

ECOSYSTEM WORKFORCE

BRIEFING PAPERS

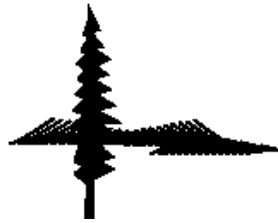
**Linking Ecological, Social, and Economic Objectives:
Moving Forward in Lake County**

Jane O’Keeffe

County Commissioner, Lake County, Oregon

Keynote Address, Ecosystem Workforce Program Forum
Pendleton Oregon, April 26, 2001

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The *Ecosystem Workforce Program Briefing Papers* series offers short papers designed to give a clear, brief, easy-to-digest introduction to key issues, innovation, lessons and findings about a variety of areas associated with the effort to build quality jobs in ecosystem management. The target audience includes public land management agency line officers and project managers, community organization leaders, and local community officials. A secondary audience is the broader community forestry constituency.

Linking Ecological, Social, and Economic Objectives: Moving Forward in Lake County, EWP Briefing Paper Number 2, is adapted from Lake County Commissioner Jane O’Keeffe’s keynote address to the April 2001 Ecosystem Workforce Program Forum in Pendleton Oregon. The talk gave participants a powerful snapshot of the leadership Commissioner O’Keeffe has contributed to the Lake County Sustainability Initiative. From development of lasting collaborative relationships within the community and with external environmental groups and technical resources, to reauthorization of the Lakeview Federal Sustained Yield Unit—reframed for sustainable resource management—and creation of Lake County Resources Initiative, an on-going, independent, non-profit organization, Lake County is *moving forward!*

ECOSYSTEM WORKFORCE PROGRAM

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE, HIGH-SKILL/HIGH-WAGE ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY

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**Linking Ecological, Social, and Economic Objectives:
Moving Forward in Lake County**
Jane O’Keeffe, Lake County Commissioner
Keynote Address, Ecosystem Workforce Program Forum
Pendleton, Oregon

I would like to tell you today what we are doing in Lake County to promote both healthy forest ecosystems *and* high wage, high skill jobs in natural resources. We have created a unique coalition to work towards this goal and we have learned several lessons along the way that I would like to share with you.

Who we are in Lake County?

Lake County is located in southeast Oregon. It is the third largest county in the state, with approximately 8,500 square miles. According to the 2000 census, there are 7,422 people living in Lake County. Our private sector economy is primarily natural resource based and the government is the largest employer in the County. This is not surprising since 78% of the land is owned by one form of government or another, primarily the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Just like every other eastside county, its natural resource-based economy is not doing well. We have high unemployment and low population growth. Our demographics have changed from an even mix of age groups to a larger percentage of retired people and fewer working-age folks.

Because Lake County’s economy has always been natural resource-based, there naturally has been a high degree of interest in national forest management and community benefits derived from the Fremont National Forest. In fact, in the early 1950s, community leaders were able to convince Congress to create a sustained Yield Unit in the Fremont National Forest. Community leaders believed that the Unit would be a stabilizing economic force for the communities of Lakeview and Paisley. The Unit agreement stipulated that all timber taken from the Unit would be milled in either Lakeview or Paisley and that companies that bid on Unit timber were not able to bid on federal timber outside the Unit, either on the Fremont or other national forests. There was an agreed-upon volume of timber that would be harvested from the Unit each year. And there were stipulations that bidders compete for timber in the Unit. This system worked well until the mid-1990s, when changing national forest policies no longer allowed for the cut stipulated in the Unit agreement. In 1996, the Paisley mill closed leaving only one remaining sawmill and created real doubt about the continued existence of the Unit.

Grouching & Facing Change

Faced with the closing of the last mill in Paisley, Lake County called together local leaders, including people who had worked on the original Unit designation, local timber industry representatives, ranchers, and the local business community and charged the group with “saving the Unit”. What started as an effort to keep exactly what we had soon turned into much more.

Our process started out as many do with lots of grouching and blaming—mainly of environmentalists. Finally, however, we broadened our focus from only trying to keep what we had to looking at what exactly we did have. We looked at the forest and we made the

uncomfortable discovery that what might have been good for the community economically was not necessarily good for the health of the forest. *This was a hard thing to face.*

We looked at positive efforts to manage forests by local private industry, specifically Collins Pine. We continued to cuss environmentalists. However, we became intrigued with the Forest Stewardship Council certification program and its focus not only on sustainable harvest but also on ecosystem health and community benefit. And believing that we had learned our lessons, we made a bold proposal: in order to “save” the Unit, we asked the Forest Service to seek certification. We were unaware of the controversy about certification on public lands, a debate mainly between environmentalists and certifiers.

Looking to the Future

Around this time the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department and Sustainable Northwest West joined us in our effort. With some substantial prodding from our new helpers, and out of a growing sense that we were never going to get anywhere telling each other how mad we were, we came up with a new approach. In July of 1997, we held a conference with the general theme being: “If you want to debate certification on public lands in Lake County, then come to Lake County and talk about it.” And people came.

To make this meeting work, we:

- Did extensive outreach to the environmentalist, industry, and certifiers
- Did lots of community outreach
- Created an agenda that
 - Allowed for extensive shared learning
 - Took us out on the ground
 - Allowed time for folks to get to know the community.

And it *was* successful, with considerable community support. (Well, almost everyone in the community supported us.)

The result was a new direction. It turned out that we all had something to learn from one another and that we agreed to move forward together. We agreed that we needed an independent assessment of the health of the Unit. A team of certifiers, including Forest Service professionals and independent scientists completed an assessment that showed us the current ecological condition of the Unit and gave recommendations on how to go forward with restoration, but not certification. The said assessment said what we had expected—the forest needed a serious focus on restoration rather than on production exclusively.

Lake County
Sustainability Initiative

Vision

We envision a sustainable forest ecosystem that, through a new understanding of the interrelationship between the people and the land, will ensure quality of life for present and future generations of people and forests.

Lake County
Sustainability Initiative

Goals

1. Sustain and restore a healthy, diverse, and resilient forest ecosystem that can accommodate human and natural disturbances.
2. Sustain and restore the land's capacity to absorb, store, and distribute quality water.
3. Provide opportunities for people to realize their material, recreational, and spiritual values and relationships with the forest.

We agreed to keep the group together and create a mission and goals. We stuck to our successful formula of shared learning about our particular ecosystem, both in the field and in the "classroom." We created a vision and goals. Ultimately one our youth wrote the vision statement.

We swung into high gear politically with a new message from Lake County: We want the Unit reauthorized and we want a new emphasis on restoration and local jobs. It is a long story but, ultimately, the Unit was reauthorized.

Where do we go from here?

We have a policy success but we aren't truly successful unless we have local folks working in the woods at high-skill, high-wage jobs. So, our focus is now on workforce issues. We are pressuring the agencies to let contracts that are friendly to local contractors. We are thinking about developing local capacity for NEPA analysis or environmental engineering services. We are considering structures to increase the bonding capacity for local contractors. We want to find ways to take advantage of local opportunities including county payments dollars and national fire plan funds.

Our group continues to play a bridging role between agency, industry, community, and environmentalists. We are creating a local non-profit, which is now in the formative stages.

Lessons learned

1. The true value of a multi-stakeholder approach such as ours is that the results are reality tested for the larger world. Remember when I told you about us sitting around in Lake County telling ourselves how it ought to be and how everyone else didn't understand? Well, now we understand those other points of view and they understand ours. I witnessed our environmental partners at a recent meeting advising the Forest Service about how to structure a timber sale so it would not be so vulnerable to appeals.
2. Working with multiple stakeholders takes a long time—everyone needs to feel that they are heard and understood. This simply cannot be accomplished in a few meetings over a short period. Perhaps a sign should be posted: "Type A's need not apply." We have been at this since 1997 and we are still not there yet.
3. It is important to work on a scale that is appropriate to the community. Our lines were already drawn on the map. Everyone knew the area; it made sense.

4. As we move forward together, we have come to believe that monitoring is critical. It gives us a tool to evaluate our proposals and ultimately extends credibility beyond the group.
5. It worked well for us to “fly below the radar.” We knew we were doing something unique and sometimes it was hard to resist tooting our horn but high media profiles can add dynamics to groups that usually aren’t healthy. With no media and just us working together, we had no stages on which to “play to our constituencies.” We were able to maintain focus. But please note: there came a time—reauthorization time—when we needed the media and I suspect that part of the reason that we got such a positive editorial from the *Oregon* supporting our reauthorization was that they were positively amazed to see a backwoods, Republican county commissioner—me—and a representative of the Wilderness Society—Mike Anderson—ask for the same thing.
6. For any effort such as this to continue, support and membership must be not only broad but deep. This is an issue we constantly struggle with. We still rely on a few key people who have the support of their groups or community. But we have to get better at this.
7. We suspect that a multiparty stakeholder group works better for emerging issues rather than a solution for hot issues, such as those facing the Klamath Basin.

Conclusion

I see a bright future for Lake County’s natural resource communities—both for the forest and the people. I see local folks working in the woods, creating a healthy ecosystem. I see a diverse group of people supporting the local community’s endeavor to keep local folks working in the woods. I see a community becoming ever more sensitive to issues that affect our outside stakeholders and continuing to address inevitable conflicts in a civil and productive manner. In short, where Lake County is concerned I see success.