



Ecosystem Workforce Program

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The State of the Dry Forest Zone

Emily Jane Davis and Cassandra Moseley Fall 2010

The Dry Forest Zone of eastern and central Oregon and northern California is a region with high rates of poverty and unemployment, degraded landscapes, and severe wildfire risk. But it also has strong traditions of innovative entrepreneurship and natural resource stewardship. Local stakeholders and community-based organizations have fostered collaborative approaches to solving these common problems. The Dry Forest Zone project is an effort to bring these local solutions to a regional scale, allowing diverse communities to learn from one another. The purpose of this briefing paper is to summarize our key findings from an assessment of the social, economic, and biophysical conditions in the zone, and the opportunities and barriers to economic development and sustainable forest stewardship.

Approach

We conducted an assessment of the 15 counties of the Dry Forest Zone between October 2009 and January 2010. We interviewed stakeholders to gather information about current conditions, and created a series of maps to document the region's biogeographic and socio-economic characteristics.

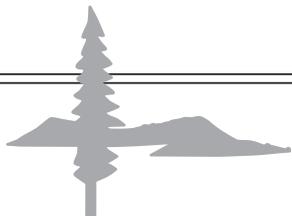
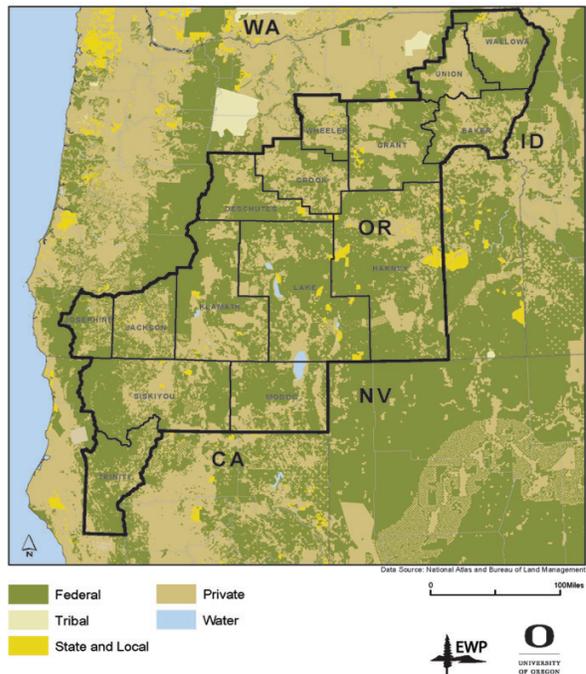
Assessment Findings

1) There is growing support for reducing wildfire risk and maintaining working landscapes through active land management

Many stakeholders from counties, businesses, nonprofits, and agencies in the zone see a need for community wildfire protection and active restoration of public lands. There is growing agreement that mid-elevation and plantation pine forests require treatment, while management of mixed conifer forests remains more controversial. There is also a strong interest in maintaining private lands for timber, ranching, and alternative value streams such as ecosystem services. Sustainable forest stewardship can create local employment and business opportunities. However, there is concern that current levels of forest management are inadequate to meet resto-

ration and economic development goals. Despite broad interest, landowners are not yet capturing alternative value streams because ecological and business feasibility data remain limited.

Land ownership in the Dry Forest Zone



2) There is extensive interest in using woody biomass utilization to achieve forest stewardship and economic development goals

Biomass and small-diameter utilization may allow capture of value streams from forest restoration and wildfire risk reduction activities. Several businesses in Wallowa, Deschutes, and Jackson counties produce biomass resources such as combined heat and power, electricity municipal heat, densified fuel, and animal bedding. A number of other businesses have proposed locating biomass facilities in the zone. Many of these proposals are for large electricity generation plants, which may not be feasible. Wallowa and Trinity counties have pioneered community-scaled integrated facilities that are diversified (produce a range of products) and integrated (systems for the site's production and consumption of energy, heat, and wood waste products are combined in a loop). These models maximize efficiency and are feasible for smaller entrepreneurs.

3) Community-based organizations in the zone have played a critical role in supporting local businesses and mobilizing forest restoration

Organizations such as the Watershed Research and Training Center, Wallowa Resources, and the Lake County Resources Initiative perform a range of tasks in their local areas. They support forest-based businesses through grant and loan acquisition, business planning, workforce training, and technical assistance. This has helped several small businesses overcome capital investment and risk issues. They have also worked with collaborative groups to build

social agreement about public lands management. Community-based organizations are able to network with a range of stakeholders to coordinate local resources and achieve diverse goals.

4) Public policy greatly impacts rural communities across the Zone, but capacity for policy engagement is largely found in regional and national coalitions

The fact that the majority of lands in the zone are publicly owned has significantly shaped the ability of federal land management agencies to generate ecological and socioeconomic benefits. County commissions or boards of supervisors are a common interface between communities and the federal government. There are several regional coalitions, such as the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, and national interest-based coalitions, that have regional representation, but all of these organizations are headquartered outside of the zone.

Conclusion

The assessment revealed that the Dry Forest Zone shares common challenges in land management, community economic development, and policy engagement. However, community-based non-profit organizations have helped find local solutions to these challenges in Trinity and Wallowa counties. Their success lies in their ability to connect key resources and stakeholders. To foster systemic, transformative change at the regional scale, our findings suggest that expanding these kinds of networks will allow communities across the zone share innovations, technical assistance, and lessons learned.



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

The Dry Forest Zone project team is Sustainable Northwest, the Watershed Research and Training Center, Wallowa Resources, and the Ecosystem Workforce Program.

For more information:

The complete assessment can be found in the EWP publication "The State of the Dry Forest Zone and its Communities", which is available on the web at <http://ewp.uoregon.edu/research/dfz/>, or by contacting the Ecosystem Workforce Program at ewp@uoregon.edu

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