



Ecosystem
Workforce
Program

ADVANCING RURAL CONSERVATION-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

FRAMING OUR COMMUNITY IN ELK CITY, ID

FACT SHEET 11 • FALL 2016

Across the U.S. West, many rural communities adjacent to publicly owned federal lands have been greatly affected by changes to federal land management policies and by economic restructuring of the wood products industry. In the late 1980s through the early 2000s, federal forest policy changes led to reductions in both federal timber harvests and timber industry employment. At the same time, a combination of industry competition, automation, and relocation created additional uncertainty in communities traditionally dependent upon wood products employment. Elk City, Idaho, like many other communities surrounded by large tracts of federal land across the West, was profoundly affected by these changes. In 1999, local leaders and citizens founded a community-based organization called Framing Our Community to help the community navigate this transition while maintaining ties to natural resource activities and employment. Like other community-based organizations, Framing Our Community works with multiple public, private, and non-profit entities at multiple scales to facilitate sustainable natural resource-based economic development at the local community level. This Fact Sheet documents the origins of Framing Our Community and illustrates how the organization has helped to foster conservation-based economic development in Elk City and beyond.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Elk City is located in Idaho County in north central Idaho, at the end of winding Highway 14, and is surrounded by the Nez Perce National Forest and by land owned and managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The unincorporated community started out as a tent-camp mining town during the gold rush days starting in the 1860s. Today Elk City is a small community that still serves as a supply center for people living in town and the outlying regions of Red River, Dixie, and Orogrande. The local economy is based on natural resources (timber, salmon, and native plants) and recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, ATV and snowmobile use, equestrian trails, and camping. Like many western rural communities, Elk City is faced with considerable challenges in economic development given its small population, isolation from major population centers and markets, limited infrastructure, and vulnerability to management changes on the surrounding federal lands.



Town of Elk City, ID. Photo courtesy of Emily Jane Davis, Oregon State University.



Elk City, ID community center. Photo courtesy of Autumn Ellison, University of Oregon



Official Framing Our Community sign. Photo courtesy of Emily Jane Davis, Oregon State University.

GETTING STARTED: FRAMING A COMMUNITY CENTER

Framing our Community began as a group of Elk City residents that met together regularly to help provide guidance for a community center construction effort. The open-air building that was created as a result of this initial community effort is located adjacent to the local school building, and serves as an outdoor classroom for local children and as a community facility where local groups can hold events. The center was constructed with timber from nearby forests, with volunteer labor supplied by community members aged 8 to 80, all under the guidance of expert timber framers from the Timber Framers Guild of North America.

"It's a very literal name... It was timber framing and how you could do custom mill cuts and create a business that had higher margins of wholesale and retail sales for the manufacturer. Literally parents, grandparents and children were involved. We integrated it into the educational system so the children actually visited the work site and did measurements on beams, realizing why they needed to learn fractions and multiplication tables."

Joyce Dearstyne, Framing Our Community Executive Director

As the community center neared completion, the group of residents met to discuss other challenges facing their community, particularly as a result of federal forest policy changes had led to decreased timber volumes, which meant less work in the woods and fewer logs going to the local mill. By the time the center was complete in 1998, the local sawmill had begun its decline from two full shifts to a skeleton crew, the Forest Service had consolidated the nearest ranger districts, and the local population had started to shrink. To confront these new challenges facing the community, a group of local residents initiated a formal organization, and went on to serve as the first board members of Framing Our Community, which was incorporated in 1999. For several years, the organization was run entirely through the volunteer hours of the board and executive director.

In its initial years, Framing Our Community held community meetings and conducted surveys to get a better idea of where the community wanted to go in response to the challenges it was facing, and it began work to bring federal, state, county, nonprofit and community members together to find solutions to keeping the community alive and working. There was broad community consensus around wanting to keep the traditional natural resource-based economy active, and Framing Our Community pursued partnerships with the Nez Perce National Forest and BLM.

In 2001, Framing Our Community conducted a business feasibility study to determine if the small-diameter timber that crowded the surrounding forests could be used to create jobs in the community. While an

overabundance of small-diameter trees can have negative ecological impacts, smaller trees were generally left behind from traditional timber sales due to a lack of economic value. Framing Our Community's study, together with community input, led to the early planning efforts for a community business "incubator" facility.

In the following years, Framing Our Community evolved from these early efforts, participating in efforts to link land stewardship and economic development in the community. Today the organization runs a completed business incubator facility, has ongoing agreements with land management agencies, and continues to pursue ongoing education and networking efforts.

Framing Our Community

Vision: healthy forests create healthy communities

Mission: to provide programs that create jobs, improve forest and watershed conditions, and increase educational opportunities

FRAMING OUR COMMUNITY TODAY

Elk City Small Business Incubator

After several years of planning, grant writing, coordination, securing land, and construction, Framing Our Community opened the completed Elk City Small Business Incubator in 2005. The facility offers a modern, low-rent industrial space for the start-up of value-added wood products and other industries that create local jobs. The objective is to give new businesses the basic skills and connections they need to start up and survive. Framing Our Community partners with colleges and small business centers in the area to offer users of the incubator access to a broad base of business development and management knowledge, including access to micro-loan programs and funding for infrastructure needs, marketing tools, and a course in business management.



Elk City Small Business Incubator in Fall '12. Photo courtesy of Emily Jane Davis, Oregon State University.

As of fall 2016, five businesses that began with help from the incubator facility and associated resources had graduated to business facilities of their own, further contributing to the local economy.

Agreements with federal land management agencies:

Hands-on forest Management

Since 2002, Framing Our Community has held agreements to work with the BLM to hire contractors for seasonal technical work, such as archeology technicians who conduct studies on planned treatment areas.

During hiring efforts, Framing Our Community solicits and evaluates applications for upcoming openings, and the BLM assists with final applicant interviews and selections. Selected professionals work directly for Framing Our Community on specified BLM projects. This process works well and offers efficiency for both Framing Our Community and the BLM, particularly because, as Framing Our Community Executive Director Joyce Dearstyne notes "we work at providing specialized services to federal land management agencies at a cost benefit, reducing agency overhead."



Hazardous fuels reduction work outside of Elk City, ID. Photo courtesy of Emily Jane Davis, Oregon State University.

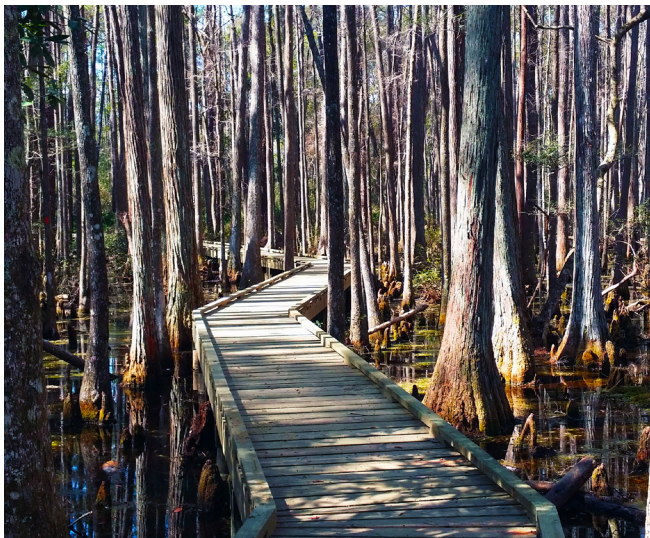
Historic Preservation

Framing Our Community works with Region 1 of the US Forest Service to contract historic preservation specialists for work to preserve and restore historic sites within national forests. Workers skilled in clerical, forestry, general labor, fire support, historic preservation, engineering, and project inspection assist the Forest Service in completing projects that restore historic buildings, lookouts, and camps. Framing Our Community only hires employees for these positions that are interested in teaching their skills and knowledge to future natural resource professionals through youth camps and programs, so that even if professionals come from outside the local area, local benefits are realized through education efforts.

Trail Infrastructure

Framing Our Community works on trail infrastructure projects, primarily with the national forests in Florida on the Florida National Scenic Trail, a 1,300-mile scenic hiking trail that begins in the Florida Panhandle and ends below Lake Okeechobee. Employees that work on trail projects on the Payette and Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests in Idaho travel to Florida each year to conduct this work because the season for trail work in Florida is at the opposite time of the year, creating full-time employment for some Elk City residents. Framing Our Community works with the members of the Florida National Scenic Trail Coalition, which is comprised of state and federal land management agencies, water

management districts, and volunteer organizations like the Florida Trail Association, on projects that maintain and improve the National Scenic Trail while instructing and empowering dedicated volunteers. The Framing Our Community trail crew is comprised primarily of engineers that design and construct bridges and boardwalks with minimal environmental impact. The crew also focuses on teaching volunteers and technicians hired by the Forest Service in Florida about trail engineering and design, broadening the local knowledge of trail building in the areas they work on there.



Boardwalk built through a cypress swamp in Ocean Pond, FL. Photo courtesy of Joyce Dearstyne, Framing Our Community.

Education and Outreach

Framing Our Community developed and is an active participant in the Clearwater Basin Youth Conservation Corps, which was created to expose local youth to natural resource career opportunities while providing them with practical problem-solving skills on projects that both restore habitats and promote healthy rural communities. The Youth Corps completes hands-on projects that survey and treat invasive species, maintain and build trails, repairs lookouts, conducts river cleanups, and implements defensible space assessments and treatments with local landowners. Framing Our Community created a Firewise Award-winning DVD, "Are We Safe from Fire? Protecting Idaho Communities," to help educate the Youth Corps as well public and homeowners about wildfires and creating defensible space around homes. Dearstyne explains: "Framing Our Community's goal is to introduce, educate and hopefully generate the next generation of natural resource stewards."

Collaboration and networking

Framing Our Community has been active in networking and policy engagement locally, regionally, and nationally. As Executive Director Joyce Dearstyne notes:

"Being so small, we learned that a single voice draws little attention, but a group has a much larger presence and draws from a much deeper reservoir of knowledge. We believe that by assisting others we can assist ourselves...success benefits all."

Framing Our Community is involved in both the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) and the Clearwater Basin Collaborative. The RVCC is comprised of over 80 organizations that work together to promote conservation-based approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the rural West and the nation. The Clearwater Basin Collaborative was established in 2008 to bring together representatives from business, conservation, government, and tribal interests to resolve land management conflicts within the Clearwater Basin in North-Central Idaho. Partnerships and an openness to new ideas have been critical to the success of Framing Our Community.

CONCLUSION

Framing Our Community works to achieve linked natural resource stewardship and rural economic development through a variety of strategies, partnering with diverse entities through multiple forums in order to create positive change at the local level. The Elk City small business incubator offers prospective businesses an opportunity to innovate with lower risks and increased support than would otherwise be available. Framing Our Community's practical work with federal land management agencies creates opportunities for both local employment and the stewardship of local forests and watersheds. Participation in networks from local to national scales fosters an exchange of ideas, helps community leaders to share successes, and connects communities that are geographically isolated but working toward the same goals

LEARN MORE

This fact sheet is part of a research project looking at how community-based organizations help foster natural resource-based economic development in public lands communities. For more information visit the project page at: www.ewp.uoregon.edu/cbos

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