects, focused in 2001 on nurturing our Core Planning Group while negotiating a long road to create the structure that would allow us to access the funding dedicated to our project. Our aim was to maintain some momentum while spending more than a year on funding issues, during which principle project leaders were unable to focus on this project.

Once base funding was in place, our key goals were to:

1. Broaden the Core Planning Group to include representation from state and national environmental groups (diversity of the Core Group is crucial to our success);

2. Identify and secure commitment from at least one public lands permittee group and one private holding's team that are prepared to be part of the learning site¹ and begin planning with them, through Holistic Management goal setting and grazing planning, for the growing season of 2002; gather baseline data on that allotment before the winter comes;
3. Put in place basic management and organizational structure for training and meetings;
4. Develop a fire-hazard reduction plan for one sub-watershed, the Antelope drainage, which was identified as the "fire" hazard priority zone for our area;
5. Create bridges between our community and state and local-level economic incentives, structures and models that support and generate creativity and flexibility for new and expanded enterprises that draw their base resource from the land and are committed to regenerative enterprises.

III. Accomplishments

Access to the funding for this project was finally secured in August. Thus, our Project Team was not able to accomplish its goals and is now working to "catch up." We did manage to achieve the following:

A. Actions

1. Created a full business plan and revised and updated that plan;
2. Developed two-page summary on the project for the USFS web to post;
3. Gave numerous talks about the purpose of the learning site and about Holistic Management;
4. Pulled baseline data on 15,000-acre private site and ??? public lands;
5. Began Holistic Management planning with private lands owner;
6. Put in place basic office structure and organization assistance to support the Learning Site;
7. Brought to the table ?? environmental groups which we intend will become part of the Core Planning Group;
8. Secure a small amount of private funding to match our USFS dollars;
9. Develop broad and crucial relationships with State Economic development activities;
10. Began working with families in Antelope drainage to develop an immediate and long-term fire-hazard reduction plan.
11. Arranged intern to gather social and economic historical data on the Lost Rivers Valley - what did the land produce during earlier eras?
12. Begin putting in place broad biological, social and economic information about the current state of well-being of the community. This will provide our baseline reference point to monitor our progress.
13. Began training NRCS representative in Holistic Management facilitation;

¹ We had a gap of more than a year from approval to actual funding. This resulted in losing some momentum and some commitment from community members and public lands permittees who were originally very interested in being part of the project.

B. Environmental Consequences/Outcomes

The only activities that may lead to environmental consequences are the work we have done with the private holdings, the public lands permittees and the work with families in the Antelope drainage to create a long-term fire-hazard reduction plan - part of the National Fire Plan effort.

In the grazing and forested lands, we *anticipate* improvements - from the use of "holistic planned grazing" - in the following areas:

- Decreased plant spacing;
- Decreased soil erosion;
- Increased plant species and overall biodiversity;
- Improved water cycle, mineral cycle, succession and energy flow.

We also expect to see improved health of the domestic animals and improved productivity. The efforts to change animal management and thus improve the health of the land are tied directly also to efforts to decrease costly inputs (into the land or the animals) and encourage improved marketing and distribution of the product - and, thus, profitability.

In the Antelope fire-hazard reduction project, we are seeking to build a community-based management model that will both solve the immediate fire risk and tie long-term changes in management of the vegetation to economic opportunities for the families in the drainage or the valley.

In each setting, our planning begins with bringing together those who have decision making authority and those who will be effected or influenced by the decisions and creating a holistic goal as the context within which all decisions should be made. The holistic goal answers the following questions:

- What is most important to us and what do we value in our lives in this community/setting?
- What will we have to produce or create to sustain the quality of life and the things we value?
- How will our resources have to function - far into the future - to sustain what we produce and create?

This, is the "so what?" in Holistic Management.

Each team that is working on a unique "whole" - people, resource base, and \$\$ available - in our very large community creates its own monitoring plan - though a minimum standard for the biological monitoring is provided by Project Leaders, especially the USFS and the Savory Center.

We are not currently far enough along with the permittees or families to provide a sample monitoring plan or make any interpretations or analysis of such.

C. Growth

Because of the delay in accessing funding, we have had to spend a bit of time the last three months re-securing commitment from the original Core Planning Group. No one has completely dropped out, but people grew weary of us saying "we're just about to get going!"

Because this project was designed to have a broad-based group of producers, conservationists, community members and agency participants, we needed to bring into the mix some additional conservationists. WE have engaged the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Idaho Conservation League, and in the last few months to participate as part of our Core Planning Group. We have also connected with, and brought into a supportive role, the following:

- INEEL (federal labs);
- Public Lands Committee of the ID Assoc. of Counties;
- ID Economic Development Admin.;
- FFA at Mackay High School;
- ID Dept. of Fish & Game;
- ID Dept. of Agriculture
- ID Conservation League.

D. Products

We are in the process of developing a simple newsletter to keep participants up on happenings in the project.

A key product we will produce is a fire-hazard planning guide that incorporates not only dealing with the immediate fire-hazards but also planning the long-term vegetation management to avoid the repeat in the build up of fire-prone material and tying the actions needed directly to additional income for producers or the community.

E. Features

None to share at this time.

IV. Challenges and Change

The key challenge we have faced is the reduction in the USFS funds available - compared with the original agreement/budget presented - and accessing the lesser funds finally made available for this project. This resulted in:

- Management overload on our key most qualified on-site manager for this project (trying to hold together other contract work and this project until the \$\$ came in) - without income; thus, this project was mostly on hold;
- Community members and permittee groups growing less willing to become part of the National Learning Site because of fears the USFS's and the NRCS's commitment to continued funding may be as unstable and difficult to access as it was the first year;

Our goal beginning in 2001 was to secure all the needed baseline data, produce rigorous grazing management plans with at least one permittee group and implement a first round of changed management on the grazing lands in the summer of 2001. We were unable to accomplish that because of the lack of accessible funds. We were also slowed up in securing additional private dollars because we could not ensure the use of public funds until we actually had access to them.

Because of the delays in federal dollars (both USFS and NRCS), the project partners took steps to seek federal appropriations directly for this project and has beefed up its search for State and private funds. It has also narrowed the scope of the project to focus more on improving the landscape and health of the watershed and scale back some of the economic development efforts. Economic benefits should naturally grow out of improved production and profitability that was resulting from improved biodiversity and we will rebuild that component as we go forward. The project partners took on a "sub" project, the Antelope Drainage Fire-Hazard reduction project to get some dollars flowing. That project will, in some ways enhance the core project and in other ways detract from it - because the planning group for that project is not as broad as we outlined for the Core Planning Group.

V. Future Actions and Opportunities

During the winter of 2001-2002, we will focus on:

- Hosting a project "kick off" day on November
- Strengthening our Core Planning Group to engage the entire group more and more in decision making for the overall project and for the public grazing allotments;
- Considering the possibility of strengthening the timber and mining rehabilitation components in our business plan;
- Planning for the management and enhancements of public allotments and private holdings in the summer of 2002 - especially in ensuring the diversity of the planning groups and the rigor of the holistic management planned grazing and monitoring process and the learning we will produce from this effort;

Issues to address:

- USFS and NRCS commitment to the continued base-line funding of \$250,000;
- Capacity to implement the project without one, of the two originally planned (one private), senior USFS persons certified to teach Holistic Management;
- Continued need to identify at least one large public grazing allotment, build a diverse decision making team around it, create and implement a management plan, and put in place the structure for learning and evaluating change on the land. And, develop a cross-learning plan between the public allotment and the private holdings that have already begun to move forward with planning.

VI. Partnership Budget/Costs

To date, partner "contributions" in terms of time donated to this effort have exceeded funding provided for this project. We have only just put in place the tracking systems needed to identify the costs, matching and in-kind activities. No useful budget data is available at this time.

As already noted, we have added a National Fire Plan project grant amount of \$50,000 to cover the Antelope Fire-Hazard reduction plan. And, we have raised \$40,000 in private matching for each of the next two years.

VII. Partnership Contacts

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