



Ecosystem Workforce Program



A QUICK GUIDE FOR CREATING HIGH-QUALITY JOBS THROUGH RESTORATION ON NATIONAL FORESTS

WINTER 2012

Forest Service policies and programs promote the integration of forest and watershed restoration with local economic development. For example, the Collaborative Landscape Restoration Program, stewardship contracting, and the Watershed Condition Framework all explicitly link rural community benefit and restoration. By providing opportunities for local businesses to restore and manage ecosystems, national forests and grasslands and their partners can help create jobs and build community capacity for watershed stewardship. However, you and your collaborators may not have deliberate strategies to make this happen. The purpose of this quick guide is to help you, as a national forests and grasslands staff person, work with key stakeholders and partners to develop and implement strategies to create jobs from restoration using tools already at your disposal.

Resources

Conducting a workforce assessment and planning a high-quality jobs program:

<http://ewp.uoregon.edu/resources/workforce-qualityjobs/>

Building a restoration workforce training program:

<http://ewp.uoregon.edu/resources/contracting-ewt/>

Monitoring the economic impacts of ecosystem restoration and stewardship:

<http://ewp.uoregon.edu/economy>

Using best value and stewardship contracting, from Sustainable Northwest:

<http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/resources/publications/Best%20value%20guidebook.pdf>

Creating and implementing a high-quality jobs program

Developing and implementing a high-quality jobs program involves several steps. Typically, you and your partners will need to assess the workforce and business capacity in your area; develop and implement a plan to build business and workforce capacity and modify agency employment, contracting, and agreement strategies to increase local benefit; monitor outcomes of your plan; and learn and adapt.

1. Build collaborative partnerships

To be successful, job creation and economic development typically involves collaboration and coordination among many entities. Forest Service personnel will need to partner with other government, nongovernmental, and educational entities to accomplish these activities. These may include workforce development agencies, community colleges, nonprofit organizations, educational programs, and natural resource collaboratives. In addition, multiple staff members on your national forest or grassland may need to be involved, including those responsible for land management as well as contract and agreement development.

There are some activities that national forest personnel can effectively undertake, such as providing contracting data for a workforce assessment, modifying contracting practices, developing seasonal employment strategies, or providing projects for training programs. In other cases, personnel may lack the authority to take the lead, such as to collect data about contractors



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as part of the workforce assessment or monitoring. In other instances, other entities may be better suited to take the lead, such as with leading youth training programs, developing training curricula, or engaging in business mentoring. Reach out to these entities if they are not already active partners and explain that you are interested in designing a program of work that yields local economic benefit. Ask them to help by offering insights into specific local economic challenges and strengths. Over time, work together to develop a shared vision and a sense of roles and responsibilities.

- What activities is your organization well-suited to do and what activities are other organizations better positioned to do?
- What steps do you need to take to build relationships with key partners?
- How can you sustain partnerships to develop a robust and successful program?

2. Assess local workforce and business capacity

Understanding local business and workforce capacity can help you and your partners direct your investments toward local communities for the greatest impact. Undertaking a workforce assessment can help you achieve this (see Resources box on page 1 for resources for conducting a workforce assessment). Nonprofit organizations with economic development interest and expertise may be in the best position to lead the assessment.

One way to begin a workforce assessment is to convene existing partners such as contractors, NGOs, tribes, and local governments to discuss local economic conditions and business capacity. You and your partners can then work together to determine how to collect more detailed information including the number and business models of area contractors, available equipment and skills, volume and trends in available restoration work, and contractor interest and needs.

In some cases, your community might already have strong contracting capacity, partnerships, and clear plans for economic development. In other cases, the local community may have limited business capacity and few partnerships. In these cases, you and your partners may consider building contractor capacity to successfully compete for government contracts. Sharing the basics of federal contracting authorities can strengthen the competitiveness of local contractors. You might also



discover that businesses have difficulty finding a local restoration workforce, and that there is a need for worker training.

- Who can collect and analyze information about contractor and workforce capacity, interests, and needs? Who can collect and analyze information about trends in contracting opportunities?
- What is the local business capacity to undertake restoration activities? What skills, equipment, and staff do they have? What barriers do local contractors face to engage in federal contracting?
- Who is currently capturing restoration contracts on your national forest, other federal lands, or private lands? Who is doing restoration for other organizations such as watershed councils or conservation districts?
- What are the significant restoration activities planned in the short to medium term? Are there any gaps between current capacity and work opportunities?
- How much and what kind of work is likely available in the future?
- Are there opportunities to locally utilize any restoration byproducts? Could new utilization opportunities be developed?

3. Create an action plan

Developing an action plan can help you and your partners deliberately create clear goals and strategies, and determine responsibilities (see resources for action planning in the Resources box on page 1). You could ask the following questions to develop your action plan:

Set goals

- What impacts do you and your partners want to have on local capacity and economic conditions?
- Where can you and your partners realistically affect local conditions?

Develop strategies

- What could you do to increase the consistency, diversity, or accessibility of this work for local contractors?
- What did you learn about local contractor capacity and needs from your workforce assessment?
 - What gaps exist between your planned work and local capacity?
 - How could you address these gaps with trainings, peer networking, and other capacity-building activities that match contractor interests with your needs?
 - How could you structure contracts to help increase accessibility of restoration opportunities without changing your restoration goals?
- How could you help improve the quality of restoration jobs (see High-Quality Jobs box)?
- How could you create opportunities for youth, tribes, and underserved communities to access jobs and training?
- What new technical and financial resources might help you implement your plan?

Identify resources and assign responsibility

- Who can implement each of these strategies?
- Who should they partner with to accomplish them?
- What resources are needed and where will they come from?
- Do you need any additional partners? How you develop those relationships?
- What is a realistic timeline for implementation?

4. Implement your action plan

Each strategy in your action plan may operate on a different timeline. You and your partners may consider planning a sequence of tasks and steps that allows you to start small and build

High-Quality Jobs in Forest and Watershed Restoration

- Family supporting compensation (e.g., above the county average annual wage)
- A safe and healthy workplace
- Stable, durable employment
- Ability to work near where one lives
- Training and opportunity for advancement

on your gains. Ensure that you maintain regular communication with your staff, partners, and contractors to track progress during project implementation, and adjust your plans if needed.

- Which strategies or projects are doable and ready to begin with minimum effort?
- Which strategies or projects are high priorities to your partners and communities?
- What kinds of contracts and agreements could you use to implement your strategies?
- How will you maintain regular communication with key partners and contractors during project implementation?

5. Monitor and adapt as you learn

Monitoring the outcomes of your high-quality jobs program can help you learn and adapt your strategies (see Resources box on page 1 for monitoring resources). Partners can assist with developing and implementing a monitoring process. If contractors are willing to participate, you can monitor any effects your projects may be having on their business capacity. Your monitoring process may include interviews or surveys with those you've aimed to affect through your jobs program. You could also monitor the impact of training and skill building on youth, tribes, and underserved communities over time.

- What types of impacts and effects do you want to track?
- How are you experimenting or innovating? How can you learn from these experiments?
- What strategies can you use to monitor efficiently? Who will conduct monitoring, and with what resources?
- How will you incorporate what you learn from your monitoring into learning?
 - How might you convene partners regularly to take stock of progress and identify areas for improvement?

Eight strategies for creating high-quality jobs through restoration

1. Structure the scale and timing of contracts to support a consistent supply of work suited to local contracting capacity. You can use information from your local workforce assessment when designing contracts to deliberately create opportunities that match local capacity. For example, contracts of a longer duration for fewer people are generally more accessible to rural businesses than shorter-duration contracts involving a larger number of people.
2. Use local benefit criteria for selecting contractors. Many types of best-value service contracts and stewardship contracts allow you to consider local benefit when selecting contractors. You can reward contractors who create local jobs and capacity and who perform excellent work.
3. Use stewardship contracting authority. Stewardship contracting and agreements incorporate local economic benefit through best-value contracting, reinvestment of retained receipts, flexible bonding requirements, and a mandate for community collaboration. You can structure stewardship contracts and agreements to fit local contracting capacity or to help build necessary capacity.
4. Develop agreements with nonprofits or local government to implement restoration projects in places with limited contracting capacity. Nonprofit organizations such as watershed councils and local governments such as soil and water conservation districts may have capacity to conduct restoration work or have interest in mentoring small local contractors. Nonprofits may also be able to perform technical activities associated with National Environmental Policy Act planning, such as surveying.
5. Ensure that contractors adhere to labor and safety laws. It is especially important to focus on job quality when work is labor-intensive or involves migrant and seasonal workers, significant minority populations, or guest workers. You can address job quality by regularly inspecting job sites for safety and labor violations, talking directly to workers in their native language, and partnering with state and federal labor and safety agencies that have enforcement authority.



6. Directly hire seasonal and student employees and use federal training opportunities to build broad workforce skill by developing a deliberate training strategy to contribute to a local workforce with a broad range of restoration skills. Direct employment also provides access to living wages, professional employment, and benefits such as health care and retirement benefits, which can be rare in rural communities.
7. Partner with workforce development agencies, community colleges, and nonprofit organizations to develop a local workforce training program. For example, you can offer restoration projects that are well-suited to on-the-job training opportunities for students; while other organizations can recruit and employ students, provide classroom training, and identify restoration projects across multiple agencies.
8. Work with AmeriCorps, Job Corps, or other youth-oriented organizations to train youth in restoration and foster stewardship values. These programs benefit individuals and can be a low-cost option for implementing projects. It is important to structure programs to include local youth if you are in a community with limited economic opportunities.

Creating jobs and contributing to business capacity

Huron National Forest builds a skilled workforce

To accomplish their hazardous fuels reduction work under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Huron National Forest developed an innovative approach to job creation. They directly hired eighty-eight seasonal workers and expanded their work season by providing extensive and broad training in “safety . . . firefighting skills, chainsaw operation, heavy equipment operation, physical fitness, and what it means to work for the Forest Service.” These workers were able to apply their new skills in the field while improving wildlife habitat, increasing timber values, and creating conditions necessary to reintroduce fire back into the landscape. Although these jobs were not permanent, they helped build a skilled workforce and contributed to the local economy. As one of the temporary employees noted, “I know a number of businesses in town that are really thankful that [this work] is here, because people have steady paychecks. . . . The bars that sell food and stuff like that, the pizza place, the Shell, the Marathon, Verizon. All these businesses have money coming from the people who work [for the recovery project]. . . . I would say a lot of money pours out into this town from the stimulus, especially on paydays.”

Rogue River–Siskiyou National Forest supports the growth of family-owned restoration business

Public lands surround the small community of Agness, in southern Oregon. The Rogue River–Siskiyou National Forest has played a significant role in their local economy by offering opportunities for local businesses to perform restoration work. One such company is the Agness Company, which first became involved with the Forest Service in 1991 through a small contract to grow grass seed. Since then, the owners have undertaken road construction and maintenance projects including a culvert replacements and a multiyear road maintenance contract. The Forest Service’s use of best-value contracting has encouraged the Agness Company to consistently perform high-quality work. A multiyear contract has provided the stability needed to invest in

new equipment and increase their workers’ skills through formal training and learning on the job. In addition, restoration work has helped create local jobs. As one owner remarked, “Since logging has shut down, there has been severe poverty. So by paying high wages, or even just steady work, . . . we have been able to help families.”

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest partners to build local businesses and critical skills

By the early 2000s, the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest faced a challenge. The Grande Ronde River and its surrounding canyons were experiencing a severe noxious weed invasion that threatened native habitat and species, grazing and soil conditions, and wildlife. However, this corridor crossed numerous boundaries: two states, land of the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, and private land. The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and other landowners asked Wallowa Resources, a local nonprofit organization, to help coordinate noxious weed treatment across ownerships. Wallowa Resources used this partnership to deliberately structure work to increase local contractor capacity. By building a steady supply of projects, Wallowa Resources and the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest have had a significant impact on local businesses. Existing businesses have been able to build their skills and invest in their equipment and workforce. In addition, the number of local businesses performing this work has more than quadrupled from three to fourteen, as Wallowa Resources has helped connect local entrepreneurs to these work opportunities and diversify their businesses. Wallowa Resources estimates that this program contributes \$100,000 per year to their local economy.

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