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Partnerships for Progress in Sustainable Forest Management

Summary

Forestlands provide natural habitats, parks, watersheds, and valuable economic resources. Many states promote sustainable forest management to improve and maintain forest vitality. The goal is to maintain and enhance the long-term health of forest ecosystems while providing ecological, economic, social, and cultural opportunities for the benefit of present and future generations. Collaboration among diverse stakeholders can strengthen such management efforts by resolving conflicts, pooling resources, and enlisting community support. This paper addresses three types of collaboration: state/federal, state/state, and state/local, but other forms are also important, including ones between private companies and government agencies and between companies and public interest groups.

To foster sustainable management practices, states have formed partnerships with federal agencies, neighboring states, and local communities. For example, Oregon is working with the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to restore the ecosystems in the federal forests in the eastern part of the state. In Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Ontario, Canada, the Great Lakes Forest Alliance fosters cooperation to enhance sustainable management of private forestlands. Through Alabama's Treasure Forest program and the Four Corners Partnership in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah, states are working with community groups and private landowners to improve forest management and revitalize the forest products industry.

Increased Demand for Collaboration

Concerns about forest management vary among states depending on their regional characteristics, economic factors, and mix of forestland ownership among federal, state, local, and private landowners. However, most states agree that collaboration among diverse agencies and groups is the best approach for successful forest policy. This complex mix of ownership and management responsibilities can

include state agencies, federal agencies, local communities, forest landowners, environmentalists, and the forest products and timber industries.

Expanded concept of sustainable forest management. Traditionally, foresters defined a sustainably managed forest as one in which growth exceeded timber harvests. In recent years, that definition has expanded to encompass economic, environmental, and social qualities that contribute to the sustainability of forest-dependent communities and ecosystems as well as the forest itself. This complex concept of sustainable forest management requires input from a wide range of stakeholders to identify criteria for assessing sustainability and the methods for achieving it.

Heightened controversy over forest management issues. Competing demands on forestlands for recreation, habitat preservation, and timber production have escalated controversy over forest management, particularly on federal lands. Governors have found that traditional management structures and the judicial system cannot resolve many of these conflicts, instead causing paralysis that harms the interests of all parties. Collaboration and compromise can produce approaches that address the primary concerns of all parties and enhance forest health. However, sometimes there are interested parties that are not local community members or that hold widely different interests, and these can complicate traditional management and collaborative approaches.

Inadequate forest management resources. Current federal and state funds and staff are not adequate to perform forest health assessment, coordinate sustainable management, and accommodate the increasing demands of multiple users, including mounting pressure to provide recreational opportunities. The participation and contributions of the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and community residents augment government resources and are essential to many state and federal forest management efforts.

States are forming partnerships with federal agencies, other states, and community stakeholders to resolve forest management issues and implement more sustainable management practices. These partnerships have shown promise for resolving conflicts and improving forest health.

Reaching Agreement with Federal Agencies

Federal agencies can exert a great influence over state economic and environmental health through their forest management practices. Federal forest policies affect not only the forest itself, but also the surrounding ecosystems and resource-based economies in neighboring communities. To protect their interests, states are working with federal agencies to improve forest management and address concerns of landowners, forest businesses, and environmental groups.

Oregon Eastside Action Plan. Under the leadership of Governor John A. Kitzhaber, M.D., Oregon has partnered with the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to restore the ecosystems in the federal forests in the eastern part of the state. The partnership has four principles:

- rely on the best interdisciplinary science available;
- use a landscape-level perspective that integrates the goals of individual projects;
- make land management decisions to restore ecosystem health; and
- solicit community involvement in decisionmaking to consider local interests and build public trust.

Eastern Oregon faces daunting forest management challenges, which Governor Kitzhaber summarized in October 1997:

“In eastern Oregon, our forests continue to be well outside their historic condition. Decades of fire suppression, timber harvest, and road building have left us with overstocked stands of young trees that are often the wrong species and are ripe for future insect outbreaks. In addition, these watersheds are plagued by degraded riparian habitat and the risk of wildfire. The current condition of many of our forests cannot support the activities we once depended on them for, such as fiber for our communities, habitat for fish and wildlife, high-quality drinking water, and recreation opportunities.”

Governor Kitzhaber launched his effort to restore eastside forest health in the spring of 1995, seeking broadly supported solutions that would provide guidance to federal land managers. He appointed ten highly respected scientists to recommend ways to restore ecosystem health and provide wood to resource-dependent communities. A year later, the Governor established the Eastside Forest Advisory Panel of community leaders to recommend ways the U.S. Forest Service might implement the findings of the scientific panel. Their work produced an eleven-point strategy based on actively managing overstocked stands, monitoring the impact of forest management policies, and funding for treatment strategies when timber revenues alone cannot support them.

Establishing community trust in federal management practices is a key element of the strategy. As Governor Kitzhaber explained, “One of the cornerstones of the proposal is that federal agencies and managers should avoid operating in controversial areas, such as in roadless or old growth areas, and instead focus on treatments that enjoy broad popular support. In this way, the federal agencies can establish a track record of success that will restore the public support so critical to the success of their efforts.”

Restoration efforts under the eleven-point strategy include prescribed burning, understory thinning, riparian restoration, and road closure and obliteration. These efforts are accelerated through the Eastside Action Plan, which sets quantifiable targets for ecosystem health and will monitor the results of restoration treatments. The plan also emphasizes identifying funding sources for restoration efforts; improving consultation with federal agencies regarding the Endangered Species Act; finding ways federal and management agencies can promote restoration; and involving communities in ecosystem management.

The Eastside Action Plan focuses on a 3-million acre demonstration area in the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon. The area encompasses state land and federal land managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management and includes grazing land, wilderness areas, critical wildlife habitat, streams, rivers, and watersheds, as well as cities and towns.

Forging Interstate Cooperation

Many forests and forest management issues cross state lines, encompassing entire regions of the United States. States that share forest resources can leverage their investments in research, assessment, and

management through collaboration. Multistate organizations enable states to share information and develop regional strategies for sustainable forest management.

Great Lakes Forest Alliance. The Governors of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin formed the Great Lakes Forest Alliance in 1987 to provide a forum to foster cooperative efforts that would enhance their members' sustainable management of private forestlands. By forming the alliance, the Governors recognized the valuable cultural, ecological, economic, and social contributions forests provide to states and sought to balance forest-based economic development with environmental and social needs. Ontario joined the alliance in 1997.

The alliance is a nonprofit corporation, funded by public and private grants and governed by a board of trustees, including academicians, state forestry and land management officials, and representatives of the timber and forest products industries. The alliance aims to:

- work cooperatively with the public and private sectors to enhance the conservation and management of the Great Lakes forests;
- improve and diversify the region's economy through the use of forest resources while enhancing the forest's environmental and recreational values;
- build public support and organizational cooperation for long-term economic and environmental forestry objectives;
- promote cooperation among programs to maintain supplies of forest goods and services to satisfy the needs of present and future generations; and
- create a nationally and internationally recognized image of the Great Lakes forest uses and values.

To meet these goals, the alliance adopted principles that underscore its commitment to sound science, constructive dialogue, intensive management, and ongoing evaluation and monitoring of forest management practices. These principles are reflected in the alliance's sustainable forest management activities to assess forest health, to identify criteria and indicators for sustainability, and to hold educational forums to exchange ideas and develop management strategies.

Assess Forest Health. In 1995, the alliance took a major step in advancing its goals by releasing the *Lake States Regional Forest Resources Assessment*. The assessment provides a foundation for forest resource management activities by the alliance and other policymakers in the Great Lakes states. Compiled from more than twenty-five technical papers, the assessment provides critical information about the interdependence of forest health, environmental protection, recreational opportunities, and the timber and wood products industries.

The assessment found that the region's forests were healthy, with timber growth exceeding harvest by 90 percent. Areas with well-developed tourism and forest-products industries had higher average earnings,

more diverse employment opportunities, and greater economic stability than areas dominated by one industry.

Additionally, the assessment noted that 80 percent of the regions productive forests are nonindustrial private forests and forests managed by the states and counties. Effective management of these private land holdings depends on adequate technical assistance and incentives for owners from a variety of public and private organizations.

Identify Criteria and Indicators for Sustainability. The alliance further clarified the definition and measurement of sustainable forest management in its 1998 publication, *Assessing Progress in Sustainable Forest Management: Proposed Criteria and Indicators for the Upper Great Lakes Region*. According to the report, “if we are to plan forest management in a systematic way to try to meet the wide range of expectations that people have, we must identify a broad suite of criteria and specific values, set a goal and identify at least one indicator for each value, and set an objective for each indicator.”

The report set forth five criteria that describe a broad “basket of forest values,” which are the qualities of forests that are most important to a wide range of stakeholders:

- maintain a balance of biological resources;
- maintain soil, water, and air quality;
- provide multiple economic benefits;
- preserve community and cultural values; and
- use society’s legal, institutional, and collaborative framework for sustainable forest management.

The report also presents 150 indicators, or measurable characteristics, for the five criteria. In early 2000, the alliance sponsored a conference to reduce this list to about thirty essential indicators. The alliance members will use the indicators in a variety of situations and meet periodically to share their experiences and evaluate the indicators’ effectiveness in promoting sustainable forest management. After assessing each indicator’s usefulness, the alliance can strengthen, modify, or discard those that are weak. The work of the alliance on this subject is in line with the international work on criteria and indicators, usually referred to as the Montreal Process. A number of key U.S. organizations are involved in using the system of criteria and indicators to measure the health of all U.S. forests; these groups include the U.S. Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters.

Hold Educational Forums to Exchange Ideas and Develop Management Strategies. In 1999, the alliance held forums on several emerging issues in the region, including carbon sequestration and forest fragmentation. The alliance follows each forum with an issue paper that pinpoints topics for further study and offers recommendations to the more than 4,500 individuals, policymakers, and organizations on the alliance’s mailing list. Each year the alliance also sponsors an educational policy forum in Washington, D.C., to exchange information and forge partnerships with other organizations involved in forest management issues.

Engaging Community Stakeholders

States have collaborated with local communities to identify and implement sustainable forest management practices. In states where most forestland is privately owned, community participation is critical to fostering sustainable management; however, the ultimate decisions rest with the landowners. On public lands, community involvement can augment the efforts of state and federal agencies, which may lack the staff or funding to unilaterally manage the forests. Communities not only help institute sustainable management practices, but also help set goals and priorities based on local economic, environmental, and social conditions. Through programs such as Alabama's Treasure Forest Program and the Four Corners Sustainable Forest Initiative, states can educate communities about the economic and environmental benefits of sustainable forest management and engage them in management efforts.

Alabama's Treasure Forest Program. Alabama's Treasure Forest program began in 1974 to promote sustainable, multiple-use forest management that encourages landowners to use their forests wisely to meet their own needs while protecting and enhancing the environment. In a state where more than 400,000 nonindustrial, private individuals own 73 percent of the forestland, this voluntary program provides the education and recognition essential to sound forest management.

The Alabama Forestry Planning Committee created the program. Composed of forestry and natural resources agencies and organizations in the state, committee members provide information and technical assistance to landowners. The program also publishes *Alabama Treasured Forests*, a quarterly magazine that provides management insights based on the program's principles.

To recognize individual achievement in sustainable forest management, the program issues the Treasure Forest Award to private landowners who display their commitment to the program ethic through the physical management of their land. The award includes a numbered and signed certificate and a Treasure Forest sign to display on the property, which acknowledges the owner as a good steward of the land who protects and enhances the multiple values of the forest to benefit present and future generations.

The Treasure Forest program is complemented by the work of the Private Forest Management Team, an effort of Alabama's forest landowners, support organizations, industry groups and natural resource management agencies. The team identifies what motivates landowners to manage forestland for a variety of potential benefits, and uses these incentives to foster enthusiasm among landowners for forest resource management principles. The team also identifies:

- the personal, social, and economic benefits that can be derived from actively managing forestland;
- the range of management goals that can lead to these benefits from the forest; and
- the management techniques to achieve desired goals.

The team provides technical information and education through state schools of forestry and the Alabama cooperative extension system. It operates on the principle that managers and landowners will share their support for sustainable practices and other information with other landowners. A steering committee sets priorities for the team's information development and distribution. The committee

includes landowners, timber industry representatives, and other entities including Auburn University, the Alabama Forestry Association, and the Alabama Forestry Commission. Landowners make the final decisions about their practices.

Four Corners Partnership. The national forests in the four-corners region of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah contain dense stands of unhealthy, small-diameter-timber—the result of years of fire suppression. To improve management of these forestlands and develop a stronger forest products industry, the states in the region launched the Four Corners Partnership. The initiative addresses economic and environmental concerns by linking production and marketing of value-added forest products made from small-diameter timber with sustainable forest restoration.

Under the partnership, New Mexico’s division of forestry obtained \$500,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to lead the effort and support an initial assessment, summit meeting, and seven demonstration projects.

The partnership will first assess the supply and demand for forest resources to support a regional strategy to promote sustainable forest restoration practices and economic growth in forest-dependent communities. It will synthesize existing data to:

- identify sustainable forest management barriers and opportunities;
- inform the partnership and the public about where sustainable practices can be applied most effectively;
- foster information exchange among the forest products industry to facilitate development of small-diameter timber; and
- increase awareness of the linkage between forest restoration and the economic health of resource-dependent communities.

A summit will provide a forum to analyze the assessment results and develop a coordinated regional action agenda. The summit participants will include the partners in the Four Corners Partnership and community members, laboratory researchers, economic development specialists, bankers, and technical experts. In addition to finding ways to use market-driven opportunities to promote sustainable forest restoration and create jobs, the summit will help build coalitions to support future projects.

The partnership’s community-level demonstration projects will help identify sustainable forest restoration practices that incorporate economic considerations with environmental, social, and cultural priorities in resource-dependent communities. The partnership is focusing on projects that:

- develop innovative uses, products, technologies, and markets for small-diameter and underutilized timber species;
- create strategies for monitoring forest health and restoring ecosystems;

- use low-impact and high-efficiency timber harvest practices;
- provide technical, financial, and other infrastructure support services; and
- train community residents in sustainable forest restoration practices.

Consistency With the Enlibra Doctrine. Efforts to engage community stakeholders can benefit from application of the Enlibra principles, which have been officially adopted by NGA. These Enlibra principles were based on a number of successful state and regional collaborations. The principles are meant to offer an alternative to traditional command-and-control regulations and also to give more responsibility to local participants in decisions. If there is interest in engaging community and other stakeholders, the Enlibra principles offer a practical framework to address difficult resource and economic issues and find creative consensus solutions. New Mexico Governor Gary E. Johnson issued an Executive Order in October 1999 that directed state agencies to incorporate the Enlibra principles into their efforts. An analysis by New Mexico staff showed how the Four Corners Partnership incorporated the eight Enlibra principles and put them into practice. For example, for the key principal of collaboration to combat polarization, members of New Mexico's Catron County Citizens Group came together in facilitated discussions to find common ground. They created a community development plan based on forest restoration and the purchase of an old lumber mill site by the county on which to establish a log sort yard. Also, environmental issues are being considered to develop a prescription for the restoration of a local watershed. The group's experience has been shared throughout the region as a model for other communities.

Conclusion

The widespread desire to preserve forest benefits for future generations has created a strong movement for sustainable forest management. State collaboration with other states as well as federal, local, and private landowners can speed the definition and implementation of sustainable management practices while resolving conflicts and leveraging scarce resources. Sustainable forest management is essential in protecting natural resources, supporting resource-based economies, providing recreational opportunities and environmental amenities, and providing environmental protection.

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