

Rural Development through Land Stewardship

Stories from the RVCC Network

Across the West, rural Americans are facing unemployment and poverty at higher rates than their urban neighbors. To address these challenges, USDA Rural Development provides financial and technical assistance to rural communities and businesses for a broad range of purposes, including housing, utilities, and business development. Within these programs, endeavors that promote job creation through natural resource stewardship and restoration have historically been underfunded or have not been prioritized. The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) believes that the wellbeing of rural communities is inextricably linked to the long-term health of the land, and that investing in land stewardship is necessary to bring prosperity to rural America.

The following case studies present projects that utilized Rural Development funding to turn ecological restoration into jobs and economic growth. These examples provide a glimpse of the potential for this type of investment to make a real difference in rural communities, and show how important the role of USDA Rural Development is in this effort.

Western Juniper Alliance



Kendall Derby,
owner and operator
of In the Sticks, a
juniper mill in Fossil,
OR. Photo Credit:
Marcus Kauffman.

\$20,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant; \$64,999 Rural Business Development Grant
(matching funds provided by the Oregon Dept. of Transportation and Business Oregon)

Over the last 100 years, a lack of management has turned the native Western Juniper into an aggressive invasive that threatens the health and wellbeing of Oregon's rangelands and the communities and wildlife that depend on them. From an ecological perspective, there is strong agreement that this invasive tree needs to be removed from both publicly and privately owned lands. But harvesting Juniper also has tremendous potential

to create jobs and provide new economic opportunities to the timber and wood products industries throughout Oregon.

In July 2013, Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber launched the Western Juniper Alliance (WJA), a collaborative effort managed by Sustainable Northwest. The goal of the WJA is to accomplish ecosystem restoration in eastern Oregon, and create jobs in Juniper supply and

market chains in rural communities, the Portland metro area, and along the West Coast. The project is coordinated with over 50 state and federal agency partners, business leaders, and non-governmental organizations.

WJA is developing markets and incentives to harvest more Juniper, improve the economic viability of these operations, and make sure they are done in an environmentally

sensitive manner. Efforts are increasing the quantity and diversity of Juniper supply in the marketplace, while growing the demand for this wood by promoting its benefits to new and existing consumers. The project is also promoting labor training to build a qualified workforce in the Juniper industry, and making sure that small businesses have financial resources to create jobs in rural communities.

With the help of USDA Rural Development, this collaborative effort has turned a challenge into an opportunity for restoration and economic growth. Specifically the Rural Development grants have supported critical network functions including:

- Initial founding and organizing of the Alliance
- Market and supply chain development
- Product testing at Oregon State University to certify Juniper's engineering design values
- Network coordination by Sustainable Northwest

WJA now sustains restoration, manufacturing, and retail businesses, including multiple businesses employing over 70 full time and seasonal staff, and cultivates new enterprises by strengthening the Juniper supply and market chain. By utilizing Juniper these businesses are improving grazing conditions, discouraging the spread of invasive weeds, increasing water supplies, decreasing wildfire risks in communities, and restoring habitat for sensitive species, all while creating jobs in local communities.



For more information, contact Dylan Kruse, Policy Director at Sustainable Northwest, at (503) 221-6911 x 115 or dkruse@sustainablenorthwest.org



Kendall turning Juniper logs into dimensional lumber. Bottom photo credit: Marcus Kauffman.



Western Juniper wood can be used for many products, including decking, landscaping timbers, furniture, paneling, and flooring. The berries can also be used to make gin. Deck courtesy of Sustainable Northwest Wood; table courtesy of Neil Kelly.





Dry Forest Investment Zone

\$500,000 multi-year cooperative agreement with USDA RD, roughly \$4 million in leveraged funds from the US Endowment for Forest and Communities and others

The Dry Forest Zone (DFZ) project was a five-year (2009-2014) initiative to support forest stewardship and economic development in eastern Oregon and northern California. With support from USDA Rural Development and the US Endowment for Forestry and Communities, a core team of four organizations collectively leveraged their strengths and networks to take innovations in community-based forestry “to scale.” A regional nonprofit organization (Sustainable Northwest), two community-based organizations (Wallowa Resources and the Watershed Research and Training Center), and an applied research group (the Ecosystem Workforce Program at the University of Oregon) led the DFZ project. The project had four integrated objectives:

1. Steward public and private forestlands for community wellbeing and multiple value streams
2. Build strong local nonprofit organizations and collaborative processes
3. Develop integrated biomass utilization infrastructure and capacity
4. Create policy conditions that support sustainable forest stewardship

The DFZ project sought to improve forest stewardship and community wellbeing by using networks and diffusing innovations across a defined region with shared socioeconomic and ecological challenges. The strengths of this model included: 1) leadership from a small core team with established relationships; 2) diffusion of local-level innovations from Wallowa Resources and the Watershed Center; 3) capacity-building and research provided by regional intermediary organizations; and 4) deliberate focus on using networks and partnerships to achieve more collective impact by replicating and disseminating local innovations, leveraging resources, and uniting disconnected entities for collective impact.



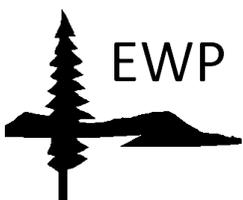
Project Accomplishments

- **At least 72 full-time equivalent jobs** were supported. The DFZ project helped support seasonal employment implementing projects on field crews with the Watershed Center and through contracts with Wallowa Resources, biomass processing jobs in Wallowa County, and in-house employment at each organization.
- **8,843 public and private acres** were directly treated (hazardous fuels reduction, prescribed burning, and other activities) either by the Watershed Center's summer adult and youth work crews or through contracts administered by Wallowa Resources.
- **214,350 acres** of national forestland in the DFZ have been or are being analyzed by national forests with active collaborative groups that the DFZ team has directly supported (provided facilitation, coordination, or other significant leadership).
- **Over 4 million acres** of national forestland are the focus of increased planning efforts due to the Forest Service's Accelerated Restoration Strategy in Region 6, and collaborative initiation of a landscape-scale assessment on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.
- **Policies and programs** that support sustainable forest stewardship were passed due to the efforts of the DFZ team and others, including the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, permanent reauthorization of stewardship contracting authorities, Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program, Eastside Restoration Strategy, and the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

These outcomes demonstrate the importance of an integrated, networked approach to improving sustainable forest stewardship and economic wellbeing. By working at all scales from local to national, the DFZ team was able to effect change at home (create jobs and treat acres) as well as transform larger policy conditions. Importantly, much of the DFZ team's national policy work also helped change conditions outside the zone's geography.

For more information, contact Dylan Kruse, Policy Director at Sustainable Northwest, at (503) 221-6911 x 115 or dkruse@sustainablenorthwest.org

This case study was adapted from the Executive Summary of "Stewarding Forests and Communities: A Final Report for the Dry Forest Zone Project" published in 2014 by the University of Oregon's Ecosystem Workforce Program. All photos by Ecosystem Workforce Program.



Restoration Means Jobs in Central Idaho



Rural Business Opportunity Grant - \$30,000 (*\$12,500 match provided*)

With the help of USDA Rural Development funding, Salmon Valley Stewardship (SVS) conducted an analysis of the economic value of restoration activities in central Idaho. The assessment considers 137 restoration projects accomplished from 2008 – 2013 in the Upper Salmon River Region as well as 14 conservation agreements in Custer and Lemhi County on working ranches.

SVS calculated the economic value of these activities using two approaches. First, they tracked the local workforce benefit using project records and interviews with local workers. Second, they partnered with Headwaters Economics to calculate the broader economic impacts of restoration spending and track it through the local economy using an economic impact assessment tool called Impact Analysis for Planning (IMPLAN).

Economic Impacts:

- Local workers and companies, not including federal or state agency employees, **earned more than \$17.2 million**, or approximately 43%, of the total \$39.6 million spent on restoration and mining reclamation project amounts surveyed for this six year period.
- The majority of the \$19 million invested in conservation easements went to Custer and Lemhi County landowners, and local and regional workers providing services such as surveying and environmental baseline analysis.
- Expenditures on documented restoration projects during the study period in Custer and Lemhi counties averaged \$6.8 million annually, resulting in an average of **\$9.1 million in total output** each year.¹
- On average, restoration activities directly supported 47 jobs and, accounting for local multipliers, a total of **70 jobs in the two counties**.¹
- The restoration industry in Central Idaho is growing year to year – about 14 percent annually. It is also benefiting a wide range of local businesses in industries from agriculture to retail trade.¹

The economic impacts of restoration activities are encouraging and meaningful to Upper Salmon River Region communities. However, most of those interviewed thought that while the amount of restoration work benefitting the local workforce was impressive, the amount captured locally could be markedly improved.

Part 2: Building Economic Security in Public Lands Communities

Rural Business Development Grant - \$18,550 (*\$6,700 match provided*)

Following up on recommendations in the Restoration Means Jobs report, Salmon Valley Stewardship produced:

1. A **form to track the economic impacts** of the emerging restoration and stewardship segment. Federal and state agencies, county governments, and non-profit organizations have committed to using the form and local economic development agencies, the Idaho Department of Labor, and the Idaho Department of Commerce committed to analyzing the data and providing annual reports.
2. A **restoration services directory** to help raise awareness of the emerging restoration sector businesses in Custer and Lemhi Counties.
3. A brief guide describing how USFS and BLM plans can affect business entities who rely on the area's abundant public lands, case studies of successful examples from other regions, and initial recommendations for a citizen involvement strategy to help shape these plans based on local economic capacity and needs, and a suggested timeline for effective involvement.

For more information, contact Salmon Valley Stewardship at (208) 756.1686.

¹ Headwaters Economics. (2014). *The Economic Impacts of Restoration*. Retrieved from http://dev.headwaterseconomics.org/wphw/wp-content/uploads/Idaho_Restoration_Report.pdf



Above: Lemhi County resident once used his excavation company to dig septic systems for new builds. Now he gets most of his business from river and streambank restoration projects like this one in the Yankee Fork drainage of Custer County, Idaho.

Right: Bighorn Outfitters cross-trained their crew to handle small hazardous fuels thinning jobs, like this one on the collaborative Hughes Creek project.





ABOUT RVCC

The Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition (RVCC) promotes new approaches to the ecological and economic problems facing the rural West. We are committed to developing practical solutions through collaborative, place-based work that recognizes the inextricable link between the long-term health of the land and the well-being of communities. We work together to improve issues that affect rural communities, public and private land management, and the continuation of a natural resource-based economy in the West, advocating for the inclusion of comprehensive community interests.

For more information, contact:

Karen Hardigg
RVCC Director

karen@wallowaresources.org
(541) 426-8053 x 24

www.ruralvoicescoalition.org

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Blackfoot Challenge, MT
Ecosystem Workforce Program, OR
Forest Stewards Guild, NM
Mt. Adams Resource Stewards, WA
Salmon Valley Stewardship, ID
Siuslaw Institute, Inc., OR
Sustainable Northwest, OR
Sustainable Southeast Partnership, AK
Wallowa Resources, OR
Watershed Research and Training Center, CA

Cover photo by Ecosystem Workforce Program.

RVCC

Rural Voices for
Conservation
COALITION

From the top: RVCC Leadership Team members at their 2016 retreat in Enterprise, OR. Ranchers in Wallowa County, OR (Photo: Kendrick Moholt). RVCC network participants in front of the US Capitol building during the 2016 Western Week in Washington.