

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

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Reviews of Watershed Projects**

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## **ST. JOE ECOSYSTEM** **Completed Fall 2002**

The St. Joe Ecosystem Restoration Project began when the USFS Community-based Large-scale Watershed Restoration Program offered help to improve conditions in the St. Joe drainage. The St. Joe had been identified in several regional assessments as a high priority restoration area and had developed restoration projects ripe for funding. With the support of a key person in the USFS Regional Office, the St. Joe Ranger District moved forward with the steps to compete for participation in the national program. Two local counties, Benewah and Shoshone, wrote letters in support of the application. Since it began, the St. Joe has completed a number of significant restoration projects including in-stream work, road decommissioning and wildlife improvements.

The St. Joe Ecosystem Restoration Project covers a sub-basin of 1.5 million acres--about half of it federal land in the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. It includes most of the St. Joe Ranger District. The St. Joe is tucked against the Montana-Idaho border, backed up to the Bitterroot Range and adjacent to the Coeur D'Alene Indian Reservation on the south end of Lake Coeur D'Alene. St. Maries, the largest community in the St. Joe, is located at the confluence of the St. Joe and the St. Maries Rivers. The St. Joe is a National Wild & Scenic River known for its fly-fishing and other recreational opportunities. The area depends on timber and the recreation industries as its economic base.

Broadly speaking, the US Forest Service manages half of the drainage. Several large private timber companies are the major private landowners. The State manages checker-boarded lands in several locations. Snow-on-rain events in 1996 contributed to over 400 road failures, making road work a major priority in the restoration of the St. Joe basin.

### **Areas Of Success in the St. Joe Project Include:**

- Completing a number of significant watershed improvement projects.
- Project-level partnering and leveraging dollars especially for in-stream work and road decommissioning.
- Funding for inventory work beyond a project allows for a broader look at the watershed.
- Building relationships among key people like County Commissioners and developing recognition among these people about the value of stream health.
- Project-level partnering success may lead the way for greater collaboration.

### **Limitations and Obstacles Identified in the Case Study Include:**

- Little time and few resources are available to build partnerships.
- The lack of community partner participation in the overall watershed restoration initiative is a critical challenge.
- The Forest Service-centered nature of the project is limiting.
- There is no commitment to a common overarching future vision held by all those involved in the watershed.
- The lack of broad tribal involvement is limiting.
- There is a perception of limited support within the Forest Service beyond a few key people.
- The uncertainty of funding streams impacts partnering ability.

### **These Things Should Be Taken into Consideration in Enhancing the St. Joe Project:**

- Engagement with local partners at the watershed and project level takes dedicated staff time and resources. It can't be done "on the side".
- The support of County Commissioners, project level partnering success, the history of leveraging funding and the Payments to Counties funding stream through the new Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) combine to offer the St. Joe an opportunity to create a community-based watershed-level partnership.
- Future success will require the generation of new projects focused on the critical areas of the St. Joe. The early success of completing projects was due to the ready-to-go nature of many of them.
- Current projects have focused federal dollars on federal lands. The lower St. Joe is largely in non-federal ownership and has not received attention in project selection to date.

### **Recommendations For Improving the Effectiveness of the Community-Based Large-Scale Watershed Restoration Project in the St. Joe Include:**

- Create a meaningful community-based oversight group that includes interests and ownerships important to restoring the St. Joe.
- Build on positive project-level partnership experiences.

- Hold a partners' workshop where collaborative projects are generated, selected and initial documents for cooperation developed to jump-start partnering in the St. Joe.
- Develop a working partnership with the Coeur D'Alene tribe.
- Work collaboratively to identify opportunities for restoration projects on non-federal lands, i.e. beyond the Forest Service boundary.
- Work to create greater certainty over funding streams for projects by leveraging restoration program dollars with RAC<sup>1</sup> funding and non-federal monies.

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<sup>1</sup> The Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) was created as a result of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-determination Act of 2000. This federal legislation makes certain transfer payments from the federal government to the states and through states to counties that were historically tied to timber sale receipts and other forest revenue. Title II requires that a RAC be established and that a percentage of funds be used for road work or watershed restoration. See the authors for more information on this act and the requirements.

## Successes

- **Completing Significant Watershed Improvement Projects**

The St. Joe Ecosystem Restoration Project has completed an impressive array of projects including hundreds of miles of roadwork. They have decommissioned roads, obliterated roads, replaced culverts and reconditioned roads aimed at improving in-stream conditions, reducing risks of failure and improving fish & wildlife habitat. Projects were also targeted at improving stream structure through the addition of large wood in streams. Other projects tied to the St. Joe Ecosystem Restoration project goals were completed as well: controlling noxious weeds, riparian planting and wildlife habitat improvements, for example. All agreed that completing restoration projects was the area where the St. Joe has had the largest success.

- **Project Level Partnering Has Been Successful.**

Most of the St. Joe's success has been at the project level. This includes success in partnering. Any number of road decommissioning projects represents significant efforts at leveraging funding by matching funds from the large-scale watershed restoration initiative with National Forest level funding, county funding and others sources. In-stream projects exhibit the best examples of in-kind contributions. For example, a local timber company with landholdings in the St. Joe provided 600 logs for the Heller Creek Restoration Project. This was an area where past practices and history (mining and fire) left few large conifers, hence the need for logs. Logs were then flown in and a "spider" was used to place them in the stream. Multiple funding sources were combined to complete the project. In all, 600 logs were placed in over 120 sites. Riparian planting was also a part of this project. This is just one example of successful project level partnering on the St. Joe.

- **County Commissions Recognize the Value of Watershed Restoration Work.**

A significant outcome of the large-scale watershed restoration project in the St. Joe was the engagement of county commissioners from Benewah and Shoshone Counties. The counties were approached as a part of the application process to be selected for the national program. Subsequent partnering on projects and the recent creation of a Resource Advisory Council have contributed to a growing relationship between the St. Joe Ranger District and the counties. Through these interactions county commissioners have come to value watershed restoration because of the potential to create healthy streams as well as the value of job creation.

- **Funding for Inventory Work Beyond a Project Allows for a Broader Look**

One of the values of the large-scale watershed restoration designation was the associated funding available for inventory work that was not tied to a specific project. This funding allowed specialists to complete inventory work that takes a broader look at watershed conditions.

- **Project-Level Partnering Success May Lead the Way for Greater Collaboration**

Success in local project partnering has improved relationships among collaborators. The funding associated with the large-scale watershed restoration project designation allowed the District to deliver on their side of the bargain. The interpersonal relationships created by project-level partnerships are in good shape. Successful experience in joint ventures should be transferable to other partnering, and through that toward greater community-based collaboration.

## **Limitations**

- **Time and Resources to Build Partnerships Are Limited**

Building partnerships takes resources. Time and money must be committed to the task. In an area like St. Joe where many partners are local but others need to be included from areas further away like Coeur D'Alene or even Moscow and Pullman, the identification and cultivation of partners is not a task that can be carried out as corollary duties. The St. Joe is limited in its capacity to build partnerships at the watershed level because of the lack of time and resources devoted to the task. There is not a full-time or dedicated coordinator in this project. This fact contributes to the limitation of time and resources.

- **Agency Centered with Limited Community Partner Participation in Overall Watershed Restoration Initiative**

As suggested earlier, there is a limited degree of involvement of community partners in the overall watershed restoration project in the St. Joe. Project-level partnering has been successful but no real effort has been made to create a watershed board. This limits the ability of the project to develop a commonly held vision for watershed restoration across ownerships, among interests and through time. The St. Joe has accomplished good on-the-ground work, but the project has been very agency centered in how the work has been accomplished.

- **Special Attention to the Lack of Tribal Involvement**

There is limited involvement of tribes in the overall restoration project. The Coeur D'Alene tribe has partnered on fish enhancement projects. There is a significant opportunity to work with the tribes to connect the St. Joe Ecosystem Restoration Project with their interests.

- **Limited Agency Support for the Initiative Outside of a Few Key People**

The St. Joe project has the strong support of one person in the Regional Office. Otherwise, those involved do not feel much support for the restoration initiative beyond project-by-project support associated with traditional planning and appropriated funding. The St. Joe has been successful in competing for pooled funds at the Forest level, but it is not clear that the large-scale restoration initiative contributed to that success.

- **Uncertainty of Funding Stream Impacts Partnering Ability**

Several people pointed out how critical it is to have more funding certainty for successful partnering. In a tale of two sides of the same coin, one person described the positive impact of funds associated with the community-based large-scale watershed restoration initiative. These funds allowed the Forest Service to make solid

commitments to project partners. On the other side of the coin, another person pointed out that the lack of certainty of this year's funding (with the fire funds pulled back) and of future-year funding is hampering partnering.



## Analysis

- **Engagement with Local Partners at the Watershed and Project Level Takes Dedicated Staff Time and Resources**

Partnering takes specialized knowledge and skills. Grant writing, building relationships, negotiating collaboration agreements and understanding the legal agreements available for Forest Service partnering are all hurdles to success. Within the Forest Service this is problematic and could perhaps be addressed by the way duties are assigned. The same issues are important to community partner organizations. They may not have the knowledge or skills in place to collaborate. Finally, there is a resource question. Even if knowledge, skills and experience are available, if the key people involved have overly full plates, there will be limited success. This reinforces the need for a dedicated watershed coordinator.

On the positive side, the project-by-project success in partnering should be enhancing skills, knowledge and experience. One novel suggestion to improve partnering is to create a workshop for likely partners. At the workshop the skills and information about partnering could be developed. Relationships could be built. The workshop could use real-life potential projects as examples and through the workshop develop the paperwork necessary to accomplish the collaboration. This would enhance competencies in the community, increase commitment to watershed restoration and create a generation of projects ready to go forward.

- **There Is an Opportunity to Create a Community-based Partnership**

The support of County Commissioners, the success in project-level partnering, the history of leveraging funding and the Payments to Counties funding stream through the new RAC combine to create a real opportunity for the St. Joe project to create a community-based watershed-level partnership. Agency staff in the St. Joe reported good relationships with those they have been partnering with on a project basis. The County Commissioners have been engaged and now have an established relationship with the St. Joe Ranger District. The recently create RAC with access to Payments to Counties monies creates yet another reason to collaborate in the St. Joe. Finally, the history of leveraging funding and in-kind support for projects suggests recognition within the community of the synergy created by working together.

- **The Future Will Require the Generation of New Projects Focused On the Most Critical Areas of the St. Joe**

Part of the reason for current success in completing projects was the ready-to-go nature of many of the projects completed. The St. Joe had any number of projects that had been planned and had a Record of Decision signed. They had gone through NEPA and final decision-making. They were ready to go. The early projects were selected by matching existing Forest Service projects with the goals and criteria of the St. Joe Ecosystem Restoration Project business plan. A similar sort of matching

process occurred to leverage funding at the Forest level and with counties and other partners. This is all well and good. The projects were in a drainage with a high restoration priority. Partnering was a key selection criterion. Success has left a track record and established good relationships among partners.

However, the future will require the generation of new projects. New projects should be tied to needs of the complete watershed and not just federal lands. Current projects have focused federal dollars on federal lands. The lower St. Joe is largely in non-federal ownership and has not received attention in project selection. In order to be successful in prioritizing across the landscape, the St. Joe will need assessment information across the watershed, a watershed-based group to generate, develop and select projects and a commitment among partners to a common vision, mission and plan. This is the opportunity before the St. Joe Ecosystem Restoration Project.

## **Recommendations**

- **Create a Meaningful Community-Based Oversight Group That Includes Interests and Ownerships Important to Restoring the St. Joe**

The primary recommendation is to create a community-based watershed-wide group that can take responsibility for guiding the St. Joe Ecosystem Restoration Project. The opportunity is before the St. Joe to move in a direction that includes the whole watershed--private and public lands--and accounts for a wide range of interests. The support of the County Commissioners, the existing relationships among local partners and the potential to partner with additional groups all suggest that this is doable in the St. Joe at this time. Creating such a group is the best way to move forward with a basin-wide restoration program.

- **Develop a Partnering Workshop**

Take on the novel idea of creating a partners' workshop where collaborative projects are generated, selected and initial documents for cooperation are developed to jump-start the partnering process in the St. Joe. This could be an activity of the new watershed oversight group.

- **Develop Working Partnerships With the Coeur D'Alene Tribe**

Tribes value healthy streams. The proximity of the Coeur D'Alene tribe suggests that a relationship be established that allows for collaboration beyond project-by-project. Governance issues are critical to success. Approach the Coeur D'Alene tribe to learn how best to engage the tribe officially in restoration of the St. Joe. The St. Joe flows through reservation land to join the St. Maries River. Beyond tribal interests in the upper St. Joe, the Coeur D'Alene tribe has a vested interest in the St. Joe because of its downstream effect on the St. Maries and on lake Coeur D'Alene. Tribes have been powerful partners in watershed restoration in other settings. The opportunity is there for those in the St. Joe.

- **Work Collaboratively to Identify Opportunities For Restoration Projects on Non-Federal Lands, i.e. Beyond the Forest Service Boundary**

As suggested above, the St. Joe Ecosystem Restoration Project must focus beyond Forest Service lands to be successful in its goals. In other places we have made recommendations about how to proceed. Here, we underscore the importance of working collaboratively to restore the health of the St. Joe watershed in areas of non-federal ownership.

- **Work to Create Greater Certainty Over Funding Streams for Projects**

There seems to be an opportunity to create greater certainty over funding at this time by thinking broadly about the match among interests. The St. Joe has been very

successful in leveraging project level funding by looking at opportunities for matches among funding streams. By stepping up to the watershed level, there may be opportunities to identify levels of funding needed and targets of funding availability. This would allow the St. Joe Project to think strategically, rather than tactically, about funding.