

### *Summary of Program*

In 2001, the US Congress and Western Governors Association called for progressive new local government/federal agency forest restoration partnership programs to reduce fire risk and restore watershed health, especially in western conifer forests. This proposal for a National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program for three Pilot National Forests is designed to fully implement the direction from Congress.

The partnership is proposed to be led by the following counties and forests: in Arizona, Navajo, Apache, Greenlee, Gila and Graham counties and the Apache/Sitgreaves National Forests; in Colorado, Delta, Montrose, Saguache, Gunnison, San Miguel, Ouray, Mesa, and Hinsdale counties and the GMUG National Forests; and in New Mexico, Otero, Lincoln, Eddy and Chaves counties and the Lincoln National Forest.

County led restoration programs on western public lands have become prominent, especially in the last five years. These efforts have focused generally on small demonstration projects to restore terrestrial wildlife habitats, protect and improve aquatic and riparian areas, restore watershed health and reduce fire risk. Elevating these partnership efforts to the landscape level of three entire National Forests represents a powerful strategy to respond to existing critical restoration needs.

A strong co-lead partnership of western counties with three National Forests has significant advantages.

- County governments operate at a localized project scale, as do federal, tribal and state land management agencies.
- County governments are mandated to assure that effective programs are in place for protection, health, safety and welfare of their citizens and their property.
- County governments assure long-term partnership commitment.
- County governments are charged to serve all interests equally, and like the US Forest Service, routinely involve federal, state, Native American and local organizations and private citizens in their programs.
- County responsibilities and authorities permit them to be a strong contributing partner to:
  - Bring together diverse stakeholders and interested publics to resolve local and regional issues.
  - Structure appropriate federal land management issues through an open forum process.
  - Mediate disputes over alternative management directions.
  - Support funding needs of public agencies.
  - Insure important social and economic needs and capabilities.
  - Provide local community partner services.

### *Program Scope and Approach*

This proposed National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program for western federal land restoration is unique in both approach and scope. It will be the first effort to create a fully operational model of a county government/federal land manager partnership at a multiple National Forest scale that will coordinate joint and multi-agency activities.

The program is specifically designed to accomplish the following:

- Expand the operating scale of local government/federal land management restoration partnerships to a multi-state, multi-agency land-base of over 7 million acres.
- Utilize best science and a collaborative process to evaluate and restore high risk areas of the three forests within a 10-year period.
- Address land management planning problems of multi-agency Ownerships at landscape levels.
- Improve local leadership and collaborative processes addressing federal land management programs.
- Enhance coordination between local/federal/tribal program jurisdiction and process.
- Reduce conflicts in treatment of biophysical and socioeconomic resources, and multi-agency issues in planning and management, especially as regards treatment of NEPA and T&E species programs.
- Reduce lengthy periods of review, approval, and implementation of needed management activities.
- Improve treatment of economic and social infrastructure issues related to both traditional and new industry, and custom and culture
- Improve information technology for managing resources and informing the public.

### *Elements of the Partnership Programs*

Existing restoration programs in Arizona and New Mexico with strong county leadership are the Apache-Sitgreaves Blue Ridge Restoration Program and the Lincoln Pilot Forest Restoration Program. Both are led by county governments and a broad based group of stakeholders and interested publics. Working with their respective National Forests, they have pioneered unique programs on forest and watershed restoration. In Colorado, the Uncompahgre Plateau Project is a collaborative effort of county governments, Forest Service and other agencies, and interested citizens. The project is addressing forest restoration programs over multiple public land ownership.

The above forests have several unique qualities that are critical to forest landscape level restoration programs, as follows:

- Fire, insect and disease, and forest watershed health impacts.
- County governments committed to a co-lead partnership and long-term support for the National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program.
- Success in urban-interface and wildland forest restoration programs.
- Completed or initiated scientific assessments of forest reference conditions and requirements for restoration. Several million dollars have been committed from a wide range of sources for science assessments.
- Multiple restoration programs are being developed or planned across the forests.
- Wood fiber and biomass industry development programs are in place.

Several of the above elements are proposed for expansion to develop this National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program. Restoration program planning and development will be elevated from current demonstration levels to an operational scale, which will evaluate all acreage for restoration on each of the three National Forests. Restoration management activities will be coordinated across the three forests so as to enhance all other management activities.

### ***Program Protocol and Requirements***

The following protocols are critical to program success:

- A three forest multi-county management group is necessary to administer the program.
- County government and National Forest managers will act as co-lead partners in managing the program, working with participating government partners from federal, tribal, state and local agencies.
- County governments will provide new leadership on collaborative approaches to: Provide opportunity for involvement of all interested and affected parties, identify place based local community issues and land restoration needs, identify science needs, mitigate conflicts, streamline local government cooperation and sustain financial and other support to forest programs.
- The process and programs will operate within the boundaries of existing law.
- Land managers will require administrative variance on contracting, budgeting, NEPA processes and pursuit of multi-agency-private sector cooperative programs.
- Annual restoration of sufficient acreage on each forest over ten year to resolve impacts of excess tree densities, wildfire, insect and disease, noxious weeds etc., on watershed health and sustainability.
- Restoration programs will be used, as appropriate, to enhance all ongoing forest programs and uses.
- Restoration approaches will use best available science.
- Programs will incorporate advanced information technology.
- Cost effective monitoring will be implemented.
- Programs will develop and improve sustainable economic infrastructures to protect local custom and culture.
- Programs will utilize existing and new forest industry to minimize social program costs. An effective information, education and technology transfer program is required. Supplemental funding is programmed on multi-year periods.

### ***Schedule and Requirements***

The National Forest County Partnership Restoration Program for the three pilot forests is proposed for the decade period 2002-2013. With appropriate funds in years 1-5, it is anticipated that the most at risk acreages to fire and forest health on these forests can be restored through the 10 year period. Also, primary accomplishments will include new collaborative approaches, improved forest restoration practices, more efficient administrative and land management planning procedures and treatment techniques, and improved economic infrastructure, monitoring and analysis.

It is anticipated that supplemental funding needs for the National Forest CPR Program are as follows:

FY 2002	\$3.0 million	Critical startup funds for each forest, possibly from carryover funds, are necessary to launch administrative, science and planning activities and initial treatments.
FY 2003-2013	\$12-\$15 million/year	The majority of funds would go to activities to engage local communities, and design and implement restoration treatments.

The average annual total cost for the three forest program is estimated at \$12-15 million per year for the first 5 years. The programs will directly affect three National Forests, 3 states, 17 counties, over 100 communities and over 7 million acres. The long-term program benefit on each forest from reduced costs of fire and resource impacts is expected to exceed proposed program costs.